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MA Thesis

Representing Native American Trauma through Literature: Leslie  
Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* and *Almanac of the Dead* as  
Postmodern Narratives of Mediation.

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## I. Introduction

For some reason, 40 carloads came in February of 1973 to Wounded Knee and took over the complex. They stayed there for 71 days. When I got it back, it was all destroyed, burned. Everything was burned to the ground, my home, my store and my trading post. They stole all of the artifacts, they burned my museum, and they burned four cabins and all my vehicles to the ground.

-James Czywczynski in "A Conversation with a Wounded Knee Owner James Czywczynski" by Vincent Schilling, 30 April 2013.

*The Pioneer* has before declared that our only safety depends upon the total extirmination [sic] of the Indians. Having wronged them for centuries we had better, in order to protect our civilization, follow it up by one more wrong and wipe these untamed and untamable creatures from the face of the earth. In this lies future safety for our settlers and the soldiers who are under incompetent commands. Otherwise, we may expect future years to be as full of trouble with the redskins as those have been in the past.

Frank L Baum, *Saturday Aberdeen Pioneer*, 3 Jan 1891

The memory of massacre at Wounded Knee that came to symbolically stand for five centuries of violent colonization of Native Americans has recently been brought into attention by one more example of a white man self-righteously claiming the right to profit on Indian land, refusing to acknowledge ruthless means by which the land came into his possession. In April 2013 James Czywczynski, the owner of the 40-acres parcel, the site of the Wounded Knee massacre, decided to put the plot on sale demanding \$3.9m for what, according to the tribal council of the Pine Ridge Reservation, should be worth \$7,000. The owner believes that it is the historical value that justifies this exorbitant price (Hill), but, as Garfield Steele the representative of the Sioux council notes, Czywczynski fails to realize that this historical and cultural value is by no means his property. Steel, quoted by *NY Times* says: "We see that greed around here all the time with non-Indians. To me, you can't put a price on the lives that were taken there" (Eligon). In the interview given to Indian Country Toady Media Network, Czywczynski proves himself ignorant of not only the murder of 150 to 300

Oglala Sioux men, women, and children by white Calvary in the December of 1890, but also of its connections to the 1973 Wounded Knee occupation by the American Indian Movement.

AIM occupied Wounded Knee to symbolically reclaim Indian sovereignty and history from the hands of the American government and American culture, and to call attention to the larger history of Native American extermination and dispossession. European colonization, according to Brewton Barry the author of "The Myth of Vanishing Indian," reduced Native American population from 800,000 to 250,000 by "smallpox, tuberculosis, massacres, and general dissipation" within 350 years (54). The callousness and ignorance with which Czywczynski refers to the history of Wounded Knee is shocking. Czywczynski sees himself, rather than Native Americans, the victim of the controversy that this spot of land causes. He perceives himself as the legitimate owner of the parcel, who was made to leave his rightful possession due to some "thugs" that came and burned his house. Yet, Czywczynski's statement is only the continuation of the tradition represented, for example, by Frank L Baum, who, in the editorial in the *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer*, quoted above, ardently justified the massacre as a matter of national safety. His language is heavy with racism, but so is Czywczynski's when he calls members of AIM "Indian thugs," or claiming that "everything is given to Indians anyway" (Hill). Moreover, claiming the site of tribal mourning and Native American genocide, which came to symbolize the cruelty of white colonization of America, and putting a price on it, is just a repetition of the history of white colonizers profiting from the stolen land. This perspective on Native American colonization is prevalent within dominant American society, and perpetuated by many writers and artists, including the beloved author of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. In mainstream American imagination and memory America was founded on the ideals of democracy and freedom, not on the dead bodies of indigenous people. And since these two concepts cannot by any means be reconciled to constitute the historical origins of the United States, one of them has to be repressed and forgotten.

To justify the extermination of whole communities and assuage potential feelings of guilt, Euro-American civilization has created its own mythology about Native Americans. In the “Myth of Vanishing Indian” Barry notes how racially charged accounts of Indians as savages unfit for civilization, and thus doomed for extinction served to justify the relocation, extermination, and cruelty in dealings with Native American tribes. However, as the colonization progressed and the number of Native Americans dwindled away these accounts transformed into nostalgic stories of the noble but vanishing Indian (Berry 52). In “Un-Writing Empire by Writing Oral Tradition: Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony*,” John Peacock refers to Thomas Jefferson and Henry Thoreau as the founders of the imperialist nostalgia for the noble Native, enforced later by “Indian legends” explored by James Fenimore Cooper or published in *Norton Anthology* (296-297). Also Westerns, especially those featuring John Wayne, an all-American quasi-legendary hero, enforce the same false memory and image of Native Americans. According to JoEllen Shively’s sociological study of Indian and Anglo reception to Westerns, “Anglos linked the Western myth to their own history and turned it into an affirmation of the values their ancestors strove for and imposed in the West” (725). In consequence, amassed cultural redefinition reduce the deaths of hundreds of thousands human beings to a sad, but necessary disappearance of less advanced race that was doomed to extinction anyway. Euro-American culture obscured Native American extermination representing it as a natural process of evolution, where those less advanced simply died out.

Since America’s cultural influence spreads across the globe, the cultural texts that serve within the dominant American culture to legitimate Native American genocide also shape the image of an American Indian throughout the world. Also, some of these texts have triggered my interest in the Native American culture and civilization. Having watched Disney’s *Pocahontas* I came to believe in the “Myth of Vanishing Indian.” But the story made me angry that a rich and complete civilization and culture has been destroyed by thoughtless violence and ruthless greed. The fact that the

genocide was executed in the name of freedom and equality has even deepened my anger. These Euro-American texts, for me, show that the crime of mass murder not only went without punishment, but also without the realization that a crime had even been committed. My interest in Native American literature therefore came from the need to counter the messages of extinction and justified murder imposed by Euro-American culture. My primary reading of works considered as Native American literature, interprets them as messages of presence that subvert the myth created by the dominant culture to justify colonization and genocide.

The choice to discuss Leslie Marmon Silko in this thesis is justified by her status within the dominant culture. *Ceremony* is most likely the narrative that has introduced a lot of Euro-American readers into the Native American culture and civilization, since, according to a scholar Kenneth Roemer, *Ceremony* is probably the most widely discussed and taught Native American novel (223). *Ceremony*'s reception within mainstream American audience gave Silko the reputation of a Native American writer who beautifully asserts the presence of Native Americans despite colonizing practices brought to America by Europeans. My first encounter with Silko's fiction, however, was through her second novel, *Almanac of the Dead* – and it was soon after I have read passages of Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*. While Pynchon's postmodern extravaganza left me exhausted, the narrative of *Almanac* restored the balance between challenging and pleasurable reading experience. *Almanac of the Dead* was the assertive and powerful message of Native American presence I had been looking for. Yet, my response was not typical: in general the reception *Almanac* fell dramatically short of *Ceremony*'s success. *Ceremony* established certain standards white readers would expect from a Native American novel. Since *Almanac of the Dead* failed to satisfy white readerly expectations, it was rejected as Silko's artistic failure. *Almanac of the Dead*, according to Blanca Schorcht, was initially criticised and unfavourably compared to *Ceremony* as missing "that special insight into the lives and minds of Native Americans" (Schorcht 107). Reviewers from *Newsweek* or

*The New York Times* hailed *Ceremony* for the feeling and intelligence with which the author reveals the complex process of healing, and the exceptional skill with which she combines “European and Indian styles of storytelling: realism and character with legend and archetype” (Jefferson), and proclaimed Silko the most accomplished Native American writer of her generation. *Almanac of the Dead*, however, triggered quite opposite reactions from *Newsweek* or *Time* reviewers, who accused Silko of savage anger (Skow) and incoherent narrative (Gates).

I will argue, however, that *Ceremony* and *Almanac of the Dead* constitute compatible and interconnected messages of Native American presence and sovereignty. Consequently, I will show that the discrepancy between the two novels arises not from the narratives themselves, but rather from application of the inadequate interpretative tools. The search for the Native American qualities within the novel might prove fruitful in the case of *Ceremony*, but is rather futile in the case of *Almanac*. Therefore I move away from this perspective and discuss Silko’s novels as narratives of mediation. I claim that both *Ceremony* and *Almanac of the Dead* mediate Native American trauma not only through their plots, the story they are telling, but also, and more importantly, through their narratives the form through which the story is told. Therefore I set my reading of the novels in the context of postmodernism and post-colonialism. Moreover, I apply trauma and psychoanalysis theories to see how the unresolved Native American trauma of colonization is at the roots of Silko’s novels, and as such becomes the departure point for the argument in this thesis. Psychoanalysis theories underscore the connection between trauma and language, but also help to understand how literary representations of trauma affect the readers triggering a change of consciousness. Through her representation of trauma in *Ceremony* and *Almanac of the Dead*, Silko challenges the master narrative of Native American colonization in order to legitimize the experience of the colonized. Through her stories, she recreates the world in which Native American colonization regains its historical and cultural meaning of ruthless genocide and collective trauma. Moreover, the two

narratives reinvent the conventional Euro-American genre of the novel and become self-reflexive narratives providing instruction for their readers.

This thesis shows how Silko, through her postmodern experiments with the conventional genre of the novel, represents Native American trauma as a challenge to Euro-American representations. This argument also shows how *Ceremony*'s narrative and message provide readers with an interpretative key that allows them to unlock the meaning of both Silko's texts. *Ceremony* as such constitutes an example of postmodern metafiction, fiction's commentary upon itself. Further I argue that Silko realizes the vision of the novel presented in *Ceremony* through her latter narrative of *Almanac of the Dead*.

Representing Native American trauma places Silko within postcolonial writers, who, according to Bran Nicol, see the dominant version of history as a narrative, which becomes means of cultural and social oppression (123). As such postcolonial narratives aim to counter the claim to universality that the master narrative usurps (122). Ron Eyerman in *Cultural Trauma and the Formation of African American Identity* refers to this attack on master narratives, in the context of slavery, as the "struggle of meaning" between the victims of slavery and its oppressors who commemorated slavery as "benign and civilizing" (5). Since collective memory and group identity are shaped not by direct experience of slavery, but representations of it, Eyerman claims, the intellectuals are obliged to counter white misrepresentations and demand recognition of slavery as the cultural trauma of African Americans (3). Eyerman also claims that collective memory of a historical event does not necessarily stem from the direct experience, but is rather established through multiple representations in mass-media (3). Literature therefore becomes one of possible mediums for cultural trauma. If, as in the context of slavery, the dominant memory misrepresents the collective traumatic experience, the intellectuals within the traumatized group bear the



responsibility to bring out the repressed memory and communicate it to the dominant culture (Eyerman 3).

Yet Eyerman clearly divides cultural trauma from personal traumas, when he claims that “there is a difference between trauma as it affects individuals and as cultural process,” since the latter aims mainly at the formation of collective identity through the memory of a traumatic event (1). My argument, on the other hand, through the analysis of Silko’s narratives, seeks to emphasize the relation between personal and cultural trauma. Eyerman forgets that personal trauma, like cultural trauma, is also inseparably connected to language. In “The Premises and Technique of Interpretation,” Sigmund Freud discusses the psychoanalyst’s manner of interpreting dreams and states clearly that “it is the dreamer himself who should tell us what his dream means” (54). Personal act of communication, putting a mental image into language is what enables us to know the meaning of a dream. Furthermore, witnessing trauma, especially through a narrative, also happens on a personal rather than collective level. The act of reading enables mediation of trauma. Thus, reading ceases to be a neutral passive act, and becomes active participation in the creation of meaning. The psychoanalysis perspective therefore coincides with Susan Sontag’s definition of a narrative as “an instrument of modifying consciousness and organizing new modes of sensibility” (qtd. in Nicol 40). Therefore, I argue that *Ceremony* and *Almanac of the Dead* mediate personal trauma to establish the connection with the reader on an individual level. Through personal identification the narrative enables the change of consciousness and new sensibility to occur within the reader.

Rather than remaining on the level of cultural trauma, Silko shows the experience of trauma through individualized physical pain and suffering to evoke readers’ empathy and identification. Only later does she connect the personal traumas of her characters to the larger political context. Silko is not alone in seeing the value of representing individualized pain. Elaine Scarry in *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* believes that voicing pain is crucial to its elimination (9).

Pain, according to Scarry, “has no voice” (3), and no object (4), and as such it is problematic to communicate. Scarry shows how difficult the feeling of empathy is to evoke, for, as she claims, “to have great pain is to have certainty; to hear that another person has pain is to have doubt” (7). The task of conveying pain rests on language representations, which adequately communicate pain to evoke empathy. Empathy, on the other hand, becomes the responsibility of the reader interwoven in the readerly response to the text. In the context of trauma mediation, readers’ approach to the narrative coincides with the stance of a trauma witness. In “Silko’s Blood Sacrifice: The circulating Witness in *Almanac of the Dead*,” David Moore distinguishes the role of a witness from disengaged watching or voyeurism. He claims that “witnessing recognizes its own implications in the other” (161). Silko’s experimental narratives serve to connect personal trauma to the larger historical and cultural context of Native American on-going colonization. As such the narratives not only allow readers to identify personally with the traumatized, but also force the readers to recognize broader cultural implications.

In making this argument about trauma, this thesis takes a different tack than prior criticism, which has tended to focus on oral tradition and Native American culture. Indeed, the usual interpretative approach to Silko assumes that her narratives originate within the Native American tradition of storytelling. Likewise, most scholars have analyzed how Silko’s novels incorporate Native American concepts into new genre, namely the novel. Yet, Silko’s introduction to *Ceremony* in which Ts’its’tsi’nako, Thought Woman creates the world through a story (1) shows how Silko’s view of stories resembles the postmodern concept of a narrative. According to Nicol, postmodernism “rests on the assumption that fiction – no matter how realist or experimental – is always, to use Robbe Grillet’s terms, a matter of ‘constructing’ rather than ‘transcribing reality’” (21). Even though Nicol claims that postmodernism insists the world of the novel is “heterocosmic”, complete in itself, he also acknowledges the need for the reader to actually recreate the described world through readers’

imagination (25). The act of reading a novel therefore resembles the act of storytelling, which assumes participative roles of the storyteller and listeners. Moreover, the reader of postmodern fiction becomes the link between the world of the novel and reality making postmodern fiction both self-reflexive and referential. Silko's representations of trauma reconstruct the reality that acknowledges Native American genocide and larger cultural trauma. Silko's readers, following the author's instructions, bring her narratives into being and anchor the narrative-created world in the readers' own reality.

In order to assure that her representations of trauma elicit the required response from the reader, Silko employs metafiction to. The aim of metafiction, as Nicol argues, is to expose the cultural and historical frame through which a narrative is interpreted (36). He claims that "narrative framing is the means by which the fictional world is made accessible to the real world, and as such is a kind of portal, a viewing screen through which the reader can enter the fictional text" (36). Exposing its own frame, in Nicol's view, a postmodern narrative waives the right to represent "the totality of the world" and exposes the narrative as "only a small section of something larger" (36). Nicol echoes Silko's assertion in *Ceremony* where Tayo understands that "his sickness was only part of something larger" (116), to show how representation of personal trauma is just a framed story that has to relate to a bigger context. In *Ceremony* Silko reveals her frame, not necessarily to show the limitations of her narrative, but rather to show how *Ceremony* is both a complete representation of personal trauma and how it a part of a bigger traumatic reality. In *Almanac of the Dead* Silko goes a step further and tries to reproduce the totality of this traumatic reality in the narrative that employs multiple smaller narratives and represents multiple personal traumas. In *Almanac of the Dead* Silko tries to transgress the limitations that postmodernism imposed on the narrative, namely its inability to break the frame completely and show the world in its totality.

That said, there is a certain point at which Silko's contradicts the general postmodern ethos. Frederick Jameson in "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" points to one of the characteristics of postmodern era, which is "the death of the subject," or "the end of individualism as such" (553), and relates it to the reality created by the conditions of late capitalism's dehumanizing corporations. Therefore, individual characters lose their credibility and significance in postmodern fiction. Also Nicol observes postmodern disbelief in an individual when he claims that postmodern narratives undermine the credibility of the character and prevent the readers from personal identification (19). Silko's representation of trauma on the other hand originates from individual characters and personal identification. Her fiction is character-driven, but in a way that significantly differs from traditional Bildungsroman. Silko's focus on individuals aims to set them in the bigger cultural context, rather than observe their internal progress. If Bildungsroman depicts introspection of the protagonist on the background of less significant events and characters, Silko's novels depict extrospection that blurs the difference between the protagonist and the foreground and requires the readers to include the significance of both in their interpretation. On one hand, Silko rejects postmodern disbelief in an individual through her fiction's sharp focus on characters. On the other hand however, she confirms this postmodern disbelief showing how the genre of Bildungsroman falsified the perception of an individual and his relationship with his surroundings. Silko introduces her own narrative genre, which is both character-driven and postmodern.

Moreover, Silko's postmodern representation of trauma corresponds closely to the poetics of postmodern witness discussed by Alicia Ostriker in "Beyond Confession: Poetics of Postmodern Witness." Even though Ostriker's focus is on the politically engaged postmodern poetry, her postulates prove useful also in discussion of Silko's mediation of trauma. Ostriker claims that political resistance towards oppression and violence must include both history and reflection upon the self to provide the reader with an interpretative model (35). Postmodern witness therefore, "reaches

toward the objectively encyclopedic”, “rejects master narratives” and “refuses to pretend coherence” but, unlike high modernist fiction, the poets preserve their lyrical I in an attempt to show an individual in the catastrophe (35). These poets, according to Ostriker, represent “a crisis that is at once global and intimate: the simultaneous impossibility of objective witness and subjective wholeness” (39). Silko’s narratives realize the same concept of witnessing that incorporates both fiction and metafiction, conflates personal and political, shows an individual in his or her reality, and engages the reader in the act of witnessing.

The witnessing stance can therefore be equated to an approach of a postmodern reader, which is exemplified among others by Roland Barthes. In *The Pleasure of the Text*, a theoretical text exploring types of narrative structure, Roland Barthes distinguishes two types of text – of pleasure and of bliss. Even though, he claims, texts of pleasure enjoy much bigger popularity, the pleasure they deliver is significantly less intense than that of the texts of bliss (10). A text of bliss, according to Barthes, is “the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts, unsettles the reader’s historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a certain crisis his relation with language” (14). Such a reader, according to Barthes, “abolishes within himself all barriers, all classes, all exclusions [...] silently accepts every charge of illogicality, of incongruity [...] endures contradiction without shame” (3). To distinguish a text of petty pleasure against a text of bliss, Barthes compares the former to striptease that always proceeds in the same order (10). A text of pleasure is “gradual unveiling” (10), but always in the same order” (11). Barthes claims that all great narratives, Balzac’s, Proust’s or Dickens’s are texts of pleasure, as the satisfaction is achieved merely in discovering the culmination of the story achieved through rushing to the ending by skipping or skimming passages considered less important for the story (11). Reading for bliss, on the other hand, is not striptease but rather an attempt to spot the naked body in the places where clothing fails to cover it. Reading for bliss looks for the moments of significance, thus “it skips

nothing, it weighs, it sticks to the text; it is not (logical) extension that captivates it, the winnowing out of truths, but the layering of significance, as the children's game of topping hands" (13). In Barthes's definition, a text of bliss "cruises" the reader "without knowing where he is" (4). The unpredictability of the text, not the familiarity of the narrative, is therefore the source of its readerly bliss, as the text takes over readers resisting familiar reading routines.

Silko uproots Euro-American cultural memory by uprooting established preconceptions about reading a novel. The layering of significance enables Silko to draw connections between the personal and larger cultural context, as she intertwines personal and global trauma. She explores connections between characters and their surrounding rather than investigating their internal lives, and shows how their healing originates from new consciousness that extends across the borders of nation and race. Subverting established Euro-American literary norms is not only at the roots of Silko's representation of Tayo's personal trauma, but also becomes the purpose of the complex narrative of *Almanac*. Famous realist novels of Euro-American literary canon have shaped not only certain reading routines, but also certain preconceptions about the individual and his reality. In the narratives of *Ceremony* and *Almanac of the Dead*, Silko revises both a narrative and reality. Eliciting new models of reading the narratives impose new perception of reality.

By focusing primarily on the narrative form, my argument differs from the perspective assumed by most scholars, who have focused on the Native American elements of the novel, exploring the interaction between Native literary forms such as storytelling or Mayan almanac with written forms of Euro-American literature. My focus on the trauma and narrative helps to explain why Euro-American audience has received *Ceremony* and *Almanac* in a completely different way, even though the two novels originate from the same source of Native American trauma. The singularity of Tayo's characters and the evocative passion with which Silko voices his personal pain elicit deep personal identification with Tayo, as *Ceremony's* protagonist. Consequently, the novel can

easily be read as a conventional Bildungsroman allowing the readers to skip the background, the larger cultural context, as less significant. *Almanac* on the other hand explicitly defies conventional reading and as such is perceived as incoherent and too strange. Silko emphasizes the connections between the characters and their reality, rather than their internal life, in both *Ceremony* and *Almanac*, yet her readers manage to omit Silko's message in *Ceremony* and rejected it in *Almanac*. The perspective of the trauma and narrative form also helps to understand why Silko allows for Tayo's personal closure at the end of *Ceremony*, which for some critics seems inappropriate in the context of Native American endings. Because Silko insists on the equality of background and individuals in a narrative, she inseparably connects Tayo's historical and physical reality to his personal trauma. Thus, even as Silko resolves Tayo's personal trauma, she represents global trauma as unresolved. Since cultural trauma is not merely a background it proves significant to the overall meaning of the ending of the novel.

The structure of my argument in this thesis is dictated by my focus on two mediations of trauma. The first chapter discusses the narrative structure of *Ceremony* as a challenge to expectations and preconceptions within her Euro-American readers. In the first section I claim that the central part of the novel, Betonie's ceremony, constitutes the interpretative beginning of the narrative. In the following two subsections I show how this interpretative approach influences reading of Tayo's confusing dreams and memories that open the novel and how it affects understanding of the novel's ending that provides personal closure despite general open-endedness.

My second chapter discusses *Almanac of the Dead* as another realization of Silko's character-driven fiction, and shows how Silko's second novel multiplies individualized trauma found in *Ceremony* through numerous characters. By multiple instances of trauma, Silko shows their interconnectedness to each other and to bigger cultural context. The first out of three sections focuses on the characters of Seese and Sterling and analyses how their trauma is linked to larger

context of Euro-American civilization and how it should be witnessed. The second section of this chapter discusses the character of Menardo as an example of internalized and self-inflicted trauma to show how cultural violence narrows down on an individual. The third section analyzes the ending of *Almanac* as a global and political closure to the novel that begins with two personal traumas of Sterling and Seese to show how *Almanac's* mediation of trauma originates from the personal and extends into global towards the narrative's ending.

In my conclusion I confirm the Native American trauma as the roots of Silko's narratives, but also reassert the postmodern character of her narratives, comparing them to complex maps of human relations that resemble Umberto Eco's model for a narrative as a rhizomatic maze (qtd. in Nicol 47). Likewise, I return to the question of the Native American content of Silko's novel and postulate a hypothesis that this approach is not only limited but also harmful as it objectifies and commodifies Native American literature.



## II. Chapter I: Mediation of Trauma in Silko's *Ceremony*

And then I went "Ahhh no! I knew there was something I forgot." How could I have forgotten that novels are supposed to be in chapters?

-Leslie Marmon Silko in "Apricots, Orchids, and Wovoka: An Interview with Leslie Marmon Silko" by Robin Cohen.

Even after thirty years in print, the absence of chapter division in *Ceremony* (1977) seems to bother few readers, who refuse to perceive the lack of chapters as Silko's outstanding rebellion against the Euro-American conventional perception of the novel. Yet, in the interview with Cohen, Silko confesses how she thought the lack of clear visual structure threatened *Ceremony's* favorable reception by her publishers, and consequently general American audience (Cohen 258-259). Cohen links Silko's anxiety to clear expectations mainstream audience's holds about the genre of the novel, and reflects on an Egyptian writer, whose expertise in the genre of European novel employed in his own writing earned him a Nobel Prize and acclaim of white critics. But to Cohen and Silko, to give in and strictly follow these writing conventions is to sell-out, since such enthusiastic reception by white audience usually translates into, as Cohen puts it " Oh, here is someone who writes what we expect him to write" (259). Silko and Cohen believe the lack of chapters in *Ceremony* is bound to frustrate white readers' expectations. But ironically, thirty years after, the mainstream American readers have played a prank on the author, since their enthusiastic reception led to *Ceremony's* inclusion into the canon of American literature. Eventually, *Ceremony* has become a Native American novel that mainstream American readers would expect a Native American author to write.

Reception theories would argue that the US society much needed *Ceremony* (1977) to heal from the trauma of social unrest, the disappointment in the civil rights movement, the assassinations, and Vietnam War. Disillusioned with the norms and values of the American democracy, young Americans focused their interests on the alternative, indigenous sources of knowledge. Yet, these sources more often originated from the Euro-American rather than genuine

Native American cultures. Silko's novel constituted not only an original Native American voice, but also a healing ceremony for those traumatized in the Vietnam War and violent street riots within the United States. Engaging the readers in personal healing of Tayo, a half-blood Laguna traumatized by the experience of the Pacific War, Silko voiced and eased the pain and suffering that the troubled decade of the 60s inflicted upon American society. Furthermore, the narrative managed to satisfy readers' basic expectations from a novel providing insight into Tayo's personal healing, love theme as a necessary part of healing, and comforting closure to Tayo's personal trauma. Readers and critics therefore tend to see *Ceremony* therefore as a character's progress through time from the depths of despair to happiness and stability, a typical Bildungsroman narrative model employed in many Euro-American novels. Since the form of *Ceremony* becomes transparent, the Native American tradition and spirituality comes to the fore as the core of *Ceremony's* message.

Readers conditioned by the European models of narratives read Tayo's story as a realization of Bildungsroman, in which internal development of the protagonist set against complimentary characters and background defines the plot. The readers, familiar with such narratives identify with the protagonist and focus on his personal progress, skimming though descriptions of historical or social circumstances not vital to their understanding. However, it is difficult to imagine that an author so outspoken about Euro-American culture as Silko, intended to please white audience with a Native ceremony of healing transcribed in a form of a conventional Euro-American narrative. It is more possible that readers, engaged in Tayo's personal trauma and healing, overlook or ignore the images of the deprivation of the Indians in the town of Gallup and the environmental catastrophe of the uranium mine in Laguna reservation as Silko's explicit references to the exploitation of Native American land and people. As such, even though present within the novel, Native American trauma loses its significance in the overall plot of the novel. In this chapter therefore I would like to rediscover the link between Tayo's personal trauma and larger Native American trauma in *Ceremony*.

I would like to see how Silko cannibalizes the conventional genre of Bildungsroman to make her readers see the connection between Tayo's personal and Native American cultural trauma.

Kenneth Roemer in "Silko's Arroyos in Mainstream" summarizes the set of expectations that Silko realizes in *Ceremony*: "the landscape, the recreations of oral literatures, the Laguna and Navajo concepts of generative and negative powers of storytelling and ceremony, and the gender and culture and racial background of the author" (Roemer 230). Interestingly, while Silko is praised for providing genuine insight into Native American spirituality, the lack of the chapters remains unnoticed by critics or audience, who choose to see the novel as the combination of the familiar novel genre and Native American storytelling. Even the character of Tayo contributes to *Ceremony's* canonization. Judith Fetterley postulates that readers of a canonical text identify themselves as white and male or remain alienated from the experience presented in the novel (qtd. in Horovitz 6). For Silko, employing a male character might mean blurring the gender difference between the writer and the characters, but in the view of American canon, Tayo's story represents "universal male experience" (Horovitz 6). Even the fact that Tayo is mixed-blood is of significance here, since it equips the character with some amount of whiteness that enables white readers to claim affinity to his experience. Perceived as familiar, the form becomes transparent to Euro-American readers. Consequently, the historical and social context of Tayo's trauma is reduced to less significant background. It is the Native American content, the alternative spirituality, the possible answers to their ailments that allure the readers. Also scholars often focus on the subjects of Silko's mediation between two cultures and worldviews, or explore Native American stories that underwrite Silko's narrative, marginalizing the subject of the narrative form itself in Silko's representation of Native American trauma.

"The Ethics Of Identification: The Global Circulation Of Traumatic Narrative In Silko's "Ceremony" And Roy's "The God Of Small Things" by Joanne Lipson Freed is one of the few articles

that directly explore the connection between Silko's narrative and mediation of trauma. Freed claims that the *Ceremony* employs trauma and healing not only as its subject but also as formal strategy. The first part of the narrative consists of Tayo's seemingly random memories. The narrative, according to Freed, resembles the language of trauma "disjointed, interruptive, and repetitive" (221). It is both the purpose of the ceremony and the task of the readers to uncover the story behind these events, to discover the meaning of Tayo's memories and their connection to each other (Freed 226). Gradual coherence that Silko's narrative achieves as the ceremony performed by Betonie progresses is formal means Silko employs to recreate the experience of healing represented as infusing meaning into incoherent traumatic experience. Freed demonstrates how Silko's narrative form engages the readers, who actively participate in Tayo's healing. Yet, the perspective assuming gradual straightening of the plot leads to a problem Freed also notices. Namely, Tayo's restoration provides a sense of relief to the readers (Freed 229), who expect a conclusion to the fragmented and episodic account of personal trauma. Drawing from the trauma theory of Dominick LaCapra, who argued an important distinction between the trauma survivor and witness, Freed observes that *Ceremony* blurs this fine line, and consequently "white readers who identify with Tayo join the ranks of the aggrieved and see themselves as entitled to the healing that the novel envisions," instead of accepting their cultural and historical responsibility for the colonization of Native Americans (238).

Freed's argument fails to show how Silko's mediation of personal trauma successfully impels the readers to witness the unresolved cultural trauma of Native Americans. The focus on the development of Tayo as the main drive of *Ceremony's* narrative is the pitfall of Freed's discussion of Silko's representation of personal and historical trauma. In this thesis I show how Tayo's trauma is resolved not in the linear manner of straightening confused memories of an individual, as Freed would want it, but through reconnecting his personal trauma to the larger historical and cultural context. *Ceremony*, unlike Bildungsroman, withholds from hierarchical arrangement between the

foregrounded protagonist against his social and cultural background, but rather brings Tayo and his background to the same level of importance. Consequently, Silko writes an emotive text and immerses the readers in Tayo's personal trauma not to let them identify and heal with the protagonist vicariously, but in order to locate Tayo's trauma in a larger context and sensitize the readers, through personal identification with Tayo, to Native American unresolved trauma, which, like Tayo's personal pain, has its roots in Euro-American culture.

By all means readers and scholars should explore Silko's incorporation of Laguna Pueblo stories in order to appreciate Native American culture and spirituality. However, when readers expect only "Indian legends and myths" they reduce *Ceremony* to a one-dimensional narrative describing the progress of the character from unresolved haunting memories to lasting reconciliation. This limited reading allows the readers to believe that Native Americans are just fine, despite war, colonization, and isolation in the reservations. Kenneth Roemer, in "Silko's Arroyos as Mainstream: Processes and Implications of Canonical Identity" refers to a concern expressed by some critics that Native American novels' endings are often read as the representations of the Native Americans' past, present and future (232). Roemer by no means argues that *Ceremony's* ending is definitively happy, particularly since it is preceded by the events of the flooding of the uranium mine, water contamination, and the explosion of the atomic bomb (232). Yet, the completion of Tayo's ceremony, his healing, and reintegration into the community relieve many readers convincing them that "there are traditional forces of regeneration that can still help Indians to survive and survive beautifully" (Roemer 233). In my analysis I purposefully shift focus from the themes of Native American worldview or wisdom to the narrative itself to prove that Silko's form is not transparent to her message. If, as Silko and Cohen argue, stories in traditional Laguna community are like roadmaps (Cohen 258), then the focus is not on the linear development of a character, but rather on the spatial

relations between the characters and their environment. Reading *Ceremony* for form allows us to trace how the character of Tayo affects and is affected by an immediate and broader reality.

The structure of this chapter reflects my claims that the central part of *Ceremony* is actually an introduction and beginning of the novel. Tayo's healing begins with Betonie's updated ceremony that enables Tayo to understand that his pain is a part of something bigger that has been going on for a long time. Tayo's pain originates from his inability to define the nature and source of his trauma, since he fails to understand the larger historical and social context. Tayo and readers lack an interpretive key that would help them to read the meaning of Tayo's haunted and confused memories. Betonie's ceremony provides this key and requires Tayo and readers to read Betonie's message into the opening part of *Ceremony*. Yet, the message affects also the ending. By recalling two environmental disasters that ravished Pueblo land, in the final part of the novel, Silko separates Tayo's personal healing from larger Native American healing

The three sections of this chapter reflect the three main parts of the novel's narrative structure. The first consists of chaotic recollections that transport the readers in time and space, while in the "real time" Tayo travels with Harley to a Mexican bar. The second describes Tayo's ceremony in Gallup, his personal account of trauma, and Betonie's alternative interpretation of these events. The third and final section delves into the novel's endings, namely the closure for Tayo despite unresolved global trauma.

### **Background on the Novel**

*Ceremony* revolves around the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder of a Native American WWII Veteran, Tayo and his attempts to heal himself upon the return to his homeland in the Southwest. *Ceremony*'s present time is anchored in the years following WW II, but the opening part of the story constantly shifts in time recalling Tayo's memories that constitute his trauma. Tayo recalls seeing the death of his uncle Josiah in the dead Japanese soldier, as well as the death of his cousin Rocky, killed

by a Japanese soldier. He remembers the time spent in the sterile environment of the Veteran hospital, and thinks about attempts to drown his guilt and disappointment in alcohol.

Yet, Silko does not narrow Tayo's recollections only to traumatic memories from the war, but intertwines them with other memories reaching as far as Tayo's childhood. As Tayo come to grips with his trauma in the war, he also grapples with the pain of his childhood. Raised by maternal relatives, Tayo was abandoned by his mother at a young age. Some memories describe Tayo's cold upbringing by Auntie, who favored her own son Rocky, and disowned Tayo as a half-blood. Tayo recalls how his Aunt never let them feel like brothers. Memories about the cattle that Tayo and his mother's brother Josiah were supposed to breed reveal how close the relationship between Josiah and Tayo was. Eventually, Tayo's final memory is triggered by his arrival in Gallup before he starts his ceremony with Betonie. The memory focuses on his mother and his very early childhood in Gallup and shows the depth of Tayo's personal trauma. Tayo's scattered memory revolves around these three losses: of his uncle Josiah, his cousin Rocky, and his mother Laura, and gradually broadens their context to global trauma inflicted by military violence, to American trauma caused by false promises of American freedom and democracy, and to Native American trauma triggered by dispossession and uprooting from the Native land.

Tayo's unbearable physical suffering, insomnia, and nausea caused by his mental suffering require unconventional healing and lead Tayo to Betonie, a controversial medicine man of mixed ancestry, who combines traditional Navajo Nightway ritual with elements brought by Europeans to America. Betonie's personifies evil not as white people but as witchery that manipulates people to help Tayo see how his personal trauma, Native American trauma and global trauma are caused by the witchery setting people against each other. Euro-American concept of racism manipulates people to provoke conflicts basing on apparent differences of skin color. Betonie refuses to ascribe blame

and responsibility according to skin color, and helps Tayo to abandon Tayo's own preconceptions about race or ethnicity.

The final stage of Tayo's healing culminates in his confrontation with witchery represented by Emo, one of WW II Indian veterans who is trapped within feelings of disappointment and hatred caused not only by his battlefield experience, but also by the experience of his rejection from the mainstream society shortly after the war. In the novel's conclusion Silko makes Tayo witness the death of Harley hanged on barbed-wire fence. Hidden behind the rocks, with a screwdriver in his pocket, Tayo has to resist the urge to kill Emo. He understands that killing Emo, even though it would save Harley and assuage Tayo's anger, would only perpetuate the death and destruction that witchery wants. Tayo's final resistance to violence provides him with a sense of completion and restoration. But before this final test in the uranium mine, Tayo once again experiences a flashback memory that explains the meaning of this particular location to link Tayo's personal trauma to the test explosion of the nuclear bomb in Jemez Mountains, and to atrocities of atomic warfare in general. In the closing part of her novel Silko emphasizes the spatial structure of her narrative showing how Tayo's consciousness erases the artificial dividing lines that the witchery draws on humanity. Silko shows how Tayo's experience is reflected and multiplied through Native American trauma and global trauma of modern warfare and mass destruction.

In the first section I address how Betonie's mixed ceremony reveals Tayo's WW II trauma in the context of larger Native American trauma to show that witchery is at the root of each. Also I show how Betonie's ceremony can be read as postmodern metafiction that instructs readers how Tayo's traumatic memories and his personal closure should be read. Second section focuses on the three deaths that haunt Tayo in his dreams and represent Tayo's trauma as an experience of loss. I claim that through representations of Josiah's, Rocky's and Laura's deaths, Silko places Tayo's experience within the contexts of humanity, American society, and Native American colonization.



Through identification with Tayo's pain on personal level in the first part readers are prepared to understand and accept white culture's role in witchery and accept its connection to Tayo's personal trauma. The final section explores how Silko brings together Tayo's personal healing and earth's destruction through nuclear bomb testing and uranium mining to show that the supposed background is not reconciled with the protagonist, and while Silko allows for the closure to Tayo's trauma, she leaves the cultural trauma unsolved.

**i. Betonie's Ceremony: Personal Healing Through Locating Individual Trauma within Larger Historical Context**

I wonder what good Indian ceremonies can do against the sickness which comes from their wars,  
their bombs, their lies? (*Ceremony* 122)

Betonie's ceremony constitutes central point of *Ceremony* not only in terms of its location exactly in the middle of the novel, but also in terms of its significance for *Ceremony's* message to the readers. What is discovered through the updated Navajo ceremony sheds light not only on what happens afterwards, but also on what happens before in the novel. This section focuses on the first part of the ceremony, which concludes in the lengthy poetic passage retelling an alternative story of the white man's creation (*Ceremony* 122-128). This passage bears significance for the ending of *Ceremony*, since it retells the world from before the existence of white man till the moment when he discovered "rocks with veins of green and yellow and black" (127), which directly relates this passage to the conclusion of *Ceremony*. The passages preceding the poem depict Tayo's attempt to voice his trauma and Betonie's indirect comments and questions that help Tayo through his healing. These passages directly refer to confused memories narrated in the opening of the novel, not only narrating Tayo's personal psychoanalysis, but also as instructing readers how to interpret Tayo's confused memories.

In Betonie's ceremony Silko shows how healing comes from the knowledge that enables Tayo to connect his personal pain to larger collective pain, Native American and global, and identify the cultural context, the witchery, as the source of trauma. Betonie's insistence on the broader perspective that originates from the knowledge about both cultures explains his presence in Gallup in the borderlands between two cultures, his assembly of herbs and seeds mixed with railway calendars and telephone directories. Betonie believes that isolation fosters ignorance that is at the roots of the oversimplified vision of the world divided by lines of race and nationality. Betonie informs Tayo that "That is the trickery of witchcraft," he said. "They want us to believe all evil resides with white people. Then they will no longer see what is happening. They want us to separate ourselves from white people, to be ignorant and helpless as we watch our own destruction" (*Ceremony* 122).

The initiation into ceremony therefore provides the new interpretative framework not only for the novel but also for reality. Betonie shows global humanity as interconnected. Tayo needs to understand that it is not white or Japanese people that are at the source of his trauma, but the belief that the difference of skin color or nationality can justify killing, incarcerating, and exploiting. He also needs to see how the same ideology is at the roots of bigger cultural trauma. Placing personal trauma in the larger context of white culture's influence on global community is the purpose of the ceremony and the foundation of Tayo's healing. The readers therefore have to see how white culture plays the role of witchery in Tayo's personal trauma, and accept the charges the novel makes, due to their deep personal identification with Tayo's pain.

Tayo's ceremony begins with his attempt to voice the sense of loss Tayo suffers after the deaths of Josiah, Rocky, and Laura. Betonie explains to Tayo the meaning of Josiah's death witnessed by Tayo in a Japanese soldier. He says that "It isn't surprising that you saw him with them. You saw who they were. Thirty thousand years ago they were not strangers. You saw what the evil had done:

you saw the witchery ranging as wide as this world" (*Ceremony* 114-115). Betonie explicitly shows how the trick of witchery that through racist language erased the humanity of the Japanese turning them into inhuman Japs. Later on Betonie shows what future would await Rocky had he survived the war and got out of the reservation pointing to people sleeping in the arroyo: "They are down there. Ones like your brother. They are down there" (*Ceremony* 121). Betonie shows that it was the abusive exploitation and destruction of Native Americans by white society –not Tayo's failure, nor even Rocky's death – that prevented Rocky from attaining the good life within white American society. However, Betonie also warns against ascribing guilt strictly according to skin color that makes all whites responsible for the theft of land. According to Betonie, "nothing is that simple" and "you don't write off all the white people, just like you don't trust all the Indians" (*Ceremony* 118). This is also Betonie's answer to Tayo's question about his mother Laura's affair with a white man, of which Tayo is the painful proof. Betonie refuses to categorize people on the same basis that white racism does, and hence he requires Tayo to abandon Tayo's preconceptions about race and humanity. The initiation into Tayo's ceremony requires the readers to look back in the narrative and see the events and stories in the bigger context that disregards notions of borders and stereotypes and looks for connections, rather than chronology.

The overwhelming feeling of helplessness embedded in Tayo's trauma paired with his anger at the white people's exploitative policies towards the indigenous people and their land is one way to face the historical trauma of Native Americans, but Betonie sees the futility of such actions, since just like war, they are fuelled by racial hatred and result in nothing beside reciprocal injuring. In the poem that closes the first stage of ceremony and retells the creation act of white people by indigenous witchery that feeds on death and destruction, Betonie recreates an alternative version of reality where people are manipulated by witchery to believe in their difference from one another. The belief, rather than the difference is the source of the trauma. Tayo's healing starts from the

awareness of it. Betonie refuses to see the world through the lenses of a dominant ideology that focuses on difference and fragmentation; instead he creates his own alternative vision that focuses on community and empathy. Tayo's trauma becomes a part and a representation of something bigger and his healing begins with the awareness of the bigger context.

The poem originates from the postmodern assumption that stories create the world rather than describe it. The witch that tells the story challenges and warns the listeners to "laugh if you want to/ but as I tell the story/ it will begin to happen" (*Ceremony* 124). The poem claims that "long time ago/ in the beginning/ there were no white people in this world/ there was nothing European" (123). The witches from all over the world, who got together for the contest in witchery, created white men through a story and forced them to cause death and destruction, the source of the witches' power. The poem narrates the origins of white people in the cold and wet caves across the ocean and their gradual separation from the land. Uprooted from their land and driven by a pervasive sense of fear white people, crossed the ocean, wipe out whole tribes, burn whole villages and destroyed the environment to finally mine uranium from the earth and transform it into a weapon of mass destruction (*Ceremony* 125-126). The poem synthesizes a mythological story of creation, the history of European colonization in America, with the reality of global warfare that has begun with WWII when atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and escalated in the Cold War arms race and the Vietnam War carnage. Cultural fear triggered by separation from nature and land compelled white people to steal the Native land and ravish the earth mining uranium used in weapons of mass destruction. Consequently these white people "will lay the final pattern with these rocks/ they will lay it across the world/ and explode everything" (*Ceremony* 127).

Silko requires her readers to abandon their collective sense of origins, religious or scientific, and see themselves as created by Indian witchery, as tools to be manipulated. Betonie presents certain groups of whites as "a small portion" that witchery manipulates (*Ceremony* 120), as carriers of

evil, of the ideology that justifies and seeks conflict, death and destruction. The alternative way of describing reality helps Tayo to resolve his personal pain. Silko, therefore, making her readers identify with Tayo and his pain, forces her readers to accept Betonie's vision of the world as their reality. Silko returns to this part of the story when Tayo reaches the closed uranium mine and realizes that Betonie's story actually is reality. Tayo looks at the stones cut by veins in different colors and almost exactly repeats Betonie's story: "they had taken these beautiful rocks from deep within the earth and they had laid them in a monstrous design, realizing the destruction on a scale only they could have dreamed" (*Ceremony* 229). Tayo needs to see the world through the lenses of Betonie's story to complete his ceremony. He needs to reject the fragmented vision of the world that Euro-American culture imposed on the Native Americans. The last part of *Ceremony* located in the uranium mine is not only where Betonie's story becomes Tayo's reality, but also where the novel becomes readers' reality. Trinity Site, the location of the first testing of the atomic bomb built with the uranium from the Pueblo reservation, defines the reality of Silko's readers. Through Tayo's personal epiphany in this particular location Silko enforces Betonie's vision of the world on her readers. In this perspective Tayo's personal healing retain its individual character, while historical and cultural context of his trauma remains not only his reality, but also the reality of readers.

Silko offers no solution to the historical trauma intertwined in the narrative of *Ceremony*. She abstains from placing the blame according to the clear line of race, but she also does not absolute white people. Yet, she presents a worldview completely different from the white one. Showing how evil is the same across the boundaries of race and nationality, and how it draws power from this artificial fragmentation and division, Silko refuses to clearly divide Native American and white cultures, and instead insists that they tend to merge and evolve under their mutual influence. Silko also shows how concepts of race, ethnicity or nationality are false conditions of empathy and inclusion, and instead reveals humanity to be undivided. This part of Betonie's ceremony, however,

also suggests Tayo's trauma not as merely internalized pain in cultural vacuum, but rather shows how personal trauma takes roots in certain cultural background. Silko however, not only requires her readers to reinterpret Tayo's initial memories through their relation to larger cultural context, but also establishes the perspective in which the ending of *Ceremony* should be viewed. Tayo's personal healing has to converge with the background Silk provides for it. As such these two elements of the novel become inseparable and equally important for the reading of *Ceremony's* ending. Moreover, Silko immerses her readers in their recent history to represent tangible destruction caused by modern warfare and force her readers to accept Tayo's reality as readers' own.

**ii. *Ceremony's* Representation of Cultural Trauma through Personal Sense of Loss**

If the ceremony with Betonie reveals Tayo's trauma to be caused by larger system of oppression, in this section I discuss the three deaths that sustain and enforce Tayo's sense of loss and his personal trauma to address how historical and cultural tones resonate within Tayo's personal trauma. First, the loss of Tayo's maternal uncle Josiah shows the trauma of war, which, justified as a fight for freedom and democracy, often obscures the tragedy of individual death it proliferates. Second, the loss of his cousin Rocky symbolically represents the broken promises of equality and freedom American democracy pledges to American and Native American people. Finally, the loss of his mother Laura references the loss of land and sovereignty of Native American people in the process of colonization. Starting from the broadest perspective Silko subtly intertwines the individual pain of Tayo with the collective pain of all humanity, pain of all Americans deprived of their human rights of freedom, and pain of all Native Americans deprived of their land, setting the deaths of Josiah, Rocky and Laura within the broader context of global influence of Euro-American imperialism and racism, the hypocrisy of the American creed, and the destruction of the land and civilization of the Native Americans. Through evocative style and deeply intimate representations of these traumas Silko forces readers to identify with Tayo, recognize his loss and his pain triggered by WWII.

However, as the novel progresses and reveals larger context of Tayo's loss, the readers due to their earlier identification on personal level, are required to accept the role Euro-American civilization plays in personal, Native American, American and global trauma. This section explores the episodic recollections that constitute the three stories of Tayo's loss to see what broader context Silko gives them and how she intertwines personal and collective in her representations of trauma.

a. *Josiah's Death: Sense of Loss Created on Global Scale by Modern Warfare*

Even white men were darker after death. (*Ceremony* 7)

The first loss Tayo suffers in the novel is the death of his mother's brother Josiah. The Laguna are a matrifocal community, and after Laura's death, Josiah plays an important role in Tayo's upbringing, often functioning as a surrogate father who ameliorates the cold upbringing Tayo receives from his Aunt. Josiah in many ways represents the pull of kinship. Josiah's death is not directly witnessed by Tayo, but imagined, which creates a confusing memory that cannot be easily accounted for without exploration of a bigger context. Tayo sees his uncle's face in one of the Japanese soldiers his team of soldiers is ordered to kill:

When 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 was about to smile at Tayo. So Tayo stood there stiff with nausea, while they fired at the soldiers, and he watched his uncle fall, and he *knew* it was Josiah; and even after Rocky started shaking him by the shoulders and telling him to stop crying, it was *still* Josiah lying there. (*Ceremony* 7)

Tayo cannot ascribe any meaning or explanation to his vision, but he is convinced that what he sees is true. Josiah is not a hallucination since even Rocky's intervention fails to reveal an anonymous Japanese soldier behind the image of Tayo's uncle. Tayo's inability to convey his feelings triggers his trauma. The pain that the others fail to see and fail to understand haunts Tayo in his memory, estranges him from his community, and causes his physical suffering.

Readers also have to accept this incongruity in Josiah's death. They, as well as Tayo, are faced with an event that cannot be accounted for in a logical and reasonable way. Silko frustrates the readers in the same way Tayo's inability to unsee Josiah irritates Rocky who keeps convincing his brother that "this is a *Jap!* This is a *Jap* uniform!" and "We're *supposed* to be here. This is what we are supposed to do" (*Ceremony* 7). But even though Tayo may follow the logics of Rocky's reasoning his body and physical reactions remain outside its influence. When Rocky turns the dead body over and made Tayo look at his face "Tayo started screaming, because it wasn't a Jap, it was Josiah, eyes shrinking into his skull" (*Ceremony* 7). Tayo's response to death is organic. Tayo's grief swells into his belly and pushes to his throat when Rocky tries to justify the deaths of Japanese soldiers by the ideological foundations of the war in the Philippines. His body as well as his subconscious recognizes the falsity and menace hidden behind the imperative to kill the Jap, as inhuman and completely irrational.

Tayo's stubborn refusal to unsee his uncle in the dead body of the Japanese, and his instinctive bodily revulsion at killing, are most prominent trauma signifiers in this passage aimed to evoke readers' empathy and identification. Silko wants her readers to be as disturbed by death as Tayo is. She makes the readers see, feel, and accept what Tayo sees, feels and accepts as the reality of war. She conflates the two deaths, of a loved one and of a war enemy to humanize and to charge the death with meaning, not matter who dies and whatever the circumstances of the death are. Moreover, through Tayo's violent physical reactions she uncovers the actual dead, burnt, and mutilated human tissue that decomposes everywhere in the battlefield, and that is so rarely rendered invisible in Euro-American accounts of war. Tayo is tormented by the idea of killing a human being, by the scope of death around him, and most importantly by the inability to explain his confused suffering to others.



Through personalization and identification with Tayo Silko requires her readers not only to recognize the humanity of a war enemy, but also to discover and reject racism as the ideological foundations of the Pacific War. Racism dehumanizes racial or national others, obliterates the event of their death as insignificant, and justifies military violence by false concepts of race or nationality. Tayo's focus on skin color as well as a nagging feeling of some sort of connection with Japanese soldiers unmasks the killing, even in the context of war, as inhuman and meaningless. Silko's deconstruction of the racism ideology echoes Elaine Scarry's theory that language is a construct aimed to obscure the act of injuring which is the primary and central activity of the war (63). The reality of an injured body – altered, burned, fractured, and mutilated tissue – is often kept from the public view by language. Scarry investigates how war is presented as movements of disembodied units. Shown from the distance, armies become super-bodies obscuring the fact they consist of living individuals, whose lives are as full and complete as ours. Scarry shows how someone's uncle, father, or brother becomes an insignificant particle within the body of an army colossus, whose damage is never seen from close enough to acknowledge the actual, violent deaths and injuries of people (71). In *Ceremony* race war in the Philippines achieves this effect of dehumanization by racially triggered hatred against Japanese soldiers. Tayo sees through the racist ideology and recognizes the humanity of Japanese soldiers. On a bigger scale however conflating the death of Josiah, a Native American, with the death of a Japanese soldier shows how both Native American genocide and Pacific War employed the same racist ideology to justify and encourage killing.

External appearance is a pervasive theme closely linked to Tayo's traumatic memory of Josiah's death. Tayo wonders how similar his and his corporal's and Japanese skin are. Silko shows that the difference between humans established by racism is only skin-deep, and as soon as the skin deteriorates after death the similarity of all humans becomes apparent. Moreover, she reveals the scope of mental confusion racism triggers within the minds of Native Americans. Tayo understands

that he is supposed to see the Japanese as racial others, but the awareness of his own appearance and the memory of Josiah prevent him. In a short passage Silko questions the difference between white, Indian and Japanese based on the arbitrary concept of skin color. The corporal skin is not very different, Japanese skin is just like Tayo's, after the death every skin turns dark and shiny. Later covered by flies, the dead body becomes indistinguishable. Death erases all differences established by skin color, physical appearance, and a uniform, since death reduces all these artificial differences to altered human tissue that looks the same irrespectively of race or nationality.

Silko's representation of Josiah's death therefore places Tayo's personal trauma in a larger context of humanity in a two-fold way. First it shows that the sense of loss caused by a death of human being is universal, and secondly it shows that the ideology that justifies the deaths of human beings is also applied universally. War, racism, and death become inseparable in Silko's account of Tayo's personal trauma, as they perpetuate not only Native America trauma, but the trauma of those affected by imperial wars the Euro-American government has been waging since colonial times. Silko exposes racism as a language device that manipulates the meaning of killing and dying for the purposes of war, creating distance and detachment from the death and injury inflicted on the battlefield. Racism, infusing certain meanings into skin color and uniform, renders death meaningless. Through Tayo, Silko reverses the process. She shows the arbitrariness and the falsity of this dehumanizing ideology and instead uses language to convey physical and mental pain war really consists of. But Silko's deconstruction of racial ideology goes further than acknowledging the cruelties of the Pacific War. Underscoring the physical similarity between Native Americans and Japanese soldiers, with the death of Josiah as most disturbing and personalized example, she creates a connection between the genocide of the Japanese and the Native Americans. Tayo's body and memory contradicts his reason when he witnesses mass murder of disarmed Japanese soldiers with their hands on their heads, as if this image triggered some latent connection in his memory that

replaced a Japanese soldier with the image of Josiah, a Native American. In consequence, Silko contextualizes the death of Tayo's uncle as a part of the mass murder that transcends the limits of time and location. The Japanese are victims of the same ideological warfare that justifies the extermination, exploitation and dispossession of Native Americans that started with the white settlement in American and continues up until now.

b. *Rocky's Death: Sense of Loss Created by False Promises of American Democracy*

Don't cry. Your brother was already dead. (*Ceremony* 40)

If through Josiah's death Silko rediscovers the immediate and bodily horrors of war and reveals racism at the roots of the destruction inflicted upon global community, then Rocky's death represents Tayo's personal loss of a brother and the lie of brotherhood and equality embedded in the American creed. Tayo and Rocky are cousins. Brought up in the same household they could be brothers. However, Tayo's Aunt constantly reminds Tayo of his half-blood, bastard status in the family and juxtaposed him with Rocky as her full-blooded legitimate son. Moreover, Aunt's actions draw a thick dividing line between Tayo and Rocky, so they are not perceived as brothers, but also do not consider themselves brothers. Silko describes a secret deal Tayo's Aunt imposed on both Tayo and Rocky:

When she was alone with the boys, she kept Rocky close to her; while she kneaded the bread, she gave Rocky little pieces of dough to play with; while she darned socks, she gave him scraps of cloth and a needle and thread to play with. She was careful that Rocky did not share these things with Tayo, that they kept the distance between themselves and him. But she would not let Tayo go outside or play in another room alone. She wanted him close enough to feel excluded, to be aware of the distance between them. (*Ceremony* 61-62)

This passage the abusive relationship between Tayo and his Aunt, which nonetheless remains invisible to other members of the family, even to the two boys, who accept it as part of their reality shaping their behavior accordingly to the circumstances. Representing the death of Rocky, Silko translates Aunt's cruelty into the cruelty of Euro-American society that recognizes and privileges their

own members on the basis of full-blooded whiteness, and ostracizes those who fail to fall into that category. Tayo's immediate reality is translated into a bigger reality of American society. Silko shows how European colonizers established a society based on racial exclusion granting or denying inclusion and empathy depending on the blood ratio.

Tayo decides to enlist with Rocky as a promise to experience the brotherhood that was denied to him by Auntie. Silko shows how this possibility directly motivates Tayo to sign his name after Rocky on the recruiter's list: "He felt light on his feet, happy that he would be with Rocky, travelling the world in the Army together, as brothers" (*Ceremony* 66). Interestingly, Rocky's motives to enlist reflect Tayo's motivation on a bigger scale. Rocky believes that the army offers the promise of brotherhood within mainstream American society. The pledge of equality and inclusion within Euro-American society through military career and participation in the war pushes Rocky to prove his worthiness and fight for America. His death therefore represents both Tayo's loss of a brother, but also collective loss inflicted by the hypocrisy of American democracy.

Through Tayo's recollection of Rocky's decision to enlist Silko draws parallels between Tayo's personal experience and collective experience of disenfranchised Americans. For the first time Rocky refers to Tayo as a brother when the army recruiter asks Rocky if he wants to sign up. Rocky nods and replies: "and my brother" (*Ceremony* 60). Even though Tayo feels that he is not supposed to leave Josiah and his cattle, the promise of Rocky's brotherhood, of their equal status in the family, proves irresistible and lures Tayo into the cruel reality of war that annihilates all the concepts of human equality and brotherhood at once. Rocky is attracted by the status the American Army uniform confers on him, but also with future possibilities of an army career outside the reservation. That is actually what the army recruiter promises him: "you enlist now, and you will be eligible for everything" (*Ceremony* 60). Rocky's death therefore comes to stand for both personal trauma caused by the loss of a brother, and collective trauma of broken promises of American democracy.

Tayo signs up with Rocky in the hope of being fully included in the family as Rocky's brother, but the result is actually the opposite. The guilt caused by Rocky's death puts Tayo in isolation that equals almost death. Similarly, Rocky's hopes of inclusion in the mainstream white American society as an equal, a patriot, the one who fought for the country are disappointed in the most definite and cruel way. Silko shows how the empty promises of inclusion made to Native American soldiers made during WW I or WW II or even Vietnam War cause collective pain equal to the death of a brother. Silko connects Tayo's personal trauma with the trauma of racial exclusion from the privileges of American democracy.

To convey the pain of this disappointment on personal level, Silko shows Rocky's death stripped of its ideological justifications and neutralizations. Showing Tayo's horror and his desire to be buried in the muddy ditch together with Rocky, Silko repeatedly inflicts the unspeakable pain of Tayo's loss on her readers. They can feel the mud in Tayo's mouth and eyes, even though he cannot feel anything except his overwhelming pain (*Ceremony* 40). Silko mutes the sounds of jabbed bones and skull with Tayo's horrified howl, and forces her readers to hear and experience the injuring of Rocky's body in everyday sounds like "children smashing gourds along the irrigation lane or a truck tire running over a piece of dry wood" (*Ceremony* 40). The description is unsettling with the amount of senses it engages, as it mediates the trauma through image, sound, and taste. Silko shows how, traumatized by the death of his brother, Tayo wants to crawl under the mounds of mud to bury himself and his unbearable pain.

Moreover, Tayo's personal pain is immediately intertwined with a larger context of Rocky's hopes and ambitions buried together with his mutilated body in the Philippine mud. Rocky's corpse becomes the most drastic representation of US government broken promises. American government manipulates people into the injuring activity of war with ideas of freedom and democracy, only later to dispose of war veterans granting them neither freedom nor democracy. Tayo's, Harley's, or Emo's

situation proves no better than the situation of Rocky, as their participation in WWII brought them nothing but the trauma of mass murder, of their own exploitation by American government. Through Tayo's memory, Silko reveals how the policies of American government, not the actions of Japanese soldiers, are responsible for Rocky's death. Even though the tall Japanese soldier kills Rocky jabbing the bloody and muddy blanket with the butt of his rifle, Tayo is unable to hate him, since he feels that he is not the reason for Rocky's death. The reason is somewhere deeper, in the ongoing policies that exploit and discriminate against non-white Americans and spread violence in the names of American equality and democracy.

But the motif of broken or false promises also resonates within Native American trauma. Through the death of Rocky Silko places Tayo's personal trauma in the contemporary aspect of Native American trauma, which constantly excludes American Indians from their legitimate claims to equality with white society as a sovereign nation on American soil. Silko hints at the painful history in which Native Americans were exploited and deceived by American government which failed to keep the treaties it made with Native Americans. The breach of treaties and promises is therefore at the roots of their cultural trauma and collective pain. Readers experience this excruciating pain and guilt through Tayo's loss of Rocky and his unrealized dream of brotherhood. The feeling of brotherhood or empathy that the representation of Rocky's death evokes in this context is necessary to acknowledge the sovereignty of Native Americans, their right to exist and live on the American soil, their right to the land, and their independence in cultivating it.

c. *Laura's Death: Sense of Loss Created by Native American Forced Removal from Their Land.*

Once they had lived somewhere else, the place full of food. (*Ceremony* 101)

Through Rocky and Josiah's deaths, Silko weaves Tayo's trauma into the larger fabric of Native American loss. This loss comes to a climax with the loss of Tayo's mother Laura, who Silko

repeatedly connects her to the land itself. Silko scatters memories representing the loss of Tayo's mother throughout the first part of *Ceremony's* narrative. First, the readers find out about Tayo's forced separation with his mother at the age of four, when she leaves him with Josiah (*Ceremony* 60); then about Laura's windy and silent funeral that leaves Tayo in tears. Finally, in a longer passage preceding Tayo's ceremony with Betonie, Silko presents a harrowing recollection of Tayo's childhood in Gallup, which I would like to focus in this part to argue that personal trauma triggered by separation from his mother is set in the context of Native American historical separation from their land.

To show how the loss of land is at the foundations of Tayo's personal sense of abandonment, and larger Native American loss, Silko locates representations of these two traumas in the town of Gallup. As an interracial and non-tribal space, Gallup represents not only a space disconnected from tradition and at the borders of Native American life, but also as the space where the exploitation of Native Americans by the white community continues unceasingly since first white settlement. Before Silko immerses the readers in the distressing memory of Tayo's childhood in Gallup, she presents the town itself to show how Native Americans have been used and treated by the town's Euro-American residents and authorities. She shows the temporary cardboard and tin shelters that are built in the arroyo in the north part of the town, which Silko names "Little Africa, where Blacks, Mexicans, and Indians lived" (*Ceremony* 100) that are repetitively destroyed and cleaned up by the police, welfare and storekeepers who prepare it to Gallup Ceremonial time, when tourists come to see Indian rituals and ceremonies and leave their money in shops, bars, and hotels run by whites. It is only at this time that Indians are welcome in the town, as they become the attraction and source of income for the white residents of Gallup. Throughout the year, however, Indians are disposed of in the dry arroyo where they forget their pain and lose themselves in alcohol and sexual abuse. Immersing the reader in such a reality from a perspective of a very young child is probably most emotionally unsettling and

thus crucial for Silko's representation of Tayo's trauma in relation to larger cultural trauma. Tayo's memory elicits deeply emotional response from the readers, who cannot help but acknowledge Tayo's early experience of loss, abandonment and pain, and locate it within the collective pain of Native Americans stemming from their loss of land.

The connection between the personal and Native American trauma proves to be most disturbing, as Silko in this part of the novel recalls unsettling images of little Tayo's hunger and desolation to show how European colonization in America has affected the whole pan-tribal community of Native Americans. Tayo's helplessness in face of hunger and lack of nourishment from his mother evokes strong emotional engagement from the readers, which the narrative transfers to the collective experience of famine and abandonment that followed the uprooting of Native Americans from their mother earth.

Tayo's memory of his childhood in Gallup presents the world experienced through his mouth, as he learns which leftovers from the floor he can eat and which make him vomit. The town of Gallup is represented as the barren place, where the only food available for a child consists of dropped potato chips, cigarette butts, coins, and old chewing gums lying on a bar's floor (*Ceremony* 101). Little Tayo experiences his reality as inedible, metallic, or nauseating, and, even as a less than four years old child, longs to the happy place full of food he remembers from his past. The fact that Tayo cannot be older than four at that time makes his memory and dreams of the place rich in food mind-boggling, since it seems impossible for such a small child to recall or even create memories so early in life. Moreover, Silko never directly explains why Laura and Tayo had left that place or what place it in fact was. Here Silko shows how larger collective memory of Native Americans, who remember their land from before Columbus as a place of plenty, is embedded within Tayo's memory and surfaces in this recollection. Silko confuses factual memory of a child with the collective memory of Native Americans, which remembers their land as fertile and generous. Tayo's reality in Gallup represents



the land appropriated by whites, who turned it into the barren place of hunger and abuse. European colonization destroyed the special relationship between Native Americans and their land, imposing different notions of property and usage. Native Americans were forcibly removed and their land was divided and exploited. In Tayo's memory Native American physical and cultural uprooting translates into consuming bodily hunger.

Moreover, Tayo's memory also conflates physical nourishment with emotional one and forces readers to see the analogy between the two. The last time Tayo sees his mother he does not feel hunger even though he cannot remember if he had eaten before his mother left him at Auntie's house with Josiah. Yet, he vividly recollects the way she cuddled and kept him close to her body (*Ceremony* 60). The possibility to be close to his mother body, to feel her warmth, to be embraced is more fulfilling than any food that someone else can offer Tayo. Here Silko shows how Native American trauma of dispossession leads not only to physical hunger, but also to psychological longing and a sense of loss. The loss of land, therefore, is inseparably intertwined in Tayo's memory, as well as in his physical and psychological suffering. Silko locates Tayo's childhood trauma triggered by the separation with his mother within larger Native American context of separation from the land.

Tayo's final memory from Gallup recollects the destruction of the arroyo community, when the police arrest the people, tear down their shelters, and burn everything to the ground until the land is absolutely sterile with no trace of life on it (*Ceremony* 103). The destruction of the arroyo community, however, shown through the eyes of little Tayo, represents the destruction of Tayo's whole world, the only place he belongs to. He witnesses Indians living in Gallup arroyo removed from their land like pest, caught, arrested, and forcefully detained while their shelters are repeatedly destroyed. In Gallup Native American trauma is reenacted repeatedly "twice, or maybe three times a year," when "the police and the welfare people made a sweep along the river" under the pretense of "sanitation and safety" (*Ceremony* 100). The way in which Gallup's Indians occupy the strip of land in

the arroyo does not fall into Western ideas of land usage; therefore arroyo inhabitants are repetitively removed, for sanitation and safety to take their place. In this passage Silko helps her readers understand what impact colonization has had on Native Americans when their world has been burned to the ground in the name of civilization fixated on rigid concepts of property, utility and safety.

Thus, through the loss of Josiah, Rocky, and Laura we find how Tayo's individual trauma is inseparably connected not only to historical trauma of Native Americans, but also to the abusive reality of American democracy and global warfare. Silko's narrative in *Ceremony* represents Tayo's trauma consistently intertwining personal, communal, national and global contexts to explicate the relationship between Tayo's personal trauma and those globally traumatized by war, nationally traumatized by exclusion from American democracy, communally traumatized by Native American genocide, and personally distressed by the loss of a loved one. Throughout the novel Silko shows how personal trauma is an inseparable part of something bigger happening on almost all levels of humanity, circulating between Tayo's personal pain and Native American pain linking it closely to global and national reality. But the physical pain that Tayo experiences establishes the common denominator that connects trauma on all levels. Silko, exploring multiple connections of Tayo's loss to his historical and social context, shows that regardless of the level of trauma discussed, the pain of an individual is always the same, showing that direct experience of warfare can have similar implications as historical collective memory of genocide, deception and exploitation. It is always an individual that gets hurt, and as such Tayo's trauma presents only a small part of the global community of traumatized. But global trauma consists of nothing more than multiplied, politically and culturally triggered personal traumas, and as such Tayo's personal trauma represents the full scope of global trauma, including Native American one.

**iii. Tayo' Personal Healing Despite the Global Madness of Witchery**

Killing across great distances without knowing who or how many died. It was all too alien to understand. (*Ceremony* 33)

In the previous two sections I showed first how Betonie's ceremony helps Tayo and readers understand Tayo's personal trauma through historical and cultural contextualization, and then how the losses of Josiah Rocky, and Laura are inseparably related to global, American, and specifically Native American trauma. In this section I turn to the end of the novel and argue that the ending of *Ceremony* gains complete meaning if Tayo's personal closure is set within the bigger context of Tayo's reality, which in turn is accepted by the readers as their own reality. In the novel's conclusion Silko denies the conventions of Bildungsroman showing not the protagonist's reconciliation with reality, but rather Tayo's personal healing despite an unresolved global trauma.

Separating Tayo's personal healing from Native American healing proves problematic for readers and critics, since Tayo's personal trauma connects so intimately with broader Native American and global traumas. This confusion, however, stems from the inability to see Tayo's development not as internal, but external. The novel requires the readers to look for knowledge and understanding not in Tayo's internal life, which is confusing and pain-ridden, but outside him to understand where this entanglement comes from. In consequence Tayo's personal healing cannot be read without its broader background that provides insight to Tayo's closure. Betonie's ceremony indicates the direction which the healing process should follow. Healing begins with voicing personal pain and locating it within broader historical context. By locating the completion of Tayo's ceremony at the site of Native American trauma, Silko shows how personal trauma always refers to bigger cultural trauma. Moreover, Tayo's healing depends on his ability to see not only Native American, but global context of his trauma. The location of the uranium mine and the historical background gain significance providing the link between personal and global. Moreover, since the two passages

set Tayo's existence firmly within contemporary reality they also provide a strong link between the novel and reality. Consequently, *Ceremony's* conclusion not only represents Tayo's epiphany, but also requires a similar one from the readers.

In the two passages describing the uranium mine and the atomic bomb explosion Silko emphasizes their factuality. In the brief story of the mine Silko shows how government trucks brought machines that dug huge hole in the ground to mine uranium necessary for the production of atomic bomb (*Ceremony* 226). In the story Silko shows how this strip of already barren land was exploited even further, and abandoned after government people "got enough of what they needed" (*Ceremony* 226). All that was left behind was a deep flooded tear in the earth surrounded by barbed-wire fence. Silko makes Tayo personally taste this part of Laguna history in the sip of water he takes exhausted by the heat. The water tastes bitter and Tayo wonders if "maybe the uranium made the water taste this way" (*Ceremony* 227). The sip of contaminated water translates personal experience into political reality of US policies that ravish the environment of the Laguna community.

Tayo's recollection of the atomic bomb explosion provides specific places of Trinity Site at White Sands; only three hundred miles away from the uranium mine (*Ceremony* 228). Later Tayo remembers his Grandma remembering a newspaper account describing the bomb as the "strongest thing on earth; biggest explosion that ever happened," and she wonders to her grandson: "Why did they make a thing like that?" (*Ceremony* 228). It is through this memory that Tayo achieves his understanding of interconnectedness of everything in this world. The first atomic bomb was exploded on Native land, only later to explode on the Japanese land leaving "dismembered corpses and the atomic heat-flash outlines, where human bodies have evaporated" (*Ceremony* 34). The age of global war and weapons able to kill on incredible distances without even seeing the injured and dead bodies is what makes connection between people in distant places or different nationalities. Personal trauma of Tayo and historical trauma of Native Americans are yet a part of something

bigger caused by weapons of mass destruction able to commit genocide with one strike, and ideologies that are able to justify and neutralize the genocide. The mine is the wound in the earth representing Native American trauma, which through connection to the bomb acquires global dimension. Tayo sees how the uranium mine links to the explosion at Trinity Site, which links to the carnage of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that concluded the mass murder of the Pacific War, the source of Tayo's trauma.

Tayo's recollection of these two facts in Laguna history leads to his epiphany that marks the completion of his ceremony. In this passage Tayo arrives "at the point of convergence where the fate of all living things, and even earth, had been laid" (*Ceremony* 228). He envisions himself and his trauma as spreading across the boundaries of ethnicity and nationality and sees how the experience of modern military violence created the common traumatic experience that unites all humanity:

From the jungles of his dreaming he recognized why the Japanese voices had merged with Laguna voices, with Josiah's voice and Rocky's voice; the lines of cultures and worlds were drawn in flat dark lines on fine light sand, converging in the middle of witchery's final ceremonial sand painting. From that time on, humans were one clan again, united by the fate the destroyers planned for all of them, for all living things; united by the circle of death that devoured people in cities twelve thousand miles away, victims who had never known these mesas, who had never seen the delicate colors of the rocks which boiled up their slaughter. (*Ceremony* 228)

The rocks that Tayo sees are the "rocks with veins of green and yellow and black" that the witchery used to define the future for humanity (*Ceremony* 127). Silko returns to the motif of rocks to ground Betonie's vision of the world in Tayo's reality. Tayo heals when he is able to see and hear "the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions through all distance and time" (*Ceremony* 229). That fragment blurs the boundary not only between ethnicities and nations, but also between individuals and their surroundings, recreating the reality through focus on relations rather than individuals. Such perspective is necessary to see how racism falsifies the image of global community and provides harmful models of identification and interaction. It asserts, though, that the

stories of uranium mine and bomb testing infuse meaning into Tayo's personal closure. But uranium also provides the physical and historical link to readers' reality. The passages directly point to a physical site that defined the character of modern warfare, which, according to Silko, is the reality. *Ceremony*, like Tayo's trauma, becomes a part of something larger. As a postmodern novel, it breaks its own frame and announces itself only a part of bigger reality. Readers cannot experience Tayo's healing as equivalent to the healing of all Native Americans, but rather originating from recognition of the global scale of witchery and its overwhelming destructive potential. Furthermore, Silko requires the readers to accept this reality also for themselves and see the world as Tayo does.

Tayo's global reconnection is directly followed by Tayo's personal confrontation with evil. The scene of Harley's murder is presented as witchery's ritual that attempts to prevent Tayo from completing his ceremony and implicate him in the perpetuation of violence and death (*Ceremony* 230-237). Tayo's former friends, veterans of WWII, Emo, Leroy, and Pinkie arrive at the abandoned mine to murder one of them Harley as a punishment for letting Tayo escape. Tayo has to resist the urge to crush Emo's skull with a screwdriver, as he believes that this act would be exactly what the witchery needs to complete its ceremony (*Ceremony* 233). Instead Tayo is forced to witness Harley's body torn and entangled in the barbed-wire fence that surrounds the mine. Barbed wire provides a link between personal and cultural. Tayo sees how the sharp metal injures Harley's body, the same way barbed-wire fence cuts a wound in Laguna land. Barbed-wire comes to stand for the same tool that the witchery uses over and over again to hurt individual bodies, destroy whole communities, and isolate them from one another.

Silko also shows how Tayo's possible surrender to the witchery would further isolate him from the community, and enforce the stereotype of a weak crazy Indian who cannot bear the reality of war. According to Silko, through murdering Emo, Tayo would perpetuate the idea of white superiority over Native American, and the sense of pervasive guilt and anger that Native Americans

feel towards white people and themselves. Silko shows how Native American community would blame themselves for their inability to protect their own people. Awareness of the consequences reaching far outside Tayo's individual body stops him from succumbing to witchery's provocation. Tayo is able to think outside the present moment and comprehend how saving Harley would prove futile in the long run. But it is not cold calculation, for Tayo's suffering caused by Harley's death is very tangible. Tayo's anger and pain is so strong that for a moment he does not even want to live and see this. Actually, to thrust the screwdriver in Emo's skull seems to be easier than stay hidden behind the rocks (*Ceremony* 234). Only the thought of the consequences his act would bring on other people, makes Tayo resist the witchery.

While Silko's representation of Tayo's trauma in the opening of the novel progresses from personal to global, the ending reverses the order and begins from the global perspective to gradually narrow to Tayo's personal healing. The two passages of uranium mine and atomic bomb clearly interrupt the linearity *Ceremony's* plot achieves after Betonie's ceremony to disturb the readers' narrow focus on Tayo's internal healing. The location of Tayo's confrontation with the witchery becomes of crucial significant as it enables Tayo to see his unity with the world. The narrative acts here as a map exploring Tayo's relation to the land and its history vital to understanding his trauma. Silko shows how healing is not tantamount to a universal solution to global problems. To the contrary, she shows how healing is tantamount to the awareness of global problems and its omnipresent source. In this context both Tayo's personal and Native American collective trauma become parts of yet even bigger world order, the witchery that realizes the same scenario every time on every level of humanity. Witchery appropriates isolates, exploits and abandons individuals, communities, and environment, justifying its actions with false differences established by the concepts of race or nationality. In the atomic era of weapons capable of inflicting massive death

across the globe imperial violence creates global community united by the collective experience of trauma.

### **Conclusion**

My discussion of the narrative shows how Betonie's ceremony is actually the introduction to the narrative, as it allows readers to make sense of the plot. Only in the central part, which instructs the readers how Tayo's personal trauma should be understood, the meaning of his seemingly random memories is revealed. Reading the narrative creates a new vision of the world devoid of dividing lines between races, nations, past and present, background and foreground. In Silko's representation of Tayo's trauma everything connects, interacts, and carries meaning to the overall representation of Native American, as well, as global trauma. But there is an important reason why Silko only reveals the purpose of her narrative after she represents excruciatingly painful details Tayo's personal trauma. In the first section of the narrative Tayo's pain and personal sense of loss force the readers into unconditional and emphatic identification with Tayo. Engrossing her readers by poignant imagery of physical pain and death, Silko conditions her readers to accept the implications of white culture and white people, albeit not all of them, in Tayo's personal trauma. Tayo's pain makes them vulnerable to the message Betonie has for Tayo and for the readers. Only after ceremony, Tayo and the readers read back Tayo's traumatic memories and see how personal pain belongs within collective pain of Native Americans, which in turn is a part of global pain caused by weapons of mass destruction.

But Betonie's ceremony also provides insight in the ending of the novel as it shows how Tayo's healing is no the happy ending *Ceremony's* readers would like to receive. Even though the novel eventually ends with Tayo's personal recovery, Silko insists on providing broader context intertwining the destruction of environment, the true meaning of the atomic bomb, and Harley's murder with Tayo's comfortable presence within his family and community. The awareness of the



larger reality to which Tayo is connected is as significant for the readers as it is for Tayo himself, since this awareness is what enables Tayo to heal and what enables the readers to make sense of Silko's representation of trauma. The ending therefore confirms Betonie's statement that "nothing is that simple" (*Ceremony* 118), and even though Tayo's personal trauma is part of something bigger, his personal healing cannot be part of bigger healing, but rather the result of his connection to bigger traumatized community.

In this chapter I have departed from the usual trend of exploring how Native and Euro American elements merge within the narrative of *Ceremony*, because I believe this merger is not really what Silko focuses on. For her, even though her writing is rooted in Native American storytelling and takes advantage of a Western genre, the world denies such oversimplifying divisions that obscure the true connection between humanity. An interpretation of *Ceremony*, therefore, which originates from this typically Euro-American dual division between Native and Western, misses the point of the novel and upholds the divisions that Silko's novel attempts to do away with. Consequently, the novel requires its readers to abandon any preconceptions they might have about Native American or even Euro-American literature; to give in to the text, as it leads and instructs the readers in their reading process. In her novel Silko does not only challenge linear concepts of time and history, she also challenges the linear concepts of understanding a story, placing the interpretative key in its center and requiring the reader to apply it to the opening and closing sections.

*Ceremony* does not imitate traditional models of the novel, and the readers should also resist the temptation to read it as such. Even though the novel is a type of character-driven fiction, it is not a classic Bildungsroman, representing the protagonist's introspection. The focus on an individual is what Silko sees as a pitfall of Euro-American psychology, and as such with Euro-American psyche and cognition. During the ceremony with Betonie Tayo remembers how white doctors tried to cure his

trauma yelling at him, “that he had to think only of himself, and not about the others, that he would never get well as long as he used words like ‘we’ and ‘us.’ But he had known the answer all along [...]: medicine didn’t work that way, because the world didn’t work that way” (*Ceremony* 116). Silko’s narrative does not work this way either. The narrative of *Ceremony* does not focus on Tayo as the protagonist and presents him uprooted from the reality he is deeply set into, but rather shows him within larger concept of humanity, American society, or Native American community annihilating the dichotomies established by Euro-American culture on many levels. Through its representation of trauma *Ceremony* does away with the division into white and non-white, American and Japanese, and pure-blood or half-blood. The narrative disregards not only the division between the background and the protagonist, but also the conventional concepts of the beginning and end, establishing a constant circulation of meaning between the physical beginning, center, and ending of the novel, between Tayo’s internal feelings and external surrounding, and between the novel’s world and readers’ reality.

Yet, there are three factors that make the novel actually look like a Bildungsroman: the complexity of Tayo’s character, the evocative language Silko conveys his pain; and the thrill of his healing through reconnection to nature and his Native American roots. Because of these factors the conventional Euro-American reading habits are difficult to resist. Therefore, Tayo’s experience as the protagonist is easily universalized. No other traumatized character within *Ceremony’s* narratives shows on personal level how trauma does connect on international level, and how healing comes from understanding this connection. And even though Silko’s attempt was not to convey universal male experience that made the novel so appealing to mainstream audience, the singularity of Tayo’s character and the immediacy of his pain bind readers so tightly to *Ceremony’s* protagonist that they easily skip the bigger context as not too important. In her second novel *Almanac of the Dead*, Silko tries to avoid the confusion between her narrative and conventional Bildungsroman weaving her plot

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out of numerous characters to recreate the interconnectedness of the world that Tayo discovers through his *Ceremony*.

### III. Chapter II: Mediation of Trauma in *Almanac of the Dead*

When I started out in 1981 I had no idea it would be a statement against capitalism.

– Leslie Marmon Silko in “An Interview with Leslie Marmon Silko” by Thomas Irmer

In the previous chapter I look at how Silko’s first novel *Ceremony* subverts the conventional genre of Bildungsroman to mediate Native American trauma. In this chapter I similarly focus on the genre to explore why Silko’s second novel *Almanac of the Dead* received less critical acclaim and has often been undervalued, even though I believe it constitutes continuation and extension of *Ceremony*’s message.

*Almanac of the Dead* has never achieved *Ceremony*’s status within Euro-American audience. Yet, it managed to gain considerable international attention, at least from the Germans, who got their translation in 1994. In the conversation with a German journalist Thomas Irmer recorded on the occasion of the publication, Silko retells the process of writing *Almanac* that coincided with her physical act of political activism. In 1986, according to Silko, “a terrible racist man” was elected the governor of Arizona. Unable to contain her anger, Silko left her office in Tucson (Arizona) and sprayed graffiti snake on a side of a building (Irmer). That political rage fuelled both Silko’s graffiti and the narrative of *Almanac* which, according to Silko, started as a simple commercial story about cocaine trafficking in Tucson, and transformed into a defiant statement against capitalism (Irmer). Moreover, writing *Almanac* paralleled by the Silko’s graffiti of a giant snake, which suggests that both the novel and graffiti originated from the same anger and political engagement. In the interview Silko recalls how spraying the graffiti snake paralleled her writing and transformed her novel into a statement against capitalism:

I kept painting and painting and I decided if I could make it work and look right I could finish the novel. I worked for about six months and the snake came and a message came and it was in Spanish: The people are cold, the people are hungry, the rich have stolen the land, the rich have stolen freedom. The people cry out for justice, otherwise revolution. I put it on the wall in Spanish because at that time in

Arizona they outlawed Spanish, they made English the legal language ... So there is a giant snake and he has skulls in his stomach and that's his message ... When I finished that drawing I was told at home that the snake was a messenger - it is a messenger to the Pueblo people, you see - and that he came to help me finish the novel. And the other two thirds of the novel went just like that - because of the snake. That's how Mexico came in, the revolution, the uprising in Chiapas, that's how I knew. (Irmer)

In the discussion that follows between the novelist and the interviewer, both Irmer and Silko are unable to separate themes of the novel from the global reality the novel concerns. Silko not only rejects the conceptual border that divides literature from politics, but also denies the frameworks of ethnicity or nationality imposed on the message of the text. In the interview she states that “when I write I am writing to the world, not to the United States alone” (Irmer). Here she emphasizes that the novel, as a work of fiction and political activism, addresses not solely Native Americans, or US society, but global community, since *Almanac of the Dead* grows from the common experience that Native Americans share with the world. The common experience of trauma caused by capitalism driven exploitation and violence constitutes the roots of the novel’s critique of capitalism. In the same way as the graffiti snake becomes part of American reality, expressing certain political message to the authorities, *Almanac of the Dead* is a work of political activism inseparably rooted in the global reality it describes.

Silko directly defines her novel in terms of radical and politically engaged literature. She asserts that the novel is a statement against capitalism, which she sees as both an economic system, and an ideology that is at the roots of the collective Euro-American identity. *Almanac of the Dead* lashes out at the capitalist practices in the disturbing images of bloody violence and ruthless exploitation. Silko employs numerous characters, under the common name “destroyers,” who embody extreme ways in which capitalism operate. Moreover, exposing violent and sexual objectification that underwrites human relationships in a capitalist society, Silko renders those who operate on the premises of capitalism, objectifying human beings and nature, responsible for

personal and cultural traumas. Silko delves in the themes of capitalist exploitation showing the connection between criminals and state authorities, who themselves are presented as corrupted to the point of repulsiveness, deliberately fusing personal perversion with political abuse, lust for power with urgent desires to spread death and suffering.

In *Almanac of the Dead*, however, Silko goes much further than in *Ceremony* regarding her criticism of Euro-American economic system. She wages lashing critique on the white culture and civilization in general, with capitalism as its inseparable element. According to Silko, European art, like capitalism, is based on death and violence. Moreover, Christian religion, according to Silko, comes to represent one more example of European fascination with blood, torture, and violent death as a spectacle. Silko criticizes Euro-American civilization in a bold, challenging and uncompromising way prophesying its inevitable fall under the weight of the suffering and exploitation it spreads. Silko believes that a culture built on death and exploitation of people and environment is doomed to die once there is nobody and nothing left to abuse. *Almanac of the Dead* shows that Euro-American civilization is nearing that very point.

The criticism of capitalism within *Almanac of the Dead* is an important element of Silko's representation of Native American trauma. According to a theorist Jenny Edkins, voicing collective trauma has as one of its objectives to question the dominant memorialization of a war or genocide, which tend to deny and erase the act of death and destruction, thus wiping out whole communities from cultural collective existence (qtd. in Meek 29). Silko's angry censure of mainstream American society reflects Edkins' understanding of trauma and its mediation, as Silko is criticizing the economic, cultural, and social system that physically wiped out Native American communities, and then erased the genocide from American collective memory by means of various cultural texts. Therefore this chapter discusses Silko's representation of trauma in *Almanac of the Dead* as a

political assault on capitalism and Euro-American culture as the major source of personal, Native American, and global traumas.

Scholars have often emphasized the transparency of Silko's intention to expose the violence and abuse by oppressive capitalism, as well as pain and suffering of the oppressed. Deborah M. Horovitz in *Literary Trauma: Sadism, Memory, and Sexual Violence in American Women's Writing* devoted a chapter to Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* exploring the imagery of violence and sexual abuse as fundamental to politically charged mediation of trauma. David L. Moore "Silko's Blood Sacrifice: The Circulating Witness in *Almanac of the Dead*" points out the importance of witnessing for the process of cultural trauma. Moore's and Horovitz's analyses, however, progress through an overview of themes in the novel read as Silko's commentary on Euro-American vices. Even though Horovitz provides an interesting discussion of how Silko anthropomorphizes capitalism as witchery, her event-driven reading of *Almanac* obscures the point of *Almanac's* narrative, which, like *Ceremony*, belongs to character driven fiction. In this chapter I will argue that Silko's political mediation of Native American trauma in *Almanac of the Dead* reproduces and multiplies the kind of personalized trauma found in *Ceremony* to set it firmly and definitively in global context, while still mediating it on deeply personal level. Mediation of personal trauma implicates readers in the act of personal witnessing, but also forces them to recognize the broader context within which the trauma occurs. Silko's mediation of trauma follows the direction from personal to political, and as such I believe the reading of the novel should also start from personal witnessing and arrive at the political awareness.

By focusing on the mediation of trauma we can better understand the novel's lack of plot and action. Silko's novel is not event-driven, but rather character-driven. Unlike most character-driven novels, however, which take the form of a Bildungsroman, *Almanac* is best characterized as what I will call a "novel of mediation," which can be defined as a new form of character-driven fiction that elicits readers' active participation by challenging their readerly expectations and enforcing

identification with the characters and their trauma. Unlike Bildungsroman, *Almanac* employs many characters and provides closure for very few. Yet, the lack of focus and the lack of closure are not problems but solutions in a novel of mediation, as the genre develops political awareness through personal identification uprooting readers from their typical approach to a genre of novel. The following analysis therefore will show, through focus on the characters, how Silko moves from personal to political in her representation of Native American trauma.

Although almost all *Almanac's* characters carry some sort of traumatic experience with them I will focus mainly on three to show how their personal trauma is represented in the political context. I begin this chapter by establishing a direct connection between the personal pain and a bigger system of capitalism, and then focus on how capitalism-based values trigger physical violence and destruction of an individual. In the first two sections of this chapter I examine personal traumas of Seese, Sterling, and Menardo as examples of the Native American trauma in global context. The first section discusses Silko's opening representations of Sterling's and Seese's personal traumas as the departure point for the representation of cultural trauma. The second section addresses Menardo's trauma and Tacho's silent witnessing of violence. The third section analyzes the novel's ending as politicized and globalized response to personal and Native American trauma. This chapter, reflecting the overall structure of *Almanac of the Dead*, reads the novel from personal to political, and shows how the characters are crucial not only to Silko's narrative, but also to Silko's representation of trauma, setting individual representation in political context.

### **Background on the Novel**

*Almanac of the Dead* is not a narrative of action. The main plotline consists of several groups in America and Mexico getting ready for revolution, which eventually does not even happen in the novel, and remains a prophecy. The novel begins in the kitchen of Zeta and Lecha, mestiza twin sisters. Scattered weapons and a strange assembly of characters appear to anticipate action



(*Almanac* 19-20). Yet, throughout the novel Silko keeps introducing more characters all about to begin something. The novel culminates in The International Holistic Healers Convention that brings together all those who plan to stand up for the people exploited and oppressed by capitalism: the indigenous people of American such as Lecha, Zeta, or Calabazas; the Army of Homeless led by a Vietnam veteran; the Army of Justice led by Clinton, a Black Indian; a revolutionary group in Chiapas led by Maya twins Tacho and El Feo together with a woman leader La Escapia; Barefoot Hopi; the eco-terrorists. Attendants of the Convention are united against exploitative capitalism, which Silko also personifies in her novel through a set of characters under the common name of “destroyers.” “Destroyers” are the tools manipulated by the witchery. Trigg, the owner of Bio-Materials, has built his wealth and influence buying blood and plasma from the homeless, but also trading body organs he obtained abducting and murdering hitchhikers or homeless people. Beaufrey specializes in delivering films of tortured and dismembered humans to his connoisseur clientele, while his lover David receives critical and financial success after he turns the scene of his friend’s suicide into a photographic work of art. Max Blue, an ex-mafia hit man, simply made murder his professional career. His wife, heedless of the damage to the environment she is about to wreck, has plans to exploit deep-water resources in order to build Venice residential area in Tucson, in the middle of Arizona desert. As the characters keep appearing, the readers are forced to trace complex and entangled connections between them in the hope of final confrontation, which Silko leaves in the novel undescribed. Silko leaves her readers with the feeling of anticipation, as if she wanted them to see the continuation of the narrative in readers’ reality. Most of Silko’s characters are not even aware of what is about to happen, and thus from the perspective of an event-driven plot irrelevant. Yet, in the opening of the novel Silko introduces such apparently irrelevant characters of Seese and Sterling, and focuses almost exclusively on their stories for the first four books of the novel.

The two deeply personal traumas of Sterling and Seese open the narrative of *Almanac of the Dead* constituting Silko's departure point for the larger critique of Euro-American culture. Silko introduces the characters of Sterling and Seese in the very beginning of the novel, in the kitchen of a ranch in the outskirts of Arizona, where the two mestiza sisters Zeta and Lecha engage in their daily activities, one is dyeing her clothes black in a boiling pot, the other is getting ready to have her daily dose of Demerol injected by Seese. Ferro, Lecha's son, and Paulie, his silent lover, are busy cleaning guns scattered across the table, and Sterling is studying dishwasher instructions. Sterling and Seese never become actively involved in the revolution. Yet, Silko hints at their importance informing that "Sterling is in training for special assignment" (*Almanac* 20), and "Seese already knows everything anyway" (*Almanac* 21). Their stories however, show in retrospect the events that led Seese and Sterling to the ranch, and uncover Seese's and Sterling's original traumatic experience. For Sterling it is the banishment from the tribe for a mistake that he believes was not his fault. For Seese the trauma starts with the kidnapping of her baby son Monte. She ends up on the ranch after tracking down Lecha, a psychic she saw on TV, hoping that Lecha can find Monte. Since the silent atmosphere on the ranch, which Silko describes as "a lonely place" (*Almanac* 23), makes these two characters alienated and craving human contact they get to each other and establish a friendship. Silko mediates their traumas next to each other to underline not only the uniqueness, but also similarity of their experience, and the importance of witnessing in the process of mediation.

Sterling's and Seese's personal stories follow the same direction as the overall narrative of *Almanac*, and extend from personal pain to the political and cultural background that roots Seese's and Sterling's traumas in Euro-American context. Representations of Sterling's and Seese's traumas are therefore the revolutionary manifesto that identifies the oppressor and the crimes. Personal character of these representations, however, engages the reader in witnessing personal pain. Moreover, bringing together two apparently different characters, a retired Laguna Indian, and a

young white addict and ex-stripper, Silko shows not only, in Seese's words, "how alike they were" (23), but also how capitalism inflicts trauma regardless of skin color, cultural background, gender, or age. Through these two personal traumas Silko prepares her readers for the explicit criticism of capitalism in the final part of her novel.

In the "Mestizo" chapter at the beginning of Part II Silko introduces one of "the destroyers," Menardo, an influential businessman of mixed, Spanish and Native American origins. Silko moves her narrative to the south of Mexico, Tuxtla in Chiapas, and employs a mestizo character to signal Native American kinship with the bigger part of the population of Latin American. Menardo, who is a Mexican, but whose ancestry is white and Indian, bears certain affinity to *Ceremony's* characters of Tayo and Betonie, who also have white or Mexican blood in their veins. Menardo's experience of alienation due to his half-blood status echoes Tayo's childhood deprivation. Yet, while Tayo, thanks to Betonie's knowledge discovers capitalism, the witchery, as the source of his trauma and heals, Menardo rejects the same knowledge offered to him by his grandfather, internalizes capitalist values and perpetuates his own trauma.

Menardo's trauma starts in a Catholic school, where Menardo was bullied for his "flat nose," an offensive word for an Indian, and began to hate himself and his ancestors for the demeaning ethnic feature in his face (*Almanac* 258). Further chapters present him as a businessman dealing in insurance and security, and the owner of a private army, but still haunted by the shame of his difference and inferiority symbolized by his short and flat nose. Further in the novel, Menardo develops an obsession with security as he himself feels constantly threatened. As a result of his paranoia, Menardo never takes off his bullet-proof vest, which he believes will protect him from death and injury. His trust in the vest, and consequently in white science and technology, is so deep that he orders Tacho, his chauffeur, to shoot at him to prove beyond any doubt top security his bulletproof vest ensures. Yet, ironically the obvious happens, and Menardo becomes his own victim.

Tacho is not only Menardo's silent chauffeur, but also, more importantly, he is a spiritual leader of Native people's uprising to take back the land. It is important to notice that Menardo and Tacho stand in clear opposition of interests, as Tacho perceives Menardo as one of the reasons of Indian plight, and Menardo, even though confined in Tacho, loathes him as a stupid and superstitious Indian. Tacho becomes a silent listener to Menardo's dreams and anxieties, but hardly ever offers him a true insight, since he is not witnessing Menardo's trauma with empathy. But while Silko withholds the knowledge from Menardo, she reveals it to her readers. It is through the thoughts of Tacho that Silko shows the bigger historical and cultural context of Native American trauma.

In the character of Menardo Silko shows how capitalism operates within an individual to result in personal abuse and destruction. Representing the violence and obtaining a witness for the act of abuse is as important for Silko's representation of trauma as voicing and witnessing pain. *Almanac* overpowers the reader with the amount and raw language of violence, but these frequent passages are necessary to make the violence visible, to convey its immediacy and pervasiveness. Deborah Horovitz in *Literary Trauma* claims that the witchery success was to contaminate humanity with greed and lust until they became normative patterns of behavior (27). Silko, therefore, through disturbing language and imagery lays bare both the violence and the pain that these normative patterns of behavior perpetuate.

Moreover, Tacho provides an exemplification of a witnessing stance towards violence and abuse. Through the character of Tacho Silko forces the readers to focus their gazes on the violence Menardo inflicts upon himself rather than his self-inflicted pain. David Moore points out, how Silko underscores the activity of witnessing in both *Ceremony* and *Storyteller* and refers to one of *Ceremony's* poems in which the author claims that "Ck'o'yo magic won't work if someone is watching us" (qtd. in Moore 150). Witnessing is therefore for Silko an appropriate reaction to violence that

triggers trauma. It is not a passive act of watching, but, according to Moore, active resistance to witchery (153).

These three representations of personal traumas explore complex connections between the oppressed, the oppressor, and the witness that constitute Silko's mediation of trauma in *Almanac*. The representations of Seese's, Sterling's and Menardo's traumas are thus necessary for the readers to understand the meaning of the novel's grand finale. The revolution against capitalism can start only when the crimes are acknowledged and the humanity of the traumatized recognized on a personal level. Trauma, either personal or cultural, cannot be separated from the the pain inflicted on an individual body, for only through personal identification and witnessing it is possible for the readers to understand and accept Silko's critiques of mainstream American society in her final book of *Almanac*.

**i. Globalizing Personal Trauma through Representations of Sterling's and Seese's Traumas**

The personal traumas of Seese and Sterling exemplify Native American trauma in global context. Silko opens the narrative, in which the prophecy of global revolution occupies a major spot, representing the traumas of two minor characters of Seese and Sterling. The opening representations of personal traumas serve as the departure point for cultural trauma. Through empathy with Seese's and Sterling's personal pain, readers learn to acknowledge the source of the characters' trauma in the readers' own reality created by Euro-American capitalism. The choice of these two divergent characters establishes a common denominator for Native American and global trauma. Although Seese's and Sterling's traumas differ, they are triggered by the same pattern of behavior based on capitalistic focus on money and property. In this section I focus first on Sterling's account of personal trauma with its political implications as the mediation of Native American trauma, and then I discuss the representation of Seese's trauma. Through the comparison I uncover

parallels between Sterling's and Seese's experience and discuss how these parallels provide broader, global context for Native American experience.

a. *Sterling*

What concerns me is that judges and courts break their own laws or they decide something completely wrong. (*Almanac* 26)

Sterling retells his trauma mainly in the context of the white legal system, as he traces how the law legitimized his personal abuse and the abuse of the Laguna people in general. His personal trauma acts a reminder of the history of broken promises and unfair treaties that American government made to Indian tribes. Silko recreates Sterling's route to Tucson in quite a confusing order. Starting in the immediate past and then shifting eighty years ago Sterling approaches his own trauma in circular manner until he identifies the center of his trauma – the banishment from his tribe. Through his story Silko shows how trauma resonates from collective past and affects individual present and future. She also asserts that personal trauma can be neither represented not solved in isolation.

Silko initiates mediation of Sterling's trauma through a nightmare he has on a bus to Phoenix. While in his dream Sterling is chasing the Hollywood crew trying to stop them before they reach the closed uranium mine, in reality he misses his stop and ends up in Tucson. Explanation of the nightmare is postponed, however, since a seemingly unrelated reflection on the white law immediately follows the nightmare, when Sterling notices the police's indifference to the fact that the bus is going over the speed limit (26). The reflection on the police's indifference opens the connection between personal and political trauma, for it implicates the white legal system in Sterling's personal oppression: "Sterling couldn't help thinking about the law, and what the law means. About people who get away with murder because of who they are, and whom they know. Then there are people like him, Sterling, people who got punished for acts they had no part in" (26).

Silko further ties the law to Sterling's personal trauma, bringing up Sterling's childhood in an Indian boarding school, since "everything the white teachers had said and done to Indian children had been 'required by law'" (27). Silko anchors her representation of Native American trauma in Sterling's personal trauma to show how the former affects not only whole communities, but also, more importantly, individuals.

In the chapter "The Stone Idols" Silko expands the circle of Sterling's trauma to challenge legal claims of ownership white culture makes to Native American artifacts stored in museums. Indirectly she also calls into question white claims of the land ownership. To explain the reasons behind his banishment, Sterling has to recount the story reaching back eighty years in the past, and assert that "the stone idols got Sterling banished" (31). The two stone figures, called by the people "Little Grandparents," are "as old as the earth herself" (31). Even though they were stolen eighty or seventy years ago, for the Laguna people the event has not lost its immediacy. The theft of beloved ancestors is yet another example of the white law's destructive impact on Native American community and individuals. Silko recounts an unsettling journey of Laguna elders to the Museum of Laboratory of Anthropology in Santa Fe, where the figures were found. The author makes her readers witness a whole assembly of Indian artifacts, which the museum assistant refers to in the sterile language of valuable acquisitions:

pottery and baskets so ancient they could only have come from the graves of ancient ancestors [...] sacred kachina masks belonging to the Hopis and the Zunis as well as prayer sticks and sacred bundles, the poor shriveled skin and bones of some ancestor taken from her grave, and one entire painted-wood kiva shrine reported stolen from Cochiti Pueblo years before. (*Almanac* 33)

Moreover, Silko also makes her readers witness the bodily pain of the old cacique who desperately tries to reach for the stone figures through the thick glass. In that instant, Silko enforces a moment of revelation on both the museum curator and her white readers, making them realize that even according to their own law the figures are not their rightful property (*Almanac* 33). Yet,

once again the inequality embedded in the law comes into play. The curator announces that the reputation of the donor renders any accusation of theft inappropriate (33), and the Laguna elders agree that they cannot afford another lawsuit (34). In this passage Silko wages a very potent critique on the white culture's urge, legitimized through the white legal system, to objectify and possess cultural objects of the Other, as well as to possess the land. She likewise criticizes the enclosure that is inseparably connected to Euro-American concept of ownership. Glass cabinets separate the Native American artifacts from the community in which they were a living part of life, and turns them into dead objects secured and preserved in the sterile environment of a museum. But above all, Silko unmasks the hypocrisy and malleability of the white law that can be bent to serve those in power to dispossess the poor.

Sterling personal trauma is initiated, however, when Sterling, as an individual, is faced with Tribal Council, which represents the government, a political body. In this story Silko narrates how the unfair practices justified by white law eventually infected the sense of law within the Laguna community, which resulted in Sterling's scapegoating and his unfair banishment from the tribe. Sterling recalls how tribe's authorities first forced him into the role of the film commissioner to supervise the Hollywood movie crew and later banished Sterling for his failure to handle the crew (*Almanac* 90-91). Sterling believes he had to take blame for all the abuse that happened to Lagunas from the hands of white people, since he cannot see how his utter helplessness with the Hollywood crew could be perceived as conspiracy against the tribe. But on the bigger scale Silko shows how through Tribal Council, white ideas of law and justice continue to traumatize Native American community. Silko shows how contagious trauma is through the sudden death of Sterling's Aunt Marie, who consciously refuses to live and accept the kind of law and justice that unfairly causes so much dismay and suffering. The conclusion of the story unquestionably exposes the arrogance of power quoting a tribal councilman who claimed that, "There is more reason now than ever to get rid



of this kind of man. He has no ties and responsibilities here any longer. His behavior upset our dear sister so much she is no longer with us" (*Almanac* 98). Silko shows how the law begins to serve political and populist ends disregarding completely the individual, the nature of his deed, his guilt or innocence. Legal theft of the land and Little Grandparents triggered cultural trauma and infected the Laguna community with white concepts of justice and retribution. Sterling was innocent; yet, putting the blame on him soothed temporarily feeling of loss within the community. Consequently, Silko shows how white legal system is responsible for Sterling's uprooting in manifold ways. Firstly, for confining an orphaned four-year old Sterling to an Indian boarding school, and secondly for his banishment due to unfair verdict of the tribal court infiltrated with the white understanding of law. Finally, for creating a collective sense of collective loss, as well as a collective need for justice and retribution, that eventually led to Sterling's exile.

b. *Seese*

I want this baby to be mine and not his. (*Almanac* 51)

If the representations of Sterling's trauma uncovers how capitalist urge to own objects embedded in the white legal system traumatizes Native American individuals and communities, the representation of Seese's trauma shows how capitalism embedded in personal relations becomes the source of individual trauma worldwide. Seese's trauma, triggered by the loss of Monte, reveals how white culture has confused love with possession. Seese's relationship with her parents and, later, with David, Beaufrey, and Eric expose how capitalism based patterns of relationship are repetitively realized through those who could not help but internalize them. In this section I would like to see at what points Seese's and Sterling's traumas converge to constitute a statement against capitalism.

Silko's description of Seese's trauma also begins with a dream in which Seese not only experiences the sense of her son Monte's presence, but also recreates the sense of loss she feels when she wakes up (*Almanac* 42). However, in the first act of Seese's trauma Silko focuses more on

Seese's alienation from the others, who are either annoyed by her pain or try to exploit her fragility. Only later, her trauma is revealed in the bigger context of her childhood in a dysfunctional military family and her position with the abusive triangular relationship between Beaufrey, David, and Eric. Silko makes a statement about the white ideals of family and marriage when Seese recalls the "deal" between her constantly absent father, a military pilot in the Pacific (*Almanac* 54), and her cold mother who was glad to receive his paycheck as a compensation for the marriage she never experienced (*Almanac* 57). But, as Seese observes, even though they seemed to be even with each other, her needs were left out from this equation, and abandoned her parents (*Almanac* 57).

As Seese's story unfolds, Silko explores Seese's position in yet another capitalism-based relationship, which revolves around the desire to own David. Both Seese and Eric, even though they manage to establish a sort of friendship, want David only for themselves, and perceive Beaufrey as the one "intent on weaning David from them" (*Almanac* 57). David uses Seese and Eric interchangeably to manipulate Beaufrey into jealousy, but Seese hopes to tie David to herself through their baby son. None of them are aware it is Beaufrey who owns all three of them hooked up on his money, influence, and coke. Silko investigates all the connections to uncover how money replaces love in the white idea of relationships, which are too often described in terms of deal or arrangement. For Silko the untamed and insatiable desire to own something and exploit it and dispose of when it dies is the foundation of capitalism which affects Euro-American culture. Seese's trauma triggered by abusive relationships as well as Sterling's trauma of banishment trace back to white man's urge to own, not to share. Seese was owned and abused by David and Beaufrey; Sterling had to take the blame for theft of the stone idols eighty years back. Objectification and claiming ownership occur on every level of life, in personal relationships, one's relationship to the land, and objects of art. This pattern applies to the relationship between Seese, Eric, David, and Beaufrey, to

Native American trauma of stolen land and stolen objects. Intertwining the stories of Seese and Sterling on different levels Silko explores different levels of capitalism inflicted trauma.

Sterling's and Seese's traumas relate when those who have a chance to witness Seese's trauma, but refuse to serve as witness. Silko shows how those who are supposed to represent the law remain completely indifferent not only to the crime committed, but also to Seese's pain. Beaufrey's lawyer, under the pretense of helping Seese, keeps her in his penthouse apartment as a sex toy (*Almanac* 43). Also the police officers prove to have little compassion for Seese, as she can sense "the detectives' contempt for her; she had got what she deserved" (*Almanac* 111). Their stance towards Seese's suffering cannot overcome the bias with which these people perceive Seese, which is best summarized through Elena, the Cuban maid of Beaufrey's lawyer, as "she has no patience for this silly blond bitch who is so stupid that she lost her own baby, then cries about it when she gets drunk" (*Almanac* 46). The indifference of those who represent the law towards Seese, combined with their willing cooperation with people such as Beaufrey is where the Native American dispossession and exploitation by capitalism and law converge with the dispossession and exploitation of those, who are defined by the white society as "white trash." The same internalized conceptions about law and justice underwrite the response of Elena, police detectives, but also Tribal Council that banished Sterling. Silko focuses on the moment of interaction between and individual and the law to show how those representing the law disregard the poor rather than protect them. But Silko also explores how the same concept that frames Euro-American legal system dictates the shape of human relations where inclusion and empathy is offered only within capitalistic rules of material reciprocation. Money and power are the markers of humanity, and those deprived of them are perceived as less human.

c. *Witnessing*

Sterling has to clear his throat to keep his tears back. Seese wipes the back of her hand across her face but never looks up from the water. Her sadness startles him, and Sterling is seized by memories and lets down his guard. (*Almanac* 31)

Interweaving the representations of Sterling's and Seese's traumas, Silko seeks to abolish artificial boundaries of race and nationality in the manner that *Ceremony* suggests, "to see the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions through distance and time" (*Ceremony* 229). Moreover, in the stories of Sterling and Seese, Silko reinterprets Betonie's claim that "you don't write off all the white people, just like you don't trust all the Indians" (*Ceremony* 118). She makes her characters look beyond the trick of the witchcraft and offer empathy regardless of the skin color. In the first chapter "Tucson" Seese first approaches Sterling and intuitively feels the similarity between them (*Almanac* 22-23). She prods him to talk, and asks questions. In the end of the chapter Sterling admits that he would like to tell his story, but as he admits "it's sort of complicated" (*Almanac* 24). Through Seese's reply, Silko defines the witnessing stance her mediation of trauma requires. Seese neither demands to hear the whole account nor discourages Sterling from telling it, she is willing to accept what Sterling thinks is enough for now, when she says "You could tell me part of it. I might understand more than you want" (24). Seese's attitude enables Sterling to voice his trauma. Her empathy and genuine interest are necessary for the trauma mediation to happen.

Seese's trauma, however, lacks a witness within the narrative. Instead Seese faces series of hostile reactions that ignore her pain. The narrative absence, therefore, needs readers to act as witnesses to Seese's trauma; to bear witness to Seese's pain, and to recognize the implications of capitalism in Seese's personal trauma. Witnessing therefore sees the suffering of the individual and identifies Euro-American capitalism at roots of this suffering. In *Ceremony*, Silko defines the source of trauma as the witchery that, according to Betonie manipulates people regardless of their race and incites them to cause death and destruction (*Ceremony* 118). In *Almanac of the Death* Silko asserts explicitly that witchery manipulates people by an insatiable desire to possess objects. Through the

representation of Seese's trauma, Silko explores how this desire objectifies and destroys people on intimately personal level.

Even before the narrative reveals the culprit behind Monte's kidnapping and death, Silko definitively identifies Beaufrey as the force that established the web of exploitation and obsessive desire between Seese, David, Eric, and Monte. Seese recalls how "Beaufrey was always delighted with the quarrels. Beaufrey was always looking for new players" (*Almanac* 59) to show how Beaufrey, the embodiment of witchery, takes pleasure at creating yet more complex conflicts between people. Beaufrey plays his puppet show with David, Seese, and Eric, takes delight with their death and suffering, and yet remains hidden in the plain sight of his victims. Silko uncovers Beaufrey's role as a destroyer as she combines the violence he inflicts on his direct victims with the violence that constitutes the commodity he deals with. His insistence on Seese's abortion is inseparable from his capitalist exploitation of abortion as the subject of snuff films he provides to his sophisticated clientele (*Almanac* 102). Silko therefore, warns her readers from a hasty judgment on Seese, or David, or Eric, as she mainly presents them as ignorant victims of the witchery that has no borders and knows no limits.

Silko constantly entangles the storylines of Sterling and Seese to present their personal traumas as inseparable from her mediation of Native American trauma. Sterling's experience is deeply set in the historical and legal exploitation and extermination of Native Americans institutionalized in boarding schools enforcing assimilation, and the Tribal Council. Silko repeatedly shows the moment when the political touches the individual as trauma trigger. Seese's trauma exhibits the same pattern of exploitation and exclusion that is applied not only to women in white society, but also to those who lack the money or connections to protect themselves. Her trauma originates in her childhood, when the government dictated the shape and location of Seese's family. Her trauma is perpetuated by the relationship with David and Beaufrey which also realizes capitalist

models. Through Seese's willingness to listen to Sterling's story, Silko shows how crucial it is for the white American society to bear witness to Native American trauma without imposing their cultural bias. Silko emphasizes that isolating Native American experience from the global traumatic reality triggers personal trauma and perpetuates the cultural trauma, which affects not only Native Americans, but those who are dispossessed and exploited by capitalism throughout the world.

**ii. Personalizing the Oppressive Character of Euro-American Culture through Trauma of Menardo**

Enemies could use your dreams to destroy you. (*Almanac* 321)

In the first section I focused on the personal traumas of Sterling and Seese and the circulation of witnessing Silko creates around their stories. I complicate the discussion exploring the violence Menardo inflicts upon himself. If the previous section establishes the connection between personal pain and a bigger system of capitalism, this section focuses on how internalized capitalism-based values trigger violence and destruction. Seese's and Sterling's personal pain, Menardo's self-destruction, and the circulation of witnessing come together in Silko's novel to mediate Native American trauma in global context on a personal level.

Silko's representation of Menardo's trauma draws complicated relations between the oppressor, the victim, and the witness, as it establishes the connection between the personal and political. Through the character of Menardo Silko mediates the contagious quality of trauma that affects the psyche of the victim, turns him into a destroyer, and perpetuates Menardo's trauma through his dreams. Menardo's traumatizing experience begins in a Catholic school, where he develops hatred towards his own appearance and his ancestry. As a result, Menardo decides to assimilate into the white society, and become a "self-made 'millionaire'" (*Almanac* 267), a term Silko uses to connect Menardo's trauma with the realization of the American Dream. Menardo willingly accepts white culture's values and shapes his behavior accordingly, internalizing capitalist oppression. Through Menardo, Silko uncovers racism embedded in capitalism which uses the

concept of skin color to justify dispossession and exploitation of non-white people. Menardo believes in capitalism's promise that equal money makes equal people. Yet, he cannot escape the feeling of inferiority that comes together with his internalized racism. Racial self-hatred not only cuts him off from his ancestors and their knowledge, but also renders him blind to the destruction and death his own actions cause. Moreover, his insecurity within the net of white society evolves in an obsessive fear which propels him to wear his bulletproof vest at all times, and his blind belief in the total immunity the vest grants him inclines him to assault himself. The violence that Menardo inflicts upon himself is the violence that capitalism inflicts on the non-white people. Menardo becomes his own victim; as he can neither divide himself from his racial identity, nor reject internalized capitalism.

Tacho, as the witness of Menardo's trauma sees not only Menardo's pain and fear, but also Menardo's involvement in the witchery of capitalism. Tacho, however, pities Menardo for his attempts to become a white man, and perceives him as "a yellow monkey who imitated real white man" (*Almanac* 339). Tacho therefore witnesses Menardo as an oppressor, and uses Menardo's testimony as the basis for his criticism of white values that Menardo internalizes and realizes upon himself.

Unlike the story of Seese and Sterling, Silko's presentation of Menardo starts with his ancestry. Menardo's grandfather understands the workings of witchery and recognizes evil no matter under what name it hides (*Almanac* 258). Menardo rejects that knowledge on account of the demeaning facial feature he has inherited from his Indian grandfather. The discovery of his Indian ancestry fills Menardo with horror (*Almanac* 259). Interestingly, Silko observes that the mechanism of self-loathing was implanted in Menardo by another dark-skinned boy, who taunted him with an offensive "flat nose" nickname (*Almanac* 258). Menardo left Catholic school, where he was constantly reminded of his Indian blood, determined erase his Indian ancestry and pass as "*sangre limpia*" (*Almanac* 259).

Even though Menardo's trauma was triggered from the outside, Menardo's acceptance of Euro-American racism perpetuates his own trauma from the inside. That early and personal event brought about major political consequences, since Menardo's rise "from rags to riches" made him a successful and well-connected businessman. As the owner of Universal Insurance and private army, Menardo exerts considerable influence on the region of Chiapas, where he lives (*Almanac* 261). In the short description of the emergency of the tidal wave approaching the coast, Silko shows how Menardo with almost unlimited financial means rescues home appliances from the warehouses his company insures, and only later helps to evacuate the nearby hospital, which makes him a regional hero nonetheless (*Almanac* 262-263). The chapter "Tidal Wave" unmasks how the concepts of insurance and security serve as a façade for all the measures taken to protect the capital and the property of the white elite. Menardo got rich and powerful offering the insurance and security of the capital, objects and commodities that constitute the wealth of the dominant society. Silko underscores how Menardo's awareness of the significance of objects within white culture helped him to rise "quickly in the insurance business because he knew exactly what people wanted to hear" (*Almanac* 260). Showing the hidden meaning behind the concept of security, Silko reveals how the dominant culture prioritizes material goods over human beings. Moreover, as Menardo creates his mercenary army to offer his clients insurance against political unrest, Silko shows how arms and munitions become synonymous with security and insurance of the capital, and consequently with unceasing oppression and submission of the indigenous people by military violence.

Silko turns this story around, however, more than once. Even though Menardo understands perfectly how capitalism operates to gather wealth and power, he is blind to its oppressive character. Therefore he is ignorant of his own self-hatred and destruction. On the personal level Silko shows how nightmares of loneliness and abandonment haunt Menardo, and how scenes of angry mob, and bloody deaths of giant reptiles leave him covered in icy sweat (*Almanac* 321). Menardo's anxiety



eventually forces him to sleep in his bulletproof vest, since Menardo believes that Western technology can protect him from the disturbing imagery of his dreams (*Almanac* 499). Since capitalism shapes relationships within white society, and Menardo's friends are rather his business associates, Menardo confines his fears and nightmares with Tacho, convinced that Tacho is "trained to decipher dreams" (*Almanac* 321). Silko especially underscores how Menardo perceives Tacho through white culture's racist preconceptions as the embodiment of "ignorance and superstition" (*Almanac* 499). Tacho understands the meaning of Menardo's dreams when he observes that "all Menardo's dreams had contained the terror of a doomed man, and always the dreams were of ambush on the highway, dreams in which the cars and guards usually accompanying the Mercedes were suddenly gone" (*Almanac* 339-340). Menardo suffers from prevalent sense of loneliness and insecurity that reflects his initial rejection of ancestry and current alienation from white community. Menardo senses his sudden end, as he "had understood his days were numbered" (*Almanac* 472).

Yet, Tacho enjoys Menardo's distressing dreams. Silko explains that he "had been delighted with the information he obtained with Menardo's dreams" (*Almanac* 473). Menardo's dream might be the prophecy concerning the upcoming revolution of the oppressed people, which slowly becomes the reality of Tuxtla, but Tacho seems to be more amused by the violence that turned back upon the oppressor in his dreams. Tacho's witnessing to Menardo's trauma is the critique of the violence inflicted by the oppressor. The witnessing gaze of Tacho is uncompromisingly and defiantly fixed on a destroyer, not on the traumatized, and is, according to Alegria:

the worst characteristic possessed by an Indian. He had listened to every word Menardo or Alegria said, from the airport to the dress shop, to the moment he opened the door of the Mercedes for them in front of the Royal Hotel. He not only made eye contact with his social superiors, this Indian alternately had mocking, then knowing eyes. Alegria hated what he had said with his eyes as she was escorted off the wretched plane by the captain. Tacho had look right at her as if to say, "The captain wants to reach right into your panties." As he held the car door outside the hotel, Alegria had glanced up and to her horror saw the Indian was smiling as if he knew she was going to seduce his boss later that afternoon. (*Almanac* 278)

The passage elucidates Silko's way of resisting violence of the oppressor through the sole act of looking. Alegria resents the fact that Tacho dares to look at his "social superiors" but what really bothers her is the awareness of her intentions and actions Tacho's look extricates. The witchery, as Silko states in *Ceremony* does not work if someone is watching, since it is the invisibility that ensures the witchery's success (*Ceremony* 230). The act of witnessing, therefore, renders the violence visible.

But even though Tacho enjoys witnessing Menardo's self-destruction and bears witness to violence Menardo inflicts upon himself, Tacho is startled with Menardo's plan to prove that the bulletproof vest is superior to death. His final dream pushes Menardo to prove his total immunity provided by the bulletproof vest. In the dream Menardo finds himself in a village of stone walls in a building with unearthed skeleton, and yet, he claims to Tacho, he is not afraid. The skeleton cannot hurt Menardo, because of the bulletproof vest. Menardo finds Tacho's interpretation superstitious and ridiculous, and decides to prove "the superiority of man-made fibers that stopped bullets and steel" (*Almanac* 500) not only over Indian superstitions but also over death. Menardo insists that, as the ultimate test, Tacho will shoot Menardo in front of Menardo's white friends. The experience renders Tacho both startled at the assignment he was given and at his own belief that the vest could actually stop the bullet (*Almanac* 510). The scene where "an Indian shoots a mestizo" (*Almanac* 510) reproduces Tayo's recollection of Josiah's death. Silko shows how the act of shooting another human being can be justified by the order given by those in power. Tacho observes that "white man did not like to see an Indian shoot a mestizo unless they had given an order" (*Almanac* 510). Menardo is a mestizo pretending to be white man, and as such is the one who gives and order and is shot. On another level, however, Silko shows how witchery internalized in Menardo has turned upon itself. The entanglement within racist and capitalistic ideas resulted in Menardo's own destruction.

In the representation of Menardo's trauma Silko voices the oppression of capitalism exploring personal and political meanings of security and insurance. In Euro-American context an

army becomes the embodiment of insurance, and a bulletproof vest the warrant of security. Politically, Menardo's idea of security and insurance is represented in his private army that in defense of the capital and private property will inflict death and injury in case of revolution. Personally these ideas are shown through Menardo's bulletproof vest, as Menardo believes the vest will protect him from his internal anxiety. Silko shows how Euro-American culture infuses constant fear of being under attack and consequently translates security into violence. On the personal level, Menardo tries to compensate for his feeling of insecurity with the bulletproof vest. His unshaken belief in capitalism as the right social system makes him enter a web of social relations shaped according to wealth and connections and reject his Indian grandfather. Menardo's social life follows "intricate and confusing rules of etiquette" that define social interaction between different classes within white society (*Almanac* 268). But neither the rituals introducing Menardo into the white wealthy society, nor his vest protect him from his sense of inferiority. Through the death of Menardo, Silko shows how capitalism assaults and oppresses people to secure capital and property. Menardo's army is ready to provide security killing the revolutionaries; Menardo is ready to prove his personal security shooting himself. To account for the role of a witness to violence, Silko advocates a bold and aware gaze, particularly because the act of looking and understanding further consequences of one's violence is central to recognition of the violence's cultural dimension.

**iii. The Prophetic Ending of *Almanac of the Dead* as Political Closure to Personal Trauma.**

One must be able to let go of a great many comforts and all things European; but the reward would be peace and harmony with all living things. (*Almanac* 710)

In the first two sections I focused on personal trauma of Sterling and Seese, and internalized oppression of Menardo and the models of witnessing, Silko creates in the narrative of *Almanac of the Dead*. This third section addresses the novel's ending and its consequences for Silko's mediation of Native American trauma. Here I analyze the prophetic and open ending of *Almanac* in comparison to

*Ceremony's* dual ending. In *Ceremony* Silko resolves Tayo's personal trauma, temporarily stopping the witchery from action, but on a bigger scale the witchery is still active, and a bigger historical trauma remains unresolved. In *Almanac* Silko abandons her traumatized characters on different stages of healing, but instead proposes a solution to historical trauma of not only Native Americans, but all colonized and subjugated people through global resistance towards capitalism. *Almanac's* conclusion introduces completely new characters to show that those within the novel are only a part of something larger that takes place not only within the narrative frame of the novel, but also in reality.

Part Six, the final part of *The Almanac of the Dead* is entitled "Prophecy" and constitutes the open ending of the novel and culmination of all the preparation Silko characters have done through the novel. In the final part Silko knots together the fates of the characters familiar from the novel and completely new ones, whose significance has to be partially guessed. The International Holistic Healers Convention is not only the meeting point, but also the cover up for those who will start the revolution. Silko's globalized ending envisions closure to historical trauma when the global community of oppressed people rises up together against capitalism. Even so, this closure may take many years and deaths to accomplish. Silko does not offer specific solutions to personal trauma, but rather proposes a global solution to cultural trauma that stems from the capitalistic abuse of discriminated and colonized people. *Almanac's* final part constitutes the politicized ending that encloses personal traumas of *Almanac's* characters.

Silko's final prophecy in *Almanac* originates from the Native American trauma of stolen land, as she shows the march led by the Maya twins Tacho and El Feo towards the North in their non-violent uprising to retake the ancestral land as the initiation of the global movement of indigenous people to abolish capitalist oppression. Tacho's insistence on peaceful uprising is immediately translated into the critique of US government and their policies, since "the white men would spend

their last dime to stop the people from the South" (*Almanac* 710). White Americans are pushed into wars because of their stubborn protection of artificial borders and exploitative possession of the land. Tacho observes how wars globally, in the same way as Indian Wars, are sources of power and wealth of generals and tycoons" (*Almanac* 713). The non-violent rebellion aims not only to subvert white concepts of state borders and land property, but also to revise white concepts of revolution and political struggle. In the subsequent chapter, Silko reiterates Tacho's claims, to return the stolen land, through a poet, and a would-be lawyer Wilson Weasel Tail who boldly announces that "only a bastard government Occupies stolen land!" (*Almanac* 714). Yet, this UCLA Law School dropout comes to speak not only for the Native American, since he learnt in college that "the law crushed and cheated the poor whatever color they were" (*Almanac* 714). The culmination of his angry poem prophesying the disappearance of white man, and reiterating unfair trials, and breaches of treaties is a declaration of the war. Wilson Weasel Tail includes America in "unlawful, unelected regimes," and demands justice on behalf of all the disposed indigenous peoples (715).

Silko not only starts from the Native American experience to evoke global solidarity, but she also confirms the political dimension of her own novel. Wilson Weasel Tail mistrusts law that serves not justice but rich people, and turns to poetry since he believes that "poetry would set the people free; poetry would speak to dreams and to the spirits, and the people will understand what they must do" (713). Silko criticizes the white legal system as inherently biased to privilege the rich and as such useless in the fight with capitalism, which does not hesitate to breach the trust, the promise, or break the law, if financial profit is at stake. Literature is much more effective way of fighting capitalism by bearing witness and keeping track of the violence and pain inflicted on individuals and communities.

Silko consistently broadens scope of her prophecy including in her vision of the fifth world eco-warriors, Awa Gee, a computer expert hacking into federal computers, and Clinton, the leader of

Army of Justice considering himself a Black Indian, to name just a few. Her inclusion of those who seemingly might have nothing in common except the fact they represented those excluded and exploited by white capitalism proves that Silko continues her mediation of Native American trauma through its placement within a bigger context. *Almanac* reproduces Tayo's epiphany in the uranium mine, his sudden realization of the interconnectedness of stories on a truly global scope.

If anything, the prophetic ending of *Almanac* confirms the political activism of the novel as a lashing criticism on the American government. As the convergence point of many of the plots and characters of the narrative it constitutes some sort of closure and crowns the preparations narrated throughout the novel. Interestingly, even the characters not actively participating in the revolution take part in its preparation. If Silko's final part is her direct critique of the capitalism through trauma representations, mediations of Seese's, Sterling's and Menardo's traumas constitute the necessary preparation for this critique. Yet, in her anticipation of global closure Silko' translates the personal healing of Tayo into the political healing of the traumatized community. To uncover the interconnectedness of everything, to see oneself as a part of global community, and to recognize witchery regardless of its skin color is what Tayo had to realize, and what Silko imposes on *Almanac's* readers.

## **Conclusion**

In the beginning of this chapter I assert that Silko's mediation of Native American trauma enforces witnessing pain and violence on personal level, as well as recognizing implications of pain or violence on political level. Overviews and generalizing accounts result in the separation of the pain and the body. Such accounts zoom out and lose the individualized connection between the victim, the oppressor, and the witness from sight. The focus on characters, as the drive of Silko's narrative, sheds light on *Almanac of the Dead* as a mediation of Native American trauma. Starting from an individual experience of Seese and Sterling, Silko voices individual pain, makes her readers identify

with it via empathy, and reject capitalist norms and values. In the character of Menardo, Silko shows how internalized values and norms of capitalism destroy an individual to represent how capitalism assaults Indians, mestizos and other people of color on global level. Representations of the trauma, progressing from personal to political, prepare readers for the "Prophecy," the final book of the novel that ties up the plots of individual characters into a bold statement against capitalism. Reading the novel, witnessing Seese's and Sterling's and Menardo's trauma, the readers undergo, like Sterling, "training for a special assignment" (*Almanac* 20). Witnessing physical pain and physical violence as the immediate results of capitalism, the readers come to reject the values and norms that capitalism represents. The open ending leaves the readers at the same point as it leaves their characters. Their vision of reality is changed; hence, they are ready to change the reality.

Through her novel, Silko blurs and annihilates all sorts of borders and boundaries, and most significantly the one between literature and political activism. *Ceremony's* narrative attempts to change reader's consciousness, but on the other hand allows for the reading based on conventional approach to Bildungsroman. *Almanac of the Dead*, however, requires already changed consciousness to be readable and palatable for the reader. The narrative violently uproots readers from their cultural and historical framework and forces them to witness pain and violence within a new cognitive framework that *Ceremony* narrates and *Almanac* reproduces. Silko's mediation of politicized trauma of Native Americans might be less successful than personal trauma and healing of *Ceremony* in the capitalist definition of success, but *Almanac* proves more efficient in the attempt to trigger readers' change of consciousness. As a novel of mediation, *Almanac of the Dead* resists canonization and denies sharp dividing lines within which white cognition operates. This fragmented view of the world is the primary object of *Almanac's* criticism, since fragmentation creates barriers between humans in order to facilitate abuse and exploitation of one group by the other.

Moreover, the fragmented world view also explains completely different receptions of *Ceremony* and *Almanac*. White readers, blinded by personal healing quest of Tayo, fail to notice the novel's global context that Silko conspicuously foregrounds in *Almanac of the Dead*. In the dominant perception the latter novel proved to be a drastic separation from *Ceremony's* deeply spiritual and indigenous ritual of healing. As a novel of mediation, however, *Almanac of the Dead* proves to be *Ceremony's* continuation. Since *Almanac* evades canonical reading, the active participation of readers gains crucial significance. The narrative of *Almanac* prevents the reader from falling into conventional reading modes and requires attention and open mind. *Almanac of the Dead* as a novel of mediation primarily attempts to shape an individual reader transforming a passive act of reading into active witnessing through the novel's narrative structure.



#### IV. Conclusion: Silko's Narratives as Maps of Human Relations

Mediating Native American trauma in Silko's *Ceremony* and *Almanac of the Dead* is the main subject of this thesis. Native American trauma, the history of physical and cultural extermination of American Indians, is the original collective experience that constitutes *raison d'être* for the two novels. Yet, in this thesis I shift the focus from specific Native American content to the form of Silko's narratives, since I argue that the experimental narrative structures of *Ceremony* and *Almanac* not only shape Silko's message but also influence readers' reception. I attempt to show how Silko's two narratives represent Native American trauma as inseparably connected both to personal and global trauma, and how the narratives require Euro-American readers to abandon their culturally established reading habits, as well as their preconceptions about their own and Native American culture.

Silko's narratives are like maps which refuse to indicate a route leading from A to B, but rather meticulously chart the topography of a character's surroundings and relations. Silko's fiction is character driven; yet, her novels do not follow a linear progress of an individual's internal journey from conflict to reconciliation, but rather explore how individuals extend in all directions through multiple connections. In *Ceremony* Silko places Tayo at the center of her map explores his trauma extends though time and space and connects to cultural trauma of Native Americans, and global trauma of war. *Almanac of the Dead* consists of many maps like that, all of them representing the relations of individual characters. By showing how these maps link and overlap *Almanac* draws connections between the personal and political across the boundaries of ethnicity and nationality. *Ceremony's* representation of trauma is synecdochal showing Tayo's trauma as representative and a part of larger cultural trauma. In *Almanac* Silko represents trauma through synthesis, showing how the reality is made up from most basic elements, stories of individuals. *Ceremony* and *Almanac of the Dead* present an individual story as a complete account of trauma, including personal, political,

historical, and cultural implications. Moreover, the novels also show how the ongoing global trauma is made solely of multiple deeply personal traumas.

Furthermore, the complexity of Silko's narratives precludes conventional, Euro-American, approaches to character-driven fiction, and calls for an attentive and close reading. Readers, therefore, need to discard familiar procedures and discover reading instructions Silko writes into her narratives through reading with "application and transport," as Barthes would want them (12). Initiation into Betonie's ceremony as well as witnessing characters of Seese and Tacho help Silko's readers to conceptualize new model of reading that coincides with Barthes's insistence on the abolition of "all classes, all barriers, all exclusions" (3), as a prerequisite for the mediation of trauma to happen. Therefore, the narratives of *Ceremony* and *Almanac of the Dead* do not primarily attempt to represent Native American trauma on its own, but rather they strive to abolish the concepts of Native American, white, African American within the narrative, within the reader, and within the Euro-American culture, showing how the oppressed, traumatized people are one global community united by the trauma triggered by the witchery and inflicted by destroyers.

It is surprising therefore that so many scholars indulge in discovering Native American nuances in Silko's texts, particularly since this interpretative perspective, though it provides some insight in the texts, mainly perpetuates the worldview that Silko is trying to debunk. Through her narratives, Silko defies the cultural label of a Native American writer, as her novels explicitly aim to discard the concepts of Native American, white American, African American, or Mexican that fragment and falsify reality. To avoid marking a victim and oppressor according to their skin or nationality, Silko introduces the concept of witchery and shows how it can manipulate anybody, e.g. Emo in *Ceremony*, Beaufrey or Menardo in *Almanac*. She also shows how witchery can affect anybody regardless of race or nationality, e.g. Tayo, Sterling, and Seese.

Moreover, the general inclination to explore the Native American within *Ceremony* and *Almanac* triggers heated debates over how much actually a reader needs to know about Laguna Pueblo culture to understand Silko's novels. In "Special Problems in Teaching Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*" Paula Gunn Allen, who like Silko is from the Laguna tribe, considers this issue as a personal dilemma between providing his students with sufficient information about Native American spirituality and revealing sacred and secret content of Laguna stories and knowledge. In this thesis, however, instead of asking how much the reader has to learn to approach the text appropriately, I ask how much the reader can learn by approaching the text appropriately. Frustrating readerly expectations and imposing new models of reading are the necessary conditions for Silko's successful mediation of Native American trauma. Only through unsettling the readers from familiar and comfortable reading experience does Silko reveal the true nature of witchery behind fake image of global community divided by skin color, nationality or language.

Paula Gunn Allen also defines typical mainstream expectations and approach to *Ceremony* claiming that students' desire to discuss *Ceremony* in terms of Indian "medicine, sacred language, rituals and spiritual customs" cannot be easily satisfied with the formal analysis of the novel's "theme, symbol, structure, and plot" (87). It proves that mainstream readership, as well as academia, underappreciates the form of Silko's novels, foregrounding the Native American origins that Silko's writing comes from. In "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance" bell hooks explicitly criticizes such attitude and draws a distinction between appreciation and appropriation as possible responses to a work by an ethnic writer. Hooks equates mainstream culture to commodity culture, in which "ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture" (366), and sees the Other, in the mode of "imperialist nostalgia" for "the primitive," as the source of alternatives to oppressive patriarchal system (hooks 369). Hooks claims that the concept of "the primitive" is deeply ingrained in white consciousness and a foundation of persistent racial

stereotyping (374). In this context, according to hooks, the Other is appropriated, commodified, to “assuage the feelings of deprivation and lack that assault the psyches of radical white youth who choose to be disloyal to Western civilization” (370). Ethnic writers representing the Other are thus claimed by the white mainstream culture as the voices of “the primitive,” which enables white readers to ignore even the most explicit and radical political message of ethnic writers (hooks 376). Such commodification of the Other led to canonization of *Ceremony*, which allows American readership to participate in Tayo’s indigenous healing without recognizing the bigger context of Native American and global trauma. Canonization was also the result of pervasive tendency to analyze and emphasize Silko’s exceptional gift of weaving Native American legends into a written form of a novel. Consequently, *Ceremony* has not been really appreciated in Euro-American culture, as hooks would want it, but rather appropriated through stereotyping – accommodating *Ceremony*’s narrative to mainstream audience’s expectations of a Native American writer. Not surprisingly, Euro-American audience declined to appropriate *Almanac of the Dead*, judging it rather a disappointment to their expectations. The appreciation, therefore, of Silko’s both novels begins with the rejection of the “imperialist nostalgia” that treats the Other as a spice rather than a dish in itself. To appreciate the dish is to recognize its unique wholeness of both the taste but also the form in which it is presented. Appreciation of *Ceremony* and *Almanac of the Dead*, therefore, recognizes both the narrative content and, most importantly, the narrative form as equally significant in Silko’s mediation of meaning.

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