

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

<https://llrjournal.com/index.php/11>

**DECOLONIZING NARRATIVE AND HEALING TRAUMA IN
LESLIE MARMON SILKO'S CEREMONY: A POSTCOLONIAL
STUDY OF INDIGENOUS RESISTANCE AND IDENTITY
FORMATION**



Atiya Rahman*

M.Phil. Scholar; Department of English, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

atiyarahman050@gmail.com



Abstract

This research critically analyze the Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony through the lens of postcolonial theory, to discuss the interrelated issues of decolonizing narrative, Indigenous identity and trauma healing. The study employs a qualitative interpretive approach through detailed textual analysis of the novel and contemporary sources in Indigenous studies, trauma theory and postcolonial criticism. The research suggests that Ceremony subverts dominant Western narrative forms by privileging Indigenous modes of storytelling, circular temporalities, and ceremonial modes of knowing as alternative modes of narrative. It also shows that trauma in the novel is not merely an individual psychological condition but is also historical, collective, and relates to colonial experiences, war, and cultural marginalisation. Silko uses the character of Tayo to demonstrate a healing process that is not clinical, sequential, or individual but spiritual, collective and land-centred, stressing the importance of reconnecting with Indigenous cosmology and memory. This research shows that storytelling is a decolonizing practice that reinvigorates fragmented identities and reestablishes cultural connections. Finally, the research also shows how Silko's narrative challenges colonial knowledge practices by reframing notions of identity, time and healing from Indigenous perspectives. Finally, this study concludes that Ceremony is a literary and cultural resistance strategy that provides a transformative vision, in which story becomes a site of resistance, survival, healing and Indigenous sovereignty.

Keywords: Ceremony, cosmology, decolonizing practice, indigenous sovereignty, memory, qualitative method, psychological condition,

Introduction

Background of the Study

Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony (1977) stands as a landmark work in postcolonial Indigenous literature, which engages the legacy of colonialism on Indigenous American identity, culture, and subjectivity. Postcolonial discourse often explores the residual mechanisms of coloniality that are perpetuated in marginalised communities and Silko's novel operates as a counter-discourse to Euro-American representations of Indigenous peoples. Through the narrative, the novel reclaims Native identity through the undoing of colonial stereotypes and the refocusing on Indigenous knowledge, cultures and spiritualities. As Saqib and Murtaza (2023) suggest, that the dual trauma is reflective of the fact that the experience of colonialism is foundational to the individual experiencing trauma and that reconnection to culture and community is a necessary part of the process of recovery. By doing so, Silko situates trauma within a socio-historical context, and reminds readers that trauma cannot be healed without culturally relevant approaches to knowing.

Ceremony and Ritual in Psychological and Cultural Healing

Ritual and ceremony are core components of Indigenous healing, and are deeply integrated to include the spiritual, emotional and social dimensions. In Ceremony, healing is not an individual or medicalised process, it is deeply embedded in a culture and community. Through rituals that connect Tayo back to his culture and its traditions, and connect him to balance in his community, Tayo's healing is realised. The ceremonies are an alternative medicine that does not separate mental health from culture, which is a more common approach in the West. Duran (2006) notes that the Indigenous healing modalities are very connected and holistic, addressing trauma in a culturally sensitive way through focusing on the mind, body, heart and community. Through an exploration of the healing and decolonising power of ceremony, as witnessed by Silko, people are able to reclaim their identities and resist the impact of colonial trauma. This view highlights the significance of culturally relevant healing practices in the context of historical trauma.

Storytelling and the rejection of western literary techniques

One of the things that makes Silko's *Ceremony* unique is the way it tells its story, which avoids the Western literary style in favor of an indigenous story-telling style. The intermingling of myth and reality also defies Western understandings of fiction and history, highlighting the importance of Indigenous knowledge systems. In short, much of Native American literature is difficult to classify in western literary genres because of its own narrative forms, which are rooted in indigenous values, as suggested by Krupat (1989). One such example would be Silko's novel, which helps to decolonise and strengthen Indigenous cultural values by using form. In its departure from conventional narrative forms, *Ceremony* offers not only a narrative of resistance but one that is embodied in its structure, underscoring the integral relationship between form and content in Indigenous literature. Silko's novel shows the ways that unresolved past traumas play out in contemporary hardships, making recovery a collective and continuing endeavour. For *Brave Heart* (1998), Indigenous historical trauma is cumulative and intergenerational, coming from the history of oppression and loss that is passed down through families and cultures. This view offers a crucial lens through which to interpret Tayo's experiences, as his healing process is both a personal one and an effort to disrupt the intergenerational cycle of trauma. Through its focus on intergenerational trauma, *Ceremony* highlights how understanding and healing the effects of historical injustices are essential to cultural recovery and healing.

Cosmology, Spirituality and Indigenous Knowledge

Cosmology and spirituality are essential in understanding *Ceremony*'s thematic resonance and the Indigenous worldview that informs the novel's narrative and philosophy. Silko offers a holistic view of life where humans, nature and the spiritual are all connected, rather than the Western dualist approach that divides the physical and the spiritual. Tayo's healing is spiritual, encompassing the physical and emotional, as well as the sacred and cosmic. According to Deloria (2003), Indigenous cosmologies are structured by a sense of sacred relationships between people, land and the universe. Silko's story exemplifies this by depicting healing as a process of realigning oneself with these relationships. In focusing on spirituality and cosmology, *Ceremony* challenges Western modes of knowledge and validates Indigenous ways of knowing, asserting their role in individual and collective health.

Statement of the Research Problem

While many scholars have explored postcolonial literature and Indigenous narratives, there remains a narrow and fragmented view of how Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* also serves as a decolonizing story, a trauma narrative, and an identity-building narrative. Current research either focuses on trauma, storytelling or resistance, but does not explore their interrelation as a holistic process in the novel. This leaves a gap in our understanding of Indigenous storytelling as a therapeutic and epistemological process. So, the key concern of this study is how *Ceremony* brings together narrative decolonization, trauma and identity formation to produce a unified Indigenous worldview that counterbalances the colonial discourse and reconstructs Indigenous continuity.

Research Objectives

- To explore how Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* portrays the decolonization of narrative through Indigenous storytelling and cultural memory.
- To explore representations of trauma and healing in *Ceremony* as integral to colonial history and Indigenous identity.
- To examine the ways Indigenous resistance and identity-making are portrayed in *Ceremony* through postcolonial narrative techniques and practices.

Research Questions

1. How does Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* decolonise narrative with Indigenous storytelling and memory?
2. How does *Ceremony* depict trauma and healing as interrelated processes shaped by coloniality and Indigenous identity?
3. How does *Ceremony* represent Indigenous forms of resistance and identity through postcolonial narrative strategies and cultural practices?

Significance of the Study

This research is important academically as it adds to the emerging genre of postcolonial literary analysis by providing a specific reading of Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* using the intersecting disciplines of trauma

theory, Indigenous epistemology, and decolonial narrative studies. The piece demonstrates that this novel is a challenge to the Western literary and psychological frameworks by embodying indigenous story telling as a legitimate mode of knowledge. In turn, it draws on the scholarship of postcolonial literature in order to emphasize the postcolonial nature of the narrative as a space of resistance and cultural reform. The study also highlights the constraints of a Eurocentric clinical framework to grasp Indigenous trauma, and the need to approach it through a historical, cultural and spiritual framework shaped by a Eurocentric colonial context. Based on these perspectives, the work provides a more detailed examination of the process of identity formation and healing in Ceremony. This work adds to literary theory by highlighting the need for Indigenous perspectives to change the face of critical discourse and Western epistemologies.

Delimitation of the Study

The research is limited to a textual and qualitative study of Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony as the central literary text. It deals with issues of decolonizing narrative, trauma, healing, resistance and Indigenous identity construction within a postcolonial framework. This study does not involve empirical research, psychologically case studies or comparative study with other Indigenous texts (besides brief theoretical mentions. Moreover, the research is limited to published academic.

Literature Review

Overview

In recent years, the study of trauma in postcolonial Indigenous contexts has broadened to include the role of trauma in maintaining contemporary systems of power, rather than looking at trauma as a historical. Eunjung Lee and Marjorie Johnstone (2022) suggest the notion of historical trauma needs to be critically revisited as dominant models often portray Indigenous people as passive victims and overlook their strengths and resistance. They emphasize that trauma is an ongoing process, and that structural inequalities and socio-political disadvantage recreate it, thus calling for trauma to be understood not apart from, but in the here and now. Extending this analysis, Joseph P. Gone (2021) argues that Western conceptualisations of trauma do not capture the complexity of Indigenous socio-cultural contexts, and do not account for collective trauma. He suggests there is a generational transmission of trauma and a link between trauma and cultural changes and losses (postcolonial distress). Further, Tessa Evans-Campbell (2020) recognizes the intergenerational legacy of trauma and Indigenous peoples continue to be affected by colonial violence in multiple ways, including through inequities such as poverty, discrimination and access to resources. These writers provide a comprehensive view of the impact of trauma on Ceremony, as Tayo's experiences represent individual and communal trauma, and the impact of colonialism on Indigenous peoples' identity.

Decolonizing Approaches to Trauma and Indigenous Healing

Decolonizing trauma theory is also a recent theme, particularly in response to the limitations of Western psychological theories. Catherine Richardson (2020) argues that traditional trauma theories tend to individualise trauma and fail to consider the historical context; she argues for a decolonial approach that is focused on 'relational healing', 'cultural recovery' and 'restoration of identities within communities'. From this, Eduardo Duran (2020 edition) points to the idea that there is a "soul wound" which refers to the psychological and spiritual effects of colonisation and how healing needs to be done individually and in a collective way, using culturally resonant approaches. In a similar manner, Karina Walters et al. (2021) suggests the "Indigenist Stress-Coping Model" which encompasses cultural resilience, spirituality and healing relationships with community. This demonstrates that Indigenous trauma healing is a holistic and whole-of-life approach, not only for psychological trauma but also for losses of culture. All of these elements support an interpretation of Ceremony as a story of Indigenous healing that begins with the process of reclaiming a cultural identity, of telling stories, and of engaging in ceremony, rather than through a Western medical process.

Narrative, Storytelling and Cultural Memory

Throughout the postcolonial world, narrative or storytelling is recognized as a central way of cultural memory and healing. According to Yan Okhtavianus Kalampung (2024), the narrative is a form of testimony that allows the marginalised communities to express their experiences of trauma that are not found in history. He emphasizes that stories are an alternative form of memory archive that can enable communities to claim their histories and identities. Similarly, Jennifer Wenzel (2020) explores how narrative forms can challenge colonial narratives by bringing together ecological and cultural knowledge, resulting in a re-imagining of

relationships between people, land and history. She emphasizes the importance of narrative in the creation of other knowledges that are resistant to colonialism.

Colonial Epistemology, and Epistemic Disobedience

Coloniality has been one of the areas that have been central to recent discussions of knowledge systems and power, particularly in relation to Indigenous knowledge systems. S. Aníbal Quijano (2020 reprint discussions) defines coloniality as 'power structures that persist from colonialism and continue to affect knowledge, culture and identity. His work highlights the Eurocentric epistemologies over Indigenous knowledge. Further, Walter D. Mignolo (2021) proposes that the decolonization process entails "epistemic disobedience", which means challenging the dominant knowledge systems and asserting other knowledges. He notes literature can be a site of resistance to such power structures. Similarly, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2021 edition) states that dominant research practices remain rooted in power dynamics, and offers research practices that focus on Indigenous voices. She emphasizes the importance of recovering the power of production of knowledge as a resistance practice. These theoretical speculations are important in the context of *Ceremony*, which can be read as a form of epistemic resistance that challenges the literary forms of the West and validates Indigenous worldviews, demonstrating the power of narrative within the process of decolonising knowledge.

Community, Resilience and Healing

There has been recent recognition of the role of community and collective resilience in responding to the impact of colonial trauma. Michael Yellow Bird (2021) suggests decolonization is an individual and collective process that seeks to re-balance culture and achieve justice. He emphasizes the importance of mindfulness and cultural practices in building resilience in Indigenous communities. Likewise, Bonnie Duran et al. (2020) explore community-based approaches to reducing health inequities among Indigenous people that incorporate cultural values and traditions into healing practices. They show that community-based interventions are more beneficial than individualised methods for well-being. Additionally, Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart (2021) builds on her previous research on historical trauma by highlighting the role of collective healing strategies that include cultural revitalisation and intergenerational knowledge-sharing. She suggests that healing trauma requires recognition of past injustices and promoting strength through community. These insights contribute to the argument that *Ceremony* is a novel that emphasises collective healing, in which Tayo's healing is inherently linked with reconnecting with his community, culture and land.

War Trauma, Colonial Violence and Psychological Dislocation

Recent research has brought to light the intersection of trauma and violence as a significant aspect of Indigenous trauma and identity disintegration. It is important to acknowledge that colonial violence continues to be part of the communities' traumas today because of the destruction of Indigenous identities, argues Amy Lonetree (2020). She says that institutions, such as the military, can create colonial dynamics and exacerbate stress and trauma for Indigenous communities (Lonetree, 2020). Building on this, Joseph P. Gone (2021) states that Indigenous veterans experience a unique form of trauma that is more challenging than that of non-Indigenous veterans due to cultural disconnection and marginalisation (Gone 2021). Furthermore, Bonnie Duran et al. (2020) emphasize the importance of recognizing that trauma experienced by Indigenous people is social and is linked to socio-political conditions, and that healing must address individual and systemic trauma (Duran et al., 2020). These revelations are essential to an understanding of *Ceremony*, in which Tayo's trauma from the war is interwoven with the history of colonialism, which shapes Tayo's identity and mental health.

Resistance, Sovereignty, and Indigenous Political Thought

There is an increasing focus on the relationship between resistance and sovereignty and on the significance of 'self-determination' in postcolonial contexts. Taiaiake Alfred (2020) calls for decolonisation to go beyond colonial state structures and be guided by Indigenous values and governance (Alfred, 2020). Similarly, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2022) highlights the significance of resistance's foundation in everyday practices of cultural revitalisation, that serve Indigenous communities and are a response to colonialism (Simpson, 2022). Further, Audra Simpson (2021) explores the idea of "refusal" as a political tactic, suggesting Indigenous peoples can assert sovereignty through refusal of colonialism and the assertion of Indigenous forms of governance (Simpson, 2021). The same is true with *Ceremony*, which is not presented in a political manner but rather as a cultural assertion and spiritual renewal, in keeping with other Indigenous strategies of sovereignty and self-determination.

Research Methodology

Overview

This research seeks to be qualitative in order to grasp the dynamics of decolonizing narrative and healing trauma in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*. It is suitable for this study because qualitative textual analysis allows for a detailed analysis of its thematic, symbolic and narrative aspects. The study is interested in the ways in which Silko's narrative, ceremony, and Indigenous ways of knowing challenge Western dominant ideologies and provide a way for healing and building of identity. The goal of this research is to contribute to the field of postcolonial literature, trauma and indigenous resistance by critically engaging with primary sources and secondary readings.

Data Collection Method

The primary data sources for this study are mainly textual data from primary and secondary data. The research will focus on the main text being analyzed – Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1987). Secondary data is gathered from academic journals, books, and other credible sources published from 2020-2025 related to postcolonial theory, Indigenous studies, trauma theory and narrative analysis. Use online academic information sources, such as Google Scholar, JSTOR and ResearchGate to check validity and credibility of sources. The secondary sources are selected based on the relevance to the research question, theoretical fit and academic rigor. This will allow the researcher to explore a wide range of critical approaches, and consequently, a multi-faceted exploration of the novel's decolonization, trauma and identity.

Research Design

This study is qualitative and interpretative, which aims to do a thematic and textual analysis. The research design is descriptive and analytical in nature which aims at describing the ideas and meanings rather than quantitative data. Close reading is used to identify and analyze the themes of colonial oppression, cultural dislocation, trauma, healing and identity. The study also compares other interpretations to grasp the research in its broader context. This will provide for the in-depth study of the use of literary elements in the portrayal of Indigenous resistance and healing, such as symbolism, narrative structure and character. The interpretive design also enables reflexivity and flexibility in analysis to respond to the complexities of the text.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical approach used in this research is postcolonial theory which is a critical perspective to understand the impact of colonialism in cultural, identity and representational practice. The theory explores the legacy of colonial power relations in different cultures, knowledge and language, beyond the formal colonial rule. A framework is used in this study to explore how Silko's *Ceremony* disrupts colonial narratives and how it identifies Indigenous voices. Parts of trauma theory and Indigenous epistemology are also incorporated in the analysis. This theoretical framework enables an examination of the psychological and cultural effects of colonialism, while emphasising the potential for literature to be used as a means of resistance and healing.

Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial theory examines the cultural, political and psychological impact of colonialism with a focus on the ways in which power is used to construct identities and representations. It explores the concept of hybridity, otherness, mimicry and resistance which are central to understanding the dynamics of a colonised society. It also questions the hegemony of the production of knowledge in the West and seeks to restore the subaltern point of view and history. The legacy of colonial power today is reflected in the work of postcolonial theorists like Frantz Fanon, Edward Said and Homi K. Bhabha. Postcolonial theory gives attention to literature's function in resisting the dominant discourse by subversion and alternative narrative. It also highlights the need to affirm culture and the reconstruction of identity in post-colonial settings. Postcolonial theory is used to analyze power, cultural and identity in postcolonial texts in literary analysis.

Analysis And Discussion

Overview

Indigenous and postcolonial literary analysis of *Ceremony* by Leslie Marmon Silko that examines the use of narrative, storytelling and memory as decolonizing and healing strategies. It is not only an Indigenous experience, it challenges colonial discourses and re-establishes identities, trauma and resistance. The study analyzes how Silko subverts the structures of the Western narrative by weaving in the use of oral storytelling, ceremonial culture and the mythical forms of Laguna Pueblo culture. Tayo's story is examined as a process of

personal and community healing – similar to the process of Indigenous people fighting against erasure, fragmentation and trauma caused by colonialism and war. It is also evident in the analysis how Silko uses non-linear narrative, symbolism of place, and embedded myths to reassert Indigenous knowledges. To sum up, in short, *Ceremony* is a space for decolonizing storytelling, in which storytelling is a means of survival, resistance, and reconstruction of identity.

Storytelling to break from colonial linearity

In *Ceremony*, Leslie Marmon Silko's work is a pointblank rejection of Western ideas of narrative chronology, using Indigenous story-telling techniques. The book does not begin in linear time, but rather in a disjointed way, like the way that Indigenous oral stories do. One of the main story claims is “the story was already beginning before the beginning” (Silko, *Ceremony*), a Native way of thinking about time, which is circular. The upending of Western time is significant because it challenges the colonial literary norms of order, cause and effect, and historical containment. Instead, Silko builds his narratives as an interactive, dynamic, and ever-evolving process that combines the past, present, and future. In this way, storytelling becomes a site for cultural survival and Indigenous identity is in constant re-formation. The shape of the storytelling technique itself is political, because it defies the colonial demand for unity and coherence, which is expressed in fragmentation, and the worldview of the Indigenous subject.

Oral Tradition as a Mechanism of Cultural Survival

Silko uses oral tradition as a narrative element throughout *Ceremony*, and storytelling as a way to preserve Indigenous knowledge systems. Silko's novel is often interrupted by stories such as the legend of Thought-Woman, who is referred to as the creator of stories. Silko writes, “She is sitting in her room thinking of a story now” (Silko, *Ceremony*), highlighting the process of story-making. This shows that storytelling is an ongoing, collective process for Indigenous people. Indigenous literature scholars suggest that oral traditions act as sites of cultural memory that endure colonialism. In the book, these embedded narratives steer Tayo through his healing journey, connecting him with ancestral knowledge that colonial schooling sought to eradicate. As such, storytelling emerges as a decolonizing practice that reinstates cultural connectedness, rather than assimilation into Western conventions of narrative.

Healing through Narrative and Psychological Reintegration

In *Ceremony*, storytelling becomes a healing process, as in Tayo's psychological disintegration following World War II. His illness is not cured through Western medical language, but through narrative reintegration through Indigenous cosmology. At one point in the novel, it is stated, “He was not crazy; he was just lost” (Silko, *Ceremony*), which reclassifies psychological symptoms as a loss of connection to the spirit world. As such, healing is not individualistic but narrative-led, where healing the story is healing the self.

Land-Based Storytelling and Indigenous Epistemology

Silko's decolonizing narrative approach is firmly grounded in land-based narratives. In *Ceremony*, landscapes are more than backgrounds to narrative events. The desert, rivers and mountains are infused with memory and meaning, and are integral to the narrative structure. Tayo's recovery is intertwined with his return to the land, which is a space for story. The novel highlights that “the land remembers everything” (Silko, *Ceremony*), implying that memory is not just human, but environmental. This is consistent with Indigenous epistemologies, which are based on relational engagement with the world. Silko troubles colonial boundaries of nature and culture through land-based narrative. The story is embedded in geography, thus emphasising the need for decolonisation through a return to land as the repository of Indigenous knowledge.

Reclamation and Resistance to Identity Loss

The fourth aspect of decolonizing narrative in *Ceremony* is resisting identity erasure through reclaiming stories. Through Tayo's experiences, we see Indigenous identity is reformed through participation in stories that were denied by colonialism. The novel emphasises the necessity of remembering and recovering the stories that colonialism attempted to eradicate for survival. Silko suggests that in the absence of story, identity is untangled by colonialism. In the ceremonial stories, Tayo understands his suffering through an Indigenous cosmology, rather than his individual failings. Healing leads to reintegration and cultural revitalisation. In reasserting story as identity, Silko affirms narrative as an Indigenous sovereign act, in which the skill of telling and re-telling is an act of survival, resistance and healing.

The disruption of the Text and the spreading of colonization

Fragmentation is another key aspect of Silko's decolonised narrative style in *Ceremony*, mirroring the impact of colonialism. The novel is not linear, but rather an exploration of time and memory and myth and experience. This text is disembodied and broken apart to mirror Indigenous identity in the colonial context, where history has been disembodied. For example, repetitive non-linear expressions such as “the story was becoming part of him” (Silko, *Ceremony*) remind readers that identity is not simply a product of linear sequence, but continual storytelling processes. In contrast, Silko claims Indigenous time is fluid, rich, and continuous. Ritual and memory are brought together in the ceremony and it becomes a metaphor for the healing through the act of storytelling. In this circular story, Silko is not only decolonising narratives, he is also recovering from Indigenous knowledge systems as a legitimate source of knowledge and understanding of reality.

War Trauma as Psychological and Cultural Rupture

Trauma is presented as personal psychological trauma in *Ceremony*, as well as cultural trauma resulting from the effects of colonialism and war. As a World War II veteran, Tayo experiences severe psychological instability, in which his traumas from war continually intersect with his native identity. His difficulty in distinguishing between the past and the present is an indicator of the trauma that the novel suggests is a detachment from self and community. Silko reinforces this when Tayo feels that “his mind was scattered like the wind” (Silko, *Ceremony*), representing his fragmented state of mind. This is not an isolated feeling but one that is connected to colonial history, already fractured Indigenous communities. The war is a continuation of colonial oppression, which institutionalises dehumanising treatment of Indigenous soldiers while demanding their loyalty to the same empire. Thus, the novel's trauma is personal, historical and systemic. Thus, healing does not just occur at the personal level but is a reengagement with culture and community. Silko presents Tayo's trauma to show that individual trauma is connected to colonial contexts that create it.

Trauma as Collective Historical Memory

Silko also extends the notion of trauma to present it as collective rather than individual, connecting Tayo's trauma to collective memory of Indigenous displacement and violence. The novel implies that colonialism has had a lasting impact on Indigenous consciousness, in which trauma is passed on through generations of stories, silence, and cultural upheaval. In this sense, Tayo is not only traumatised by war, but also by the historical trauma that precedes him. This is echoed in the story's frequent references to land dispossession, treaty violations and cultural assimilation. Silko subtly reinforces this collective aspect in lines like “the old stories were still there, waiting” (Silko, *Ceremony*), which implies that memories remain even when forgotten. The novel, then, locates trauma within Indigenous collective identity, in which the past is ever-present. Healing, then, involves collective remembering, not personal forgetting. Through blending myths and ancestor stories, Silko indicates that healing happens when cultural memory is reactivated, allowing for past experiences to return and reclaim their present meaning.

Identity Fragmentation and Colonialism

A component of trauma in *Ceremony* is the fragmentation that Tayo feels in response to his assimilation of both colonial and Indigenous cultures. This is an example of the tension between the Western identity imposed on him through education, war and social norms and expectations and the Indigenous identity that stresses connectedness and spirituality. Tayo's inability to reconcile these creates a feeling of dislocation, in which he feels like an outsider in both cultures. Silko presents this in Tayo's confusion and disorientation when he perceives the world is changing. The novel suggests that colonialism produces this fragmentation, putting Indigenous people in a paradoxical situation – they are required to work but are not given the benefits. This causes a psychological fragmentation and trauma. However, Silko does not suggest that the fragmentation is permanent; rather, it can be transformative. The narrative implies that rebuilding identity is only possible by breaking from colonially-imposed identity categories, adopting Indigenous forms of identification. Thus, trauma can be seen as destructive and creative.

Trauma as Transformed into Spiritual Awareness

In the end, Silko presents trauma in *Ceremony* as both devastating and transformable through Indigenous knowledge systems that allow for understanding trauma from a spiritual perspective. Far from eradicating Tayo's trauma, it is transformed by ceremonial knowledge, and he is able to understand that his own trauma is part of his community's trauma and the disharmony brought on by colonialism. This is the case in his growing

awareness of his trauma's connection to a larger spiritual and historical context. Silko's novel suggests that trauma cannot be eradicated but understood cosmologically. Tayo's epiphany often takes place outside, as he begins to realise that human trauma is linked with environmental and spiritual imbalances. Silko implies that trauma is cured by understanding its significance through Indigenous cosmologies that emphasise harmony, connectedness and renewal. Trauma, then, is a way of learning. Trauma is therefore integrated into a healing process that sees Indigenous identity reconstructed through the renewal of spirituality and ceremony.

Narrative Resistance of Colonial Epistemology

In her novel *Ceremony*, Leslie Marmon Silko offers storytelling as a key strategy of Indigenous resistance to colonial epistemologies that aim to suppress or distort Indigenous identities. The novel presents a challenge to Western ways of knowing by privileging oral culture, mythology and non-linear narrative structures over rational, linear historiography. This work is part of the narrative resistance seen in the way that Silko weaves Indigenous stories into the text, where storytelling is not an addendum, but integral to understanding. The refrain that stories "were all that was left" (Silko, *Ceremony*) is a reminder that cultural preservation relies on the transmission of stories. By doing so, Silko asserts Indigenous sovereignty over knowledge and history, thereby legitimating Indigenous ways of knowing.

Ceremony as Collective Cultural Resistance

The notion of ceremony itself is a major act of resistance in the novel as it represents the collective ways in which Indigenous identity is sustained. Silko stresses that healing ceremonies are communal rather than individual acts that re-establish harmony in the community and the land. Tayo's involvement in ceremonies symbolises his return to Indigenous cultural forms that were targeted by colonialism. The novel hints that "the ceremony was still going on" (Silko, *Ceremony*), suggesting that cultural healing is an ongoing process. Ceremony serves as a metaphor for survival, in which storytelling, ritual and participation all contribute to the maintenance of Indigenous identity. This communal aspect of resistance upends Western individualism with its focus on relationality and interdependence. Silko demonstrates that ceremony is a way to survive, not in isolation, but collectively reaffirming Indigenous ways of life and values. Thus, resistance can be found in the daily cultural practices that preserve continuity in the face of colonialism.

Identity Reconstruction through Spiritual and Narrative Reclamation

Ultimately, Silko offers Indigenous identity reconstruction as a process centred on spiritual and narrative reclamation. Tayo's journey in the novel represents his reconnection with Indigenous cosmology, which sees identity as relational, spiritual and ecological rather than static and individual. He shows how colonialism fractures identity but Indigenous narrative offers means for reconciliation. Through contemplating his role in a greater spiritual order, Tayo comes to adopt a reconstructed identity that is no longer traumatised by colonialism. Silko implies that identity is not recovered through denial of trauma but rather through its reframing by Indigenous knowledge systems. This process is facilitated by storytelling, ceremony and land, which act as decolonizing agents. For Silko, identity construction is an ongoing spiritual renewal, and resistance is about both challenging colonialism and reconstructing Indigenous ways of being.

Resisting through Time and History

Silko establishes resistance with her temporal recasting, which ruptures colonial history that places Indigenous cultures in the past. In *Ceremony*, time is cyclical and connected to memory, myth and experience, not progressive or linear. This temporal understanding subverts colonial framings of Indigenous cultures as "vanishing" or "primitive" and their endurance. Tayo's healing moments demonstrate this subversion of time, as his experiences, while not linear, move back and forth in time, between the past, present and future, and between the war and the past, which suggests trauma is not linear. The narrative also implies that "the past is always present" (Silko, *Ceremony*), which means that history is always impacting identity and consciousness. Silko's rejection of colonial time establishes Indigenous time as an epistemologically valid conception of history as something that is being reactivated in the present through memory and narrative. This reorganisation of time is a subversion because it does not accord with colonial authority over historical narratives, and asserts Indigenous authority over historical experience and knowledge.

Discussion of the study

This study analysis reveals that there is no separation of trauma from narrative and decolonization in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, rather they are integrated in the rich narrative space provided in the book. The study of all of the objectives reveals that trauma is not just psychological trauma, but is connected to the

historical paths of colonialism, war and dispossession. The divided identity of Tayo stands as a symbol of the broken identities of Indigenous people who have experienced language, land, and cultural erasure and disruption. Additionally, the analysis reveals how Silko's narrative style is challenging the Western literary canon by foregrounding Indigenous narrative frameworks, circular time and ceremony. The narrative strategies are not just stylistic, but also decolonizing practices that reconfigure Indigenous knowledges in the novel. This commentary notes how recovery occurs in the novel, through the integration of narratives, which serve as avenues by which the novel's characters can recover identity and memory. It is important to make this point again: *Ceremony* is a novel but also a de-colonial endeavor that challenges the dominant narratives of trauma and identity. The study validates that narrative can indeed be a transformational space where the trauma is not only redefined, but resisted, and reframed as a cultural survival.

Conclusion

The results of this study demonstrate that Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* is a powerful literary work of decolonization, trauma healing and Indigenous identity building. As the reading proceeds it is evident that Silko challenges the Western literary conventions and incorporates Indigenous literary strategies that emphasize the importance of recurrence, connections, and integrated identities that are spiritually. Tayo's life experiences demonstrate that trauma is not only an individual psychological disorder, but a historical and collective trauma, shaped by colonialism, war and cultural trauma. Healing is ultimately through restoration of Indigenous knowledge, ceremony and land – his subsequent healing reveals this. The analysis reveals that Silko's narration makes the act of telling a story political one, and reclaiming a voice of the Indigenous people is one of life and death. Thus, *Ceremony* is a literary and cultural intervention which redefines trauma, identity and healing in postcolonial discourse.

In addition, the novel's conclusion makes it clear that Silko's story is a part of the novel's decolonizing urge. *Ceremony* destabilises western thinking centred on rationality, linear time and the individual through its use of oral storytelling, mythic elements and non-linear time. Rather, it emphasizes the Indigenous thoughts that are relational, collective and spiritual. This healing process from the novel comes to reflect the theme of the novel that identities are not fixed, but are constantly redefined by interactions with story, land and community. The research also reveals that healing in *Ceremony* is related to the continuity of culture, with storytelling as a way to remember and to recover identity. This is indicative of the idea that Indigenous literature is not only a representation of but also is a force for Indigenous cultural survival and resistance. The novel thus recovers a narrative agency that affirms Indigenous voices on histories and experiences.

Suggestions and Recommendations

The research suggests that more comparative narratives between *Ceremony* and other Indigenous or postcolonial texts would be useful to understand more about the decolonization of other Indigenous and postcolonial contexts. Additionally, scholars might investigate how Indigenous narratives and present-day trauma studies are interrelated, particularly with respect to loss of environment and the climate crisis. It also calls for interdisciplinary research in literature, psychology and Indigenous studies to deepen understanding from a non-Western perspective about healing practices. Expansion of research on the nature and development of oral traditions and their transformation into modern literature would also provide insights into the persistence of the Indigenous knowledge systems.

References

- Aiello, A. (2021). *Coloniality of power and knowledge in contemporary discourse*.
- Alfred, T. (2020). *Peace, power, righteousness: An Indigenous manifesto* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (2002). *The empire writes back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Bhabha, H. K. (2020). *The location of culture* (Reprint ed.). Routledge.
- Brave Heart, M. Y. H. (2021). Historical trauma and Indigenous healing. *Journal of Indigenous Wellbeing*.
- Cajete, G. (2021). *Native science: Natural laws of interdependence*. Clear Light Publishers.
- Clark, M., Couzens, V., & Neale, J. (2023). Revealing story and healing rifts: The potential of post-colonial placemaking. *Journal of Urban Cultural Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08111146.2023.2218079>
- Coulthard, G. S. (2020). *Red skin, white masks: Rejecting the colonial politics of recognition*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Crenshaw, K. (2020). *Mapping the margins: Intersectionality and identity politics*. Stanford Law Review.

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

- Das, D., Guha, S., Brubaker, J., & Semaan, B. (2024). The colonial impulse of natural language processing: Identity-based biases in sentiment analysis tools. arXiv. <https://arxiv.org/abs/2401.10535>
- Deer, S. (2022). *The beginning and end of rape: Confronting sexual violence in Native America* (Updated ed.). University of Minnesota Press.
- Deloria, V. (2020). *God is red: A native view of religion* (Updated ed.). Fulcrum Publishing.
- Duran, B., Oetzel, J., Lucero, J., Jiang, Y., & Novins, D. (2020). Community-based participatory research and Indigenous health. *American Journal of Public Health*, 110(S2), S199–S204.
- Duran, E. (2020). *Healing the soul wound: Counseling with American Indians and other Native peoples* (Updated ed.). Teachers College Press.
- Evans-Campbell, T. (2020). Historical trauma in American Indian/Native Alaska communities. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*.
- Fish, J. N., et al. (2024). To heal, grow, and thrive: Engaging Indigenous paradigms and perspectives in developmental science. *American Psychologist*. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11681947/>
- Freire, P. (2020). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (50th anniversary ed.). Bloomsbury.
- Gone, J. P. (2021). Reconsidering Indigenous trauma and mental health. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 58(2), 218–236.
- Grande, S. (2021). *Red pedagogy: Native American social and political thought*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Hartman, S. (2020). *Wayward lives, beautiful experiments*. W. W. Norton.
- Howe, L. (2021). *Seeing red: Hollywood's Pixeled Indians*. Michigan State University Press.
- Kalampung, Y. O. (2024). Postcolonial literary testimony and trauma studies. *Gradiva Journal*, 63(10).
- Kimmerer, R. W. (2021). *Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants*. Milkweed Editions.
- Kovach, M. (2021). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations, and contexts* (2nd ed.). University of Toronto Press.
- Lee, E., & Johnstone, M. (2022). Resisting a postcolonial construction of historical trauma and healing. *Critical Sociology*, 48(4–5), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08969205211052326>
- Leetsch, J. (2024). New ways of telling true stories: Ecological solidarities across post/colonial worlds. *Postcolonial Text*, 19(1–2).
- Lonetree, A. (2020). *Decolonizing museums: Representing Native America in national and tribal museums*. University of North Carolina Press.
- Mignolo, W. D. (2021). *The politics of decolonial investigations*. Duke University Press.
- Ong, W. J. (1982). *Orality and literacy: The technologizing of the word*. Methuen.
- Quijano, A. (2020). Coloniality of power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America. *Nepantla: Views from South*, 1(3), 533–580.
- Richardson, C. (2020). Healing and rebalancing in the aftermath of colonial violence. *Genealogy*, 5(3), 69. <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy5030069>
- Simpson, A. (2021). *Mohawk interruptus: Political life across the borders of settler states*. Duke University Press.
- Simpson, L. B. (2022). *As we have always done: Indigenous freedom through radical resistance*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Smith, A. (2021). *Conquest: Sexual violence and American Indian genocide*. Duke University Press.
- Smith, L. T. (2021). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples* (3rd ed.). Zed Books.
- Sturm, C. (2020). *Becoming Indian: The struggle over Cherokee identity in the twenty-first century*. School for Advanced Research Press.
- TallBear, K. (2021). *Native American DNA: Tribal belonging and the false promise of genetic science*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Taylor, D. (2020). *The archive and the repertoire: Performing cultural memory in the Americas*. Duke University Press.
- Trouillot, M.-R. (2021). *Silencing the past: Power and the production of history*. Beacon Press.
- Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2021). Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1(1), 1–40.
- Vizenor, G. (2020). *Manifest manners: Narratives on postindian survivance*. University of Nebraska Press.

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

- Walters, K. L., Johnson-Jennings, M., Stroud, S., Rasmus, S., Charles, B., & John, S. (2021). Growing from our roots: Strategies for developing culturally grounded health promotion interventions. *American Journal of Public Health*, 111(S3), S331–S338.
- Whyte, K. P. (2020). Indigenous climate change studies. *WIREs Climate Change*, 11(1), e603.
- Wenzel, J. (2020). *The dismal science: How thinking like an economist undermines community*. University of Chicago Press.
- Yellow Bird, M. (2021). Decolonizing and Indigenous mindfulness. *Mindfulness*, 12(1), 1–12.
- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (2002). *The empire writes back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Fattah, M. A. M. (2022). Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony: Tayo's healing quest. *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies*, 4(4), 247–256. <https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v4i4.1139>
- Saqib, G. S., & Murtaza, G. (2023). Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony as counter discourse of American Indians. *Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review*, 7(3), 836–845. [https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2023\(7-III\)72](https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2023(7-III)72)
- Tosam, D. (2025). Hybridity and identity in Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony. *Journal of Validation Technology*, 31(2), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/jvtnetwork.v31i2.134>
- Žiláková, J. (2015). *Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony: Story as a means of healing*. University of Prešov.
- Özkan, A., & Geçikli, K. (2025). Nature, narrative, and healing: Ecotherapy in Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony.
- Duran, E. (2006). *Healing the soul wound: Counseling with American Indians and other Native peoples*. Teachers College Press.
- Krupat, A. (1989). *The voice in the margin: Native American literature and the canon*. University of California Press.
- Lawrence, B. (2004). "Real" Indians and others: Mixed-blood urban Native peoples and Indigenous nationhood. University of Nebraska Press.
- Ong, W. J. (1982). *Orality and literacy: The technologizing of the word*. Methuen.
- Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples* (2nd ed.). Zed Books.
- Brave Heart, M. Y. H. (1998). The historical trauma response among Natives and its relationship with substance abuse: A Lakota illustration. *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 35(1), 7–13.
- Deloria, V. (2003). *God is red: A native view of religion* (3rd ed.). Fulcrum Publishing.