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## Ritualism as a Means of Healthcare, Cultural Revival and Leadership Uprighting in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*

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# Ritualism as a Means of Healthcare, Cultural Revival and Leadership Uprighting in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Storytelling is not only worth the literary regards in American literature but also one of the ritual practices for the survival of Native Americans. Due in large part to the increased contact between communities instigated by the demographic shifts caused by World War II, and to the Harlem Renaissance and then the equal rights movements of the 1960s, the coming together of Indians with the white community brings at odds the life conception of the one with the civilization of the other. Inasmuch as life in the reservation deserves attention from the US power holders (Affirmative Action), the threat to annihilate the cultural features weighs heavy on life peculiarities of Native Americans. And if the Native cultural heritage is faced with frustration, how could this ethnic group contribute to the US national culture which can never be purely white? This article argues that the western culture is a threat to the sacrament and beliefs of Native Americans and the natural constraints on the cultural home rule, which creates a multicultural American nation.

In effect, the birth of the protagonist of *Ceremony* (Tayo) ensued from the conflicting lessons his mother (Laura) received from school and at home. Unable to negotiate that confusion Laura became victim of alcoholism and was impregnated by a Mexican whom Tayo never knew. Though the protagonist was abandoned by his mother at the age of four years, he

was raised in the reservation by his grand mother in the middle of tribal rituals and attended a white-run school to join later the US Army. His taking part in the Vietnam War resulted in his emotional traumas that could not have medical solace in the Veterans' hospital. Not only does Tayo go through a healing process in the Native spirituality but also look for his self-identity and wisdom.

Through his commentary on the narrative of *Ceremony*, Andrew Wiget testifies that "Leslie Silko deliberately draws upon tribal mythology as a mode of interpreting contemporary events."<sup>1</sup> This way of writing cannot be bypassed if we come to argue that the peculiarity of a way of writing is inherent in the author's cultural/historical background. This implicates the tribal circle that inspires him/her. "Indeed, the special significance of a true work of art resides in the fact that it has escaped from the limitations of the personal and has soared beyond the personal concerns of its creator."<sup>2</sup> In the same way, the storytelling which is a literary genre is boasted mostly by naturalists who view nature as replete with ways and means that almost always come to the rescue of human race. Kenneth Lincoln, in: "The Now Day Indi'ns" describes how the Native American Simon Ortiz's poetry is built upon the traditions of his people and how it looks to the future of these traditions:

Ortiz cares for all things in a natural religious regard, unscaffolded with theology or a monotheistic deity. This poet's religion calls upon a sense of the world as greater than man, multitudinous, spiritually alive, if Indian people ritually prepare and conduct themselves in a sacred manner. But "sacred" here infuses the "common" world, so that *this* world, the ordinary things now, come forward speaking of significances related to, yet apart from, man. The Indian world is reciprocal with people.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Andrew Wiget, "Contemporary Poetry: Songs from the Earth." *Native American Literature*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985. Rpt. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Ed. Jeffrey W. Hunter. Vol. 208. Detroit: Gale, 2006. *Literature Resource Center*. 108-114.

<sup>2</sup> Carl Gustav Jung, *On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry*. Leitch, Vincent B, general edit. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. (NY: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. 2001), p. 994.

<sup>3</sup> Lincoln, Kenneth. "The Now Day Indi'ns." *Native American Renaissance*. University of California Press, 1983. Rpt. in *Poetry*

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No matter what the material world produces to the satisfaction of human needs, Leslie Marmon Silko insists on the importance of some traditional rituals in overcoming some natural calamities and in the asserting of one's identity. Because Native Americans have always mastered the wild world by the invention of ceremonies, it becomes precarious to persuade a member of that ethnic group to put off the belief therein in the interest of a more unordinary view of the world. Moreover, if the American white civilization looks for the throwing off of the traditional conception of life (through the formal education channel), there is no easy way for a Native to be acculturating if every minority group comes to the American Mainstream via a specific cultural line of attack. And the real objective of the cultural inclusion is not a mere vulgarization of and respect to its features, rather a compassionate treatment of the affiliates of that culture.

## II. SUBSTANCE OF STORIES, RITUALS AND CEREMONIES FOR INDIAN AMERICANS

The whole of Indian Americans life rests on their respect for their rituals and ceremonies. Actually, the deeds, actions and even the conception of things by Native Americans are dictated to them by rituals, customs, stories and ceremonies. In any Indian community there is a multitude of rituals specially designed for special and various events. That is why among Indian people, one may come across rituals such as the Rain ritual which is performed whenever rain is missing, healing ceremonies, burial customs or the ghost dance ceremony which is performed anytime the Indians feel their safety is threatened. In *The Ghost-Dance: Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*, James Mooney argues that,

The great underlying principle of the ghost dance Doctrine is that time will come when the whole Indian race, living and dead will be reunited upon a regenerated earth to live a life of aboriginal happiness forever free from death, disease and misery. On this foundation, each tribe has built a structure from its own mythology, and each apostle and believer has filled in the details according to his own mental capacity or idea of happiness.<sup>4</sup>

This is to understand why Indians rarely react when they are offended and also rarely claim their rights whenever U.S laws and institutions are cheating them. It helps us understand why instead of fighting back Europeans and keeping their land, Indians surrendered large parcels of lands to them. In short it is because they believe that no matter what evil befalls them, time

will come when they will be free and happy, thus it is no use fighting for something or claiming something else anymore. Hence we understand that the whole of the Indian life is cadenced by ceremonies, customs and rituals.

Native Americans frequently resort to ceremonies, under situation in which common people would go to church, call for the help of a medicine person or seek for the advice of an experienced person. In other words, ceremonies, customs and rituals play religious and medical roles and that of morals within the native community. In sum, stories, customs, rituals and ceremonies represent absolutely everything to Indian Americans. That is why on the second page of her novel Leslie Marmon Silko through a story has clearly shown the importance of ceremonies and stories for her people. She wrote this:

Ceremony  
 I will tell you something about stories  
 They aren't just entertainment.  
 Don't be fooled.  
 They are all we have, you see,  
 All we have to fight off  
 Illness and death.  
 You don't have anything  
 if you don't have the stories  
 their evil is mighty  
 but it can't stand up our stories.  
 So they try to destroy the stories  
 Let the stories be confused and forgotten.  
 They would like that.  
 They would be happy  
 Because we would be defenseless then.<sup>5</sup>

From this excerpt it follows that, stories represent more than a means of entertainment to these writers. They are simply everything to them. And as she mentioned it in the story, "they are all we have"<sup>6</sup>. The "we" in her sentence, is used for Indians. She says stories are all they possess and that they are the only weapon she and her people use to fight off sickness and diseases but also enemies. And this is illustrated in the sick person of Tayo the protagonist about whom the narrator says, "He wanted to believe old Betonie. He wanted to keep the feeling of his words alive inside him so that he could believe that he might get well."<sup>7</sup> Thus words from the medicine man constitute the major part of his healing process.

Moreover the fact that Leslie Marmon Silko wrote this very story on the second page of the novel helps the reader understand the novel. In deed, *Ceremony*, as the title itself suggests is about ceremonies, rituals and the importance they have in the

*Criticism*.Ed. Carol T. Gaffke and Margaret Haerens.Vol. 17.Detroit: Gale Research, 1997. *Literature Resource Center*.183-221.

<sup>4</sup>James Mooney, *The Ghost- Dance: Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*, (University of Nebraska Press, 1896),p 68.

<sup>5</sup> Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1977), p 2.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p126 -127

lives of Native Americans. Consequently, the presence of this story right at the beginning of the novel is crucial in the understanding of the latter because it guides readers in their attempt to generate meaning to this novel. In fact, right at the beginning of the novel, readers are informed about the way they should consider stories that Leslie Marmon Silko has embedded here and there in her novel. Right from there they are taught a new way of reading stories and considering them. They are told to see them the way Indians themselves see them, because it is the only way they can get the meaning of the novel.

Seen from the perspective of both Julian Rice and Elizabeth N. Evasdaughter, every custom of the Indian tribes turns around stories and story telling. Julian Rice sustains that "The story's existence as a complex literary expression of a highly developed mythology implies the effectiveness of traditional education."<sup>8</sup> In this regard, Elizabeth N. Evasdaughter observes that "The ceremony Silko narrates is that of a Navajo sing, but one not sung exactly as it would have been done before whites arrived in New Mexico, nor sung by a pure-blood Indian, nor sung on behalf of a pure-blood Indian."<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, oral tradition is an important part of Indian culture. For long, Indians used oral tradition to pass on tribal knowledge. The whole of Indian people's history, customs and cultural patrimony is contained in Indian communal stories that they often tell during the performance of rituals, ceremonies or communal festivals. When we move a step back to the passage above, we see that the word "ceremony" in the passage seems to be used as the title of the story. We also noticed that instead of dealing with ceremonies as the story's title mentions, it deals with stories. That is because the basic elements of rituals and ceremonies are stories. In fact in those stories, new generations are told how to perform ceremonies, that is when and for which purpose they should perform them. This, once again, shows the importance of stories for the Indian community and the reason why Leslie Marmon Silko lays so much emphasis on stories in her novel.

As we previously mentioned, under any situation Indians frequently resorted to ceremonies and to each problem there is always a ritual or a ceremony that is specially designed. In the novel, when Tayo was in need of additional care because the care he received at the Los Angeles Veterans' Hospital did not really help him much, his grandmother decided to call for a

traditional medicine man to perform a ceremony for him. Despite the relatively pertinent reasons that Auntie had mentioned to dissuade her mother from calling for traditional medicine, she couldn't make old Grandma change her mind. In fact as an Indian woman, Grandma was convinced that only a ceremony could help Tayo recover from his sickness. Grandma was Christian, and frequently went to church; meanwhile, she never stopped trusting the power of traditional Indian rituals and ceremonies.

Moreover, Tayo had already gone to hospital and western medicine could do nothing for him. So for Grandma, it was clear that a ceremony was the ultimate solution for them if they truly wanted Tayo to recover from his mental sickness. Consequently, Ku'oosh, an Indian traditional medicine man was called upon to look after Tayo. Ku'oosh came and as expected, started the performance of a ceremony. He started, by saying some sentences and in the way he pronounced them, it was clear that they did not belong to him, in fact, those sentences were stories, containing explanations of their origins. These sentences had been told long before Ku'oosh and were handed down to him through oral tradition. This means that the ceremony he was about to perform was nothing new. The ceremony he was going to perform to Tayo was the ceremony that his Laguna ancestors used to perform to warriors who have killed during battles. It was a healing ceremony and the particularity of it was that, it was performed only for warriors such as Tayo, Pinkie and Emo. Through this, we understand that if Tayo had suffered another sickness, his ceremony would have been assuredly different.

In addition to this, Leslie Marmon Silkous in her novel another story of her people retelling them why their ancestors used to perform the scalp ceremony for the warriors who have killed in battles and how the ceremony should be done. The following passage is the story that shows the importance of the Laguna Indian warriors' ceremony:

The way  
I heard it  
was  
in the old days  
long time ago  
they had this  
Scalp Society  
for warriors  
who killed  
or touched  
dead enemies.  
They had things  
they must do  
otherwise  
K'oo'ko would haunt their dream  
with the great fangs and  
everything would be endangered.

<sup>8</sup> Julian Rice, "Ella (Cara) Deloria." *Native American Writers of the United States*. Ed. Kenneth M. Roemer. Detroit: Gale Research, 1997. Dictionary of Literary Biography Vol. 175. *Literature Resource Center*. 130-142.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth N. Evasdaughter, "Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*: Healing Ethnic Hatred." *MELUS* 15.1 (Spring 1988): Rpt. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism Select*. Detroit: Gale, 2008. *Literature Resource Center*.83-94.





Maybe the rain wouldn't come  
 or the deer would go away.  
 That's why  
 they had things  
 they must do  
 The flute and dancing  
 blue cornmeal and  
 hair-washing.  
 All these things  
 they have to do.<sup>10</sup>

The above quoted story does not only tell how to do the ceremony but it also tells what will happen to the warrior and to the entire Indian community if ever the ceremony is not performed. Based on its content, the ceremony is very important because otherwise as stated in the story, "everything would be endangered"<sup>11</sup>. And another very important thing is that it is specified in the story that "maybe rain wouldn't come."<sup>12</sup> Indeed, in the novel we see that drought persisted until Tayo completed his ceremony which not only brought him recovery, but also caused the rain to fall. After a long time of sickness and the care he received at the Veterans' Hospital, Tayo recovered thanks to a ceremony. Finally, only the ceremony could help him recover his mental abilities, and it is the same ceremony that brought happiness back to his people. In short, ceremonies are very important because, as we see in the context of our novel a single ceremony could not only help Tayo recover from a sickness that hospital could not cure, but it also put an end to a six long years of drought.

Healing ceremonies are only a very small part of the range of ceremonies and rituals that do exist among Indians, and the ceremony that was performed for Tayo is a healing ceremony among many that exist within the Laguna Indians community. We have to mention that each Indian tribe has got its own conception of illness and heal that differ from the modern conception and scientific conception of diseases and sicknesses. Hence, healing ceremonies may vary according to tribes. In the case of Laguna Indians that is Tayo's tribe, as we previously mentioned, they see "illness not as the result of some biochemical, physiological, or psychological malady, but as a sign of disorder in society or the world, which is then reflected in the illness of an individual"<sup>13</sup>. "Diagnosis thus consists of discerning the status of the community or the world. Healing requires repairing or restructuring these environmental concerns."<sup>14</sup> In contrast, in the Navajo tribe they believe that "healing is based on the premise

that a person's illness is caused by the individual's being out of harmony with life, and sprinkling a person with corn pollen helps reestablish that harmony. In their ceremonies, corn pollen is said to be pure and immaculate. As such, this substance has the power to drive off the forces that produce disharmony".<sup>15</sup> In sum ceremonies, rituals and the conception Indian people have of some notion of life may vary from a tribe to another.

The practice of ceremonies and rituals, in brief ritualism is an important part of native Indian life. Through the reading and the study of *Ceremony* we see that according to Leslie Marmon Silko it will be very difficult for an Indian to be without ceremonies. We have seen this with old Grandma. She is a Christian yet she is not ready to depart from her traditional Indian ways. She often goes to church yet in front of the first difficulty she comes across, she quickly runs back to her Indian tradition.

We also learn through the study of this novel that ritualism constitutes an important part of Native Americans life. As such we can say that it occupies a crucial place in the welfare of Native Americans. Indeed as we noticed through the plot of *Ceremony*, Rituals and Indians customs succeeded where science met failure. In fact if Tayo could recover mental wellness it was thanks to the rituals that Ku'oosh and Betonie performed to him. Actually the care of the Los Angeles Veterans Hospital did not do much good to him. Moreover, those same rituals could put an end to the drought, reestablishing thus the natural order. All this is to show that rituals occupy an important place in the Indian life and that they are worth being practiced.

Most definitely, it is worth acknowledging that the essence of Native Americans life is closely related to their performing rituals and ceremonies. In other words, through *Ceremony* Leslie Marmon Silko has made it clear that an Indian is bound to remember his tradition, his rituals and ceremonies if he truly wants to survive.

### III. THE INFLUENCE OF AMERICAN CULTURE ON INDIAN AMERICANS

The contact between native and white had affected the Indian community in all domains. It affected their way of life, their territory, their culture and themselves. What threatened much the Indian culture was the creation of the Bureau of Indians Affairs by the Federal Government. Through this institution, Indian students were taken in a different type of boarding schools where they are taught European American ways and culture. At the same time, they are forbidden to practice Indian rituals and also to speak their mother tongue. In *Ceremony*, the character of Rocky perfectly illustrates the kind of Indian the U.S government wanted

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 37.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> [Bonniebutterfield.com/indian-art.htm](http://Bonniebutterfield.com/indian-art.htm). 12/08/2013.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

to have. Rocky has been totally transformed by the teachings he had been getting at school, thus he became skeptical vis-à-vis the ways and tradition of his people. He started giving no importance to the practices of the old time. He even called them superstitions. "He knew what white people thought about the stories. In school the science teacher had explained what superstition was, and then held the science textbook up for the class to see the true source of explanation. He had studied those books, and he had no reasons to believe the stories any more."<sup>16</sup> Rocky was more Indian than Tayo was, that is, he was full blooded Indian and it was not the case of Tayo. Mean while, Tayo believed the tradition more than Rocky did. He never since he started going to school regarded the tradition of Indians with interest until he died in Vietnam.

The following passage, portrays the new person Rocky had become, it portrays Rocky's new perception of the Indian world: "After their first year at boarding school in Albuquerque, Tayo saw how Rocky deliberately avoided the old-time ways. Old Grandma shook her head at him, but he called it superstition, and he opened his textbooks to show her."<sup>17</sup> This perfectly illustrates, the point to which Rocky has been transformed and led astray of his culture. In fact Rocky does not only mistrust the rituals and tradition, but he even taxes them of being superstitions. Right from the moment he started going to school the only things that have got any importance before his eyes were those that could be explained scientifically. That is why when his grandmother shook her head at him as sign of disapproval with him and his new way of considering things, he simply opened his book to try to show and explain to her. In fact according to Rocky book truths are the only things worth being regarded with interest.

Without any doubt, Rocky has profoundly been transformed by the knowledge he has acquired at school. He is the character of *Ceremony* whose transformation was radical, yet he is not the only one. His mother, Auntie too, has been favorable to transformation. Her mentality has shifted from that of an Indian traditional mother to the one that a white American woman may be expected to have. In deed, a real traditional Indian woman, in the presence of a boy like Rocky would exactly feel the same as old Grandma. In other words, any Indian woman that knows the value of rituals respects them and knows they are worth being taken care of would be deceived by Rocky because of his scorn toward the Indian patrimony.

However, this was not the case with Auntie. As an Indian woman, instead of being shocked at Rocky's behavior, auntie was pleased. She was pleased that Rocky was a good student and trusted his books much

more than he trusted Indian customs. That means she shares Rocky's ideas.

This is what the novel seems to say about Auntie: "But Auntie never scolded him, and she never let Robert and Josiah talk to him either. She wanted him to be a success. She could see what White people wanted in an Indian and she believed this way was his only chance."<sup>18</sup> This passage of the novel shows that Auntie knew that Rocky did not behave the way an Indian young man was expected to do. Meanwhile, she was proud of him. She was proud that her Rocky be the way white people wanted him, not the way Indians would like him to. And so she avoided Josiah or Robert talking to Rocky to bring him back to the right way and help him find back the Indian spirit that schooling has been killing in him.

If we analyze the above paragraph carefully and especially the information it gives about Auntie, we shall figure out that Auntie, in some way, agrees more with the white American community than she does with her own community. Because through the reading of this passage, we understand that Auntie trusted the sayings of White people than her people. In fact, on the one hand, this passage shows us that Auntie is aware of the fact that Rocky has been transformed by the teachings he has got at school. And on the other hand, her indifference towards Rocky and her refusal to let Robert or Josiah talk to Rocky proves that, in some way, she also has been transformed by the contact of Indians with the White American world. This actually is the reason why she accepts Rocky the way he has become; otherwise she would never have condoned the new behavior of Rocky after his first year at the boarding school.

Rocky and Auntie are only two cases among many. In the novel, Rocky is the character whose transformation is very flagrant. Through Rocky's mentality, we can thus denote an influence of the white American culture on the Indian society. But there is also Tayo. Actually Tayo knows more about Indian traditions than Rocky. Yet the point here is not on Tayo's mentality but it is Tayo, himself. Indeed Tayo is the human consequence of the contact between Indians and white people. Because as we know already, he is not full-blooded, actually, his mother is Indian and his father is an unknown white person. In other words, the fact that Tayo exists is a sign of transformation brought among Indians by the contact between them and White people. In fact, how else could Tayo exist if Indian never met White people?

Moreover, throughout the novel, the way people look at Tayo and treat him emphasizes the fact that Tayo is a different type of Indian. In fact, Auntie and Emo hated him for the person he was and white rail men too looked strangely at him for the same reason.

<sup>16</sup> *Ceremony*, p. 94.

<sup>17</sup> *Ceremony*, p. 51.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*



Another sign of changing that could also be noted within the Indian community is in the field of religious belief. Before the Indians came into contact with white people and their culture, their belief was concentrated essentially on their traditions, customs and performance of rituals. Thus we construe that their customs, traditions, rituals and stories served them as religion, since most of time they turn to performance of rituals and ceremonies whenever they are faced with a problem they cannot handle easily. In deed in the novel, before Tayo had left for War with Rocky, he and Josiah performed a ceremony because the rain was not falling and as a consequence grass and trees were drying up and cattle couldn't feed themselves. It was a ceremony, of which the intent was to bring back rain. It was actually ceremony, yet we may simply refer to it as a prayer for rain.

Moreover, in the way the Bible tells about the creation of the world, Indian customs also do have their stories about the beginning of the world. In the Bible, in deed it is written that:

In the beginning, when God created the universe, the earth was formless and desolate. The ranging ocean that covered everything was engulfed in total darkness, and the spirit of God was moving over the water. Then God commended, "let there be light" and light appeared. God was pleased with what he saw. Then he separated the light from the darkness, and he named light "Day" and the darkness "Night". Evening passed and morning came, that was the first day.<sup>19</sup>

This passage, taken from the genesis of the Bible suggests that Christians believe that there is one God and he created the world starting by night and day. In other words, Christians believe that it all originated from God. Indians have a completely different opinion on the creation of the world. And the opinion they have on it too has been taught by a story. In fact Leslie Marmon Silko started her novel by a story, and that very story is actually the one that justifies Indians' idea about the conception of the world among Laguna Indians. The following passage of the novel is a part of the story and it shall help us discover Indians' idea about God and about the creation of the world.

Ts'its'tsi'nako, Thought-woman,  
 is sitting in her room  
 and whatever she thinks about appears.  
 She thought of her sisters,  
 Nau'ts'ity'l and l'tctcity'l,  
 and together they created the Universe  
 This world  
 and the four worlds below.<sup>20</sup>

Based on this excerpt, it is obvious that to Indians stories are holy documents and they use them just as Muslims may use the holy Koran and Christians, their holy Bible. Secondly, we also discover that Indians do not believe in a single God. In addition to that, they have the belief that God is a female being. Indians believe that they owe their living to three Goddesses. In fact the story refers to them as Thought woman and her sisters: Corn woman and Reed woman. For Indians, their lives and welfare, the equilibrium of the nature and the abundance depend on the frame of mind of those three goddesses. Finally, the third information we get from the contents of this story is that Indians believe that the Universe is composed of five worlds, including the one we are living in and that those five worlds have been created by Thought Woman, Corn woman and Reed woman, the three goddesses.

In sum, before Indians and white people came in contact with one another, Indians trusted only their stories and their rituals.

They resorted essentially to teachings of their stories, customs and rituals under situations before which white people would go for a prayer, ask for advice to a pastor for example or even for a thanksgiving service. But with the influence of white culture, Native Indians learned about Christianity and started going to church but they did not completely abandon Indian traditional practices. However, they offer up much of their time to church and several things around them have changed as the consequence of the presence of Christianity in their community. This backs up the fact that in the novel, most of the characters' names sounds more Christian than Indian. In fact, among all the characters of *Ceremony* only Tayo and Ku'oosh, the medicine men bear typically Indian names. Most of the other characters bear Christian names such as Robert, Leroy and Josiah.

Added to this, as we said previously, Indians have acquired some new habits and life around them has changed because of Christianity. Indeed, in Tayo's family, Auntie and Grandma regularly went to church. They were even there the day Tayo had been brought to the reservation by his mother. Moreover, Auntie had special shoes and dressing for church. Even though Christianity could not completely take the place of ritualism in the Indian community, we must acknowledge that it had a great impact on Indians and on their living.

Throughout the novel, the way Leslie Marmon Silko names characters and places denounces a white American tint within the Indian world. In fact right at the beginning of the novel, we see that Leslie Silko finds no problem in using typically Indian names, though they are often not easy to be written and spelt in English. As such we may infer that, was it not because Indians have learnt about the culture of white people and have copied their language for instance and many their ways, Tayo and Rocky would have referred to their grand mother not by

<sup>19</sup> Genesis, P 03.

<sup>20</sup> *Ceremony*, p. 1.

the appellation grandma but by the Indian equivalent of Grandmother. Hence instead of using the appellations Grandma and Auntie, Leslie Marmon Silko would have certainly used traditional Indian names such as K'oo'ko. Actually, instead of using the name "K'oo'ko", she could have simply said a spirit, because according to Indians K'oo'ko is the spirit that haunts the night of warriors who have killed during war.

If Leslie Silko choose to say K'oo'ko, it means nothing normally prevented her from using the Indian traditional equivalent of grandmother or Auntie. The fact that she didn't do it proves that the Indian society has changed and that English is little by little replacing the Indian traditional language among Indians.

Beyond all the elements we have so far been giving, based on *Ceremony*, to show the changing that occurred within Indian community as the consequence of its contact with the white American world, there is still one very important fact to study. That is the transformation of rituals and ceremonies. In the same wave length, "At one time, the ceremonies as they had been performed were enough for the way the world was then. But after the white people came, elements in this world began to shift; and it became necessary to create new ceremonies. I have made changes in the rituals. The people mistrust this greatly, but only this growth keeps the ceremonies strong..."<sup>21</sup> Culture can be defined as: "The total shared way of life of a given people, comprising their mode of thinking, acting and feeling, which are expressed, for instance, in religion, law, language, art and custom as well as in material products such as house, clothes and tools."<sup>22</sup> We deduce that since Indians have been transformed and that their ways, language and mode of thinking are no more the same, their culture too is automatically no more the same. Thus Indians rituals and customs in order to continue being effective had to undergo some transformations in line with the "new" people Indians have become. "Following Vietnam, America 'and particularly American men' faced a 'disruption of cultural identity' amplified by the victories of the civil rights and feminist movements."<sup>23</sup> The phalocentric tendency to undermine women and the racial segregation around the country took other directions. Gibson argues that:

American men--lacking confidence in the government and the economy, troubled by the changing relations between the sexes, uncertain of their identity or their

future--began to *dream*, to fantasize about the powers and features of another kind of man who could retake and reorder the world. And the hero of all these dreams was the paramilitary warrior. In the New War he fights the battles of Vietnam a thousand times, each time winning decisively. Terrorists and drug dealers are blasted into oblivion. Illegal aliens inside the United States and the hordes of non-whites in the Third World are returned by force to their proper place. Women are revealed as dangerous temptresses who have to be mastered, avoided, or terminated.<sup>24</sup>

The three different courses that Tayohas followed before he is healed is a means, the author uses to show the transformation in the ceremonies and the reason why they should be transformed. As we know already, before Tayo got to the reservation when back from war, he spent a period of time at Los Angeles Veterans Hospital. The care he received there does not heal him totally. Once at home, Grandma sent for Ku'oosh an Indian traditional medicine man, to take care of him again. Ku'oosh takes care of him. He performs for Tayo the ceremony that the Laguna people used to perform for warriors who killed in battle. But Ku'oosh knows things have changed and fears his ceremony alone may not heal Tayo. Tayo is then taken to another medicine man. The man is old Betonie. Old Betonie too is Indian and is performing Indian medicine. But Betonie is not practicing medicine the way Ku'oosh does. Betonie knows a lot about the problems incurred by the contact between Native American and white cultures and as a consequence has taken time to transform the ceremonies so as to make them effective on the "new" Indians and on the new sicknesses brought by the contact between whites and Indians.

Indeed, when Tayo arrived at Betonie's place, the latter took time to explain to him why he was there and why he had transformed the Old ceremonies into something new and different. In the following passage of *Ceremony* Betonie is talking to Tayo and giving him the reasons for his transforming the ceremonies.

'There are some things I have to tell you,' Betonie began softly. '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 the ritual, great harm can be done, great harm unleashed.' He was quiet for a while, looking up at the sky through the smoke hole. "That much can be also true. But long ago when the people were given the ceremonies, the changing began; if only in the aging of the yellow

<sup>21</sup> Quoted by Angelina Paul in "An overview of 'The Man to Send Rain Clouds,'" *Gale Online Encyclopedia*. Detroit: Gale, 2012. *Literature Resource Center*.

<sup>22</sup> Kneller, G.F., *Educational Anthropology: An Introduction*, (Malabar, Florida: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1982), p.4.

<sup>23</sup> Philip K. Jason, "Hard-Boiled Nam II: James Lee Burke's Dave Robicheaux." *Acts and Shadows: The Vietnam War in American Literary Culture*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000. Rpt. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Ed. Jeffrey W. Hunter. Vol. 322. Detroit: Gale, 2012. *Literature Resource Center*. 101-120.

<sup>24</sup> Cited by Philip K. Jason, *Ibid*.



gourd rattle or the shrinking of the skin around the eagle's claw, if only in the different voices from generation to generation, singing chants. You see in many ways, the ceremonies have always been changing.'

Tayo nodded; he looked at the medicine pouches hanging from the ceiling and tried to imagine the objects they contained. "At one time, the ceremonies alone as they had been performed were enough for the way the world was then. But after the white people came, elements in this world began to shift; and it became necessary to create new ceremonies. I have made changes in the rituals. The people mistrust this greatly, but only this growth keeps the ceremonies strong."<sup>25</sup>

Based on this passage we understand that, Betonie did not decide to transform the ceremonies for the sake of transforming them, but he was compelled to. The society had changed and ceremonies too had to change. In fact, there were new diseases and sicknesses; there were also "new" Indians as it is the case of Tayo in the novel or of Leslie Marmon Silko in factual life. We call them "new" Indians because they are not totally Indian, they are particular and because, before white people came to America and by the time most of the rituals have been created, people like Tayo and the author of *Ceremony* did not exist among Indians. Hence, it is not amazing Ku'oosh and Betonie doubt that rituals of before the arrival of White people may not have full effect on those diseases and on the range of "new" Indians Tayo and Leslie Marmon Silko are part of. That is why Betonie has changed his rituals and has adapted them to the new realities surrounding them so as to make them totally effective on people like Leslie Marmon Silko and in cases like modern battle fatigue.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

This article has discussed the cultural dynamism after World War II that saw, on the one hand, the coming together of the western civilization and the Native Americans. The study has shown that the impact of the US participation and failure in Vietnam, on the other hand has been a hallmark in the Cultural Revolution that concretized the American Mainstream multiculturalism.

This study firstly saw to the substance of stories, rituals and ceremonies for Indian Americans. Here we found that the recourse of Native Americans has always been to oral traditions and performances inherent in stories. These stories that are of the Indian origin belong to their custom and are considered more than one can consider a story. The author's use of these stories teaches us that a Native American in trouble or sickness

cannot find a solution without the traditional use of these stories full of rituals and ceremonies.

The second step presented the impact of the Federal Affirmative Action that makes vivid the influence of American culture on Indian Americans. Firstly the protagonist's birth which is from a white father and an Indian mother denotes the consequence of this coming together. Other characters from the same cultural background like Tayo, or even more authentic than him have shown a different behavior just because they have started getting some diverse cultural features from public schools. Rocky – Auntie's son and Auntie herself are radically transformed by their contact with white Mexican. This transformation is negatively elaborated on by the author through the disapproval of Grandma vis-à-vis Rocky and his mother's conducts.

Tayo, a mixed blood character in this novel stands in the cultural liminality to affirm his identity as an Indian and at the same time use the Indian cultural features in his contribution to the American culture. Despite the fact that he is not full blood Indian, Tayo stands on the side of his Grandma to submit himself to Indian traditional healing to the sickness he got from the US participation in the Vietnam War. However, post-modernism is obviously at stake here not only because the protagonist lost faith to western medical treatment, but also the traditional medicine men did not implement the means they used to cure full blood Indians. Instead, they created a blend of traditional healings to cure the culturally hybrid patient. Tayo's position in Silko's world is to point at the hybrid aspect of the American society which constitutes its national cultural strength.

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<sup>25</sup> *Ceremony*, p. 126.

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