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In-between History and Memory: Leslie Marmon Silko's Fictional World

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Abstract

Leslie Marmon Silko, an American Indian writer, is one of the pioneers of literary renaissance in Native American literature. Her works are focused on cultural identity, the Native people's struggle to preserve their past and culture by means of storytelling. This article focuses on Silko's fictional world as both fiction and history. Moreover, it deals with the cultural trauma ingrained in the Indigenous people's collective memories, which have shaped Silko's imagined geography in her works. Regarding the theoretical axis of discussions concerning history, historiography and emplotment of history, this article uses theories of Hayden White to explore the place of historiography in narrative. Furthermore, it applies the critical arguments concerning cultural trauma proposed by Jeffrey C. Alexander. The research proves that Silko and her characters are haunted not by the desire for history, or the past itself; but rather, they are haunted by the desire for the act of historical recollection and the process of remembering and surviving. Finally, this article shows that Silko, as a historical figure with certain literary-historiographical ambitions, reconstructs her cultural heritage and cultural identity through storytelling and fictionalizes history to give voice to her silenced land, past and history, and dismantle the dominant Euro-American historiography.

Keywords

Cultural Trauma; Emplotment; Historiography; Memory; Storytelling.

1. Introduction

Contemporary Native American writers have become aware, reintroduced their fires, and breathed into their novels an Indigenous voice for national independence, cultural perseverance, and social heterogeneity. Despite the fact that these writers' minds are preoccupied with different kinds of trauma, they have tried to find a remedy for the pains and suffering of the Indigenous people and, at the same time, to revive their lost past.

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The American Indians emphasize the role of storytelling and storytellers in their life. The storyteller plays a significant role in Native American culture; he/she takes what he/she tells from experiences whether they are his/her own or that recounted by others. The storyteller relies on memory and creates a chain of tradition that passes on an incident from generation to generation. In this regard, this article deals with Leslie Marmon Silko (1948-), as a Laguna storyteller, her fictional world and the way she adapted fiction to express the experience of political awakening on reconnection with Indigenous land, community, written and oral literature.

The first questions that come to mind concerning Native American are related to the subject who is doing the writing; the intention to write and what the subjects have to say about this. Native American history is a field dominated by white, male historians who rarely ask or care what the Indians they study have to say about their work. The Native American writers write about themselves, their history etc. Because of this, they started to write their own history in a different way. On the one hand, the works of Native American writers are written with the aim to dismantle and decentralize the non-Indian stereotypical representations of Indigenous people, and on the other hand, to revitalize the past and revive their identity. They write to change the Euro-American perception about their history, which has been written through the lenses of non-Indians. A successful story re-creates the sacred order of the people in the universe, affirming what Leslie Marmon Silko calls a "communal truth" (*Yellow Woman* 21) that renews the world. Native American literature makes the Indigenous people aware about the inaccurate histories and negative stereotypes. The main points in the works written about Leslie Marmon Silko's works, which include a few books, dissertations, theses and essays, are that they dealt with Silko's works from postcolonial, ecocritical and feminist perspectives. Moreover, they focused on issues like trauma of war, Native myth, socio-historical contexts, race, gender and culture. None of these works dealt with Silko's works from Hayden White's perspective that is historiography or Jeffrey Alexander's (1947-) arguments regarding cultural trauma.

2. Hayden White and Historiography

In *The Writing of History* (1988), the French scholar Michel de Certeau (1925-1986) states: "What we initially call history is nothing more than a narrative" (287). One of the significant arguments in the philosophy of history since the 1960s has been whether the discipline of history is essentially a narrative mode of knowing, understanding, explaining and reconstructing the past. Hayden White (1928-2-18), in *Metahistory*, which had a great impact on many different fields such as new philosophy of history, literary and cultural studies, in social sciences, etc., focuses on the place historical imagination has in historiography. He argues that all historiography contains an element

of fiction, and places history and literature on the same level. In other words, the components of the historical narrative are true, but at the same time, historiography contains an element of fiction. For him, the historical monuments generally take a form of narrative in the coherent and logical reproduction of events and successive events; in fact, all of the historical explanations are in essence blatant and literary. He interprets history as a narrative or literary genre, challenging the claim of historical texts to achieve truth and objectivity. According to White, the historical narratives are language-based stories that are more invented and in a more literary structure than in science. The focus of White's theory is on the nature of the narrative of history, which is interpreted as meta-history (*Metahistory* 233).

White defines the historical work as a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that classifies past structures and processes in order to explain what they were by representing them as models (*Metahistory* 233). A historian takes events that have happened and makes a story out of them. White, when viewing history and literature as competitive narrations of/about the past, concludes that narrative representations do not consist of mere factual statements and arguments; but rather, of poetic and rhetorical elements that help transform the list of facts into a narrative. That is why White asserted:

> A historical narrative is thus necessarily a mixture of adequately and inadequately explained events, a congeries of established and inferred facts, at once a representation that is an interpretation and interpretation that passes for an explanation of the whole process mirrored in the narrative. (*Tropics of Discourse* 51)

White argues that it is the narrative structure of historiography, which gives meaning to the past. For him, the past–history–and history are not the same and historiography is a literary enterprise; as a result, narrative form becomes the determining factor in understanding its data. In contrast to literary fictions, the historical texts are written about the incidents that exist outside the consciousness of the historiographer and cannot be invented. Historical discourse makes its subject in the very procedure of speaking about it, rather than exposing pre-existing relations among the events they consider, historians themselves imbue events with meaning by projecting a narrative "emplotment" (*Metahistory* x) on the past, choosing its basic form and "tropological figuration" based on aesthetic principles (37). White believes that we have an innate desire to project the qualities of narrative–such as coherence, integrity, fullness and the closure of 'an image of life' – onto real events, although the former features can only be imaginary (*Content of the Form* 24–25). According to him, any historian has to meet this problem of how to represent and re-create the past. White talks about

"specifically historiographical representation", calls the nineteenth-century classic historians whom he analyzed, in *Metahistory*, as "great narrativizers of historical reality" and suggested that […] literature is interested in "representing reality realistically" ("Old Question" in pages 392, 395, 398). White clarified how historians inevitably chose the narrative form in which to "emplot" their records of past events. He argued that events have no intrinsic meaning: meaning can be attributed to them only within the value system of a definite context; and that context in turn takes its meaning as well from another context, and so in an infinite retreat. He undermines the scientific nature of historical investigation and turning it into literature. According to him, historiography includes "emplotment"–organization of the historical material into narrative genres known to us from literature. White has notably identified that historical narratives are "verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much *invented* as found" (*Tropics of Discourse* 82) and that the historical work is "a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse" (*Metahistory* 2). He used these statements to explain his comparison of historiography to literature. White claims, "history is rather a craft-like discipline […] governed by convention and custom rather than by methodology and theory" ("Response" 243–5). His whole "metahistorical" attempt has been to show that "any historian's account of his or her subject is constrained by *conventions* of language, genre, mode […] argument, and a host of other cultural and social contextual considerations" (245). White states that the past has no arrangement.

White introduced the term "emplotment" which, according to him, means that the historian and the philosopher of history use conventional narrative forms to bring together and tell a story about the past (Doran 20). The historian or philosopher "*emplots*" the story that he intends to tell about the past. It does not mean that he prefers a kind of story that he thinks best fits the documents in a particular context; but rather to say, the choice of narrative form is a way of "choosing the past." In other words, there are a variety of ways of "emplotting" the same components, none of which can be said be similar to "historical reality" than any other, since historical reality itself is the result of such a "discursive choice" (Doran 21). As far as White's view of narrative is related to "emplotment," the plot creates the tales and, in a reciprocal interaction, the tales create the plot. History is often defined as a study of past events. The past is not very comprehensible, although it might be put together coherently by an imaginative, in the case of a novelist or a filmmaker, or an evidence-seeking mind, as in the case of a historian. The past is available to us only in shreds and shards in form of fragmented recordings presented to us in many modes, such as oral, coins, recordings in reeds and skins, and ancient epic poetry and literature. History can be defined as writings about how one tells the story of what happened rather than a story of what happened. In this sense, any narrative is always and already a metanarrative. To show to what extent the

Euro-American historical discourse concerning the American Indian past and culture is produced in accordance with the discourse of power, one can refer to White's claims about historiography. He considers it as an especially good ground on which to consider the nature of "narration and narrativity" because it is here that men's desire for the "imaginary", the possible, must contest with the imperatives of the real, the actual (*Content of the Form* 4).

3. The Haunted Author and Traumatized Characters

No one can stand outside history. Every person's life in a network of cultural context is haunted by past, history, heritage, tradition, stories and memories, to name just a few. Not only are the writers haunted by the specter of the past but also the characters in their works are haunted in between history and memory. The Euro-American historiography concerning the Native American's past is in line with de-historicizing and acculturation, which turns into a trauma for Native peoples. In this regard, having been haunted by history and past/memory, the process of storytelling in the works of Native American writers is devoted to recounting various kinds of traumas of the past. For instance, in Leslie Marmon Silko's novel, *Ceremony* (1977), Tayo as the central character is haunted by memories of his half-brother, which echoes such an idea that the Native American writers as well are haunted by the past. It is as if neither Silko nor the Native people can free their mind from the specter of the past. Moreover, Tayo is haunted by the shadow of his alcoholic mother, Laura, who moved in and out of his early life, finally leaving him and making him an everlasting orphan following her death. All these are narrated through storytelling:

> I will tell you something about stories,
> [he said]
> They aren't just entertainment.
> Don't be fooled.
> They are all we have, you see, […]
> Their evil is mighty but it can't stand up to our stories. So they try to
> destroy the stories let the stories be confused or forgotten. They would like
> that They would be happy Because we would be defenseless then. (*Ceremony* 20)

By repeating specific words more than five hundred times throughout her works, through which each time the word opens up a new perspective to the Native American culture and history, one could conclude that Silko highlights the significance of the words past, history, memory and storytelling in relation to the Native American life. In the "Introduction" of her collage of stories, *Storyteller,* she states, "the entire culture, all the knowledge, experience, and beliefs, were kept in the human memory of the Pueblo

people in the form of narratives that were told and retold from generation to generation. The people perceived themselves in the world as part of an ancient continuous story composed of innumerable bundles of other stories" (Silko, *Storyteller*, 14). In addition to this, she asserts, "but sometimes what we call 'memory' and what we call 'imagination' are not so easily distinguished" (244). In a similar vein, she highlights the significance and role of memory, storytelling in *Yellow Woman*:

> Ancient Pueblo people depended upon collective memory through successive generations to maintain and transmit an entire culture, a worldview complete with proven strategies for survival. The oral narrative, or story, became the medium through which the complex of Pueblo knowledge and belief was maintained. (20)

Concerning the way Silko recounts and puts emphasis on Pueblo people's "collective memory," one could see to what extent this "collective memory" is haunted by past. In another work titled *The Turquoise Ledge*, Silko repeats the same point and shows the importance of memory, past and storytelling: "All my life at Laguna I was surrounded by people who loved to tell stories because it was through the spoken word and human memory that for thousands of years the Pueblo people had recorded and maintained their entire culture. The stories I loved to hear were part of my early training" (35); or else, "Auntie stared at him the way she always had, reaching inside him with her eyes, calling up the past as if it were his future too, as if things would always be the same for him" (41). Elsewhere she states, "The people said that even in the driest years nobody could ever remember a time when the spring had dried up" (53). It is as if no character could free himself/herself from the burden of the past; hence, one encounters obsessed minds. The course of narration in her works rotates around past and memories of the characters. In addition to this, it reflects to what extent Silko's mind is preoccupied with past which paves the way for the emergence of the narratives of the past.

In *Ceremony*, Silko places Tayo at the focal point of her map, explores his trauma, which extends through time and space and connects to cultural trauma of Native Americans, and global trauma of war. Throughout this novel, the reader repeatedly encounters the process of remembering, thinking about past or the characters who remind each other concerning past. This repetition could be traced in Silko's other works to the extent the reader's mind would be engaged and haunted in/by the past. For instance, one could refer to the repetition of moving backward and forward which is going on in the characters' mind and life. The course of narration rotates around past and memories of the characters. In addition to this, it reflects to what extent Silko's mind is preoccupied with past which paves the way for the emergence of the narratives of the past. Ever since Tayo,

> could *remember*, he had known Auntie's shame for what his mother had done, and Auntie's shame for him. He *remembered* how the white men who were building the new highway through Laguna had pointed at him. They had elbowed each other and winked. He never forgot that, and finally, years later, he understood what it was about white men and Indian women: the disgrace of Indian women who went with them. And during the war Tayo learned about white women and Indian men. (62, emphasis added)

Tayo "even forgot about the picture except sometimes when he tried to remember how she looked" (73). The process of remembering by the characters and the recounting of memories by the writer is not limited to the human life but it touches the land, animals and inanimate objects that have the life of their own for the Native Americans. For example, "the mare whinnied, and he smiled at the way horses remember those who feed them. […] 'The clay is washing away,' she said. 'Nobody has come to paint it since the war. But as long as you remember what you have seen, then nothing is gone. As long as you remember, it is part of this story we have together.' […] 'Remember,' she said, 'remember everything'" (in pages 189, 211, 208). There is a movement from the memories of characters to the memories of the writer and back to the characters and finally to the environment.

Silko in *Storyteller* interlinks short stories and poems with photographs offered to her by her father, which are all about her own family's past. Each picture has a personal touch and familiarity interwoven with each other; hence, another sign of being haunted by the past. Like the photographs in the basket, the subjects are frequently the same, only the details change. Silko invites the reader to share with her a personal as well as mythological, historical and fictional set of memories. As far as a set of personal, mythological, historical and fictional memories preoccupied and haunted Silko's mind, her *Storyteller* could be considered as a means through which she tries to share all the memories and experiences of the past, as well as collective memory of the Indigenous people with the reader. One sees and hears about her father, her sister, Auntie Susie, Grandpa Hank, Uncle Walter, Great Grandmother Anaya, Great Grandfather Marmon, Grandma A'mooh, Aunt Bessie, Great Grandpa Stegner and his brother Bill, Grandma Helen and even old Juana, who raised Grandma Helen. Their photographs and the captions speak louder to give deep meaning of their past golden time. Each photograph tells a story and the story is written in the images. In relation to Native Americans' storytelling tradition, Silko herself begins to tell the story: "I've heard tellers begin 'The way I heard it was …' and then proceed with another story purportedly a version of a story just told but the story they would tell was a wholly separate story, a new story a

part of the continuing which storytelling must be" (*Storyteller* 244). Each story is her story that is Silko's story, and in a sense, is a story of all, which indicates the extent of which the life of the whole community is preoccupied and haunted by past. Silko plays the role of a storyteller who through emplotment "keeps the stories, all the escape stories she says, 'with these stories of ours we can escape almost anything with these stories we will survive.' […] 'The Storytellor's Escape'" (200). *Storyteller* establishes a kind of link of the past-present and future life of the Indigenous people.

For the Native American people, storytelling is a type of verbal activity through which they try to survive. In other words, through storytelling, the Pueblo people as well as the Native American writers rewrite their own history, which is full of the events and stories of haunted and traumatized characters and land. For instance:

> Stories are valuable repositories for details and information of use to future generations; details and information are easier to remember when there is a story associated with them. Stories even served as maps because a person who was lost in the mountains in a snowstorm might see an odd rock formation and remember a story that described the strange rock formation in detail including its location. (Silko, *Turquoise Ledge*, 35-6).

Silko's skill as a writer is that to weave the web of time in which past, present and future are brought together to give the sense of people of her clan as a member of Native American group as well as the member of the human history. In her *Almanac of the Dead* as a work of fiction and political activity, Silko writes about the trauma, showing how the fact is made up from the most fundamental components, and people. She represents an individual story as a whole record of trauma, including individual, political, verifiable, and social implications.

Furthermore, Silko shows how worldwide of trauma is going on. She does not basically want to write about Native American trauma all alone, but rather she tries to dismantle the ideas of 'Local American', 'white', 'African American' inside the story, among the readers, and inside the Euro-American culture, indicating how the victimized, traumatized individuals are one worldwide network joined by the trauma that set off by the witchery and caused by destroyers. In other words, she deals not only with Native Americans or the American community, but also with the whole world, because the *Almanac of the Dead* is a common experience of the trauma caused by the movement. She enumerates the global characteristics and historical changes that have traumatized individuals, society and the nation. This trauma is local and its treatment is specific to that region. Silko introduces the historical values of the cultural metaphor of the string—the main symbol of Laguna cosmology—to show that the trauma is not limited to the

nation itself. The historical, mythological and symbolic features have been gathered in this novel to narrate a new example of history. *The Almanac of the Dead* mediates the personal trauma to connect readers to society. The individual's recognition changes the reader's consciousness and feelings. Instead of remaining in the stage of cultural trauma, Silko evokes the traumatic experiences through the physical pain and suffering of individuals to provoke the sympathy of readers.

Throughout the works of Native American writers, one can see how these writers try to recover the past through storytelling and oral tradition as a historical recollection. For instance, in her fictional world, Silko recounts the ancestors' past, stories and tales that passed on from generation to generation with little modifications because storytelling is a form of history and it is a form of survival too. She believes that these stories have existed since the first humans sat around many years ago and told tales that are recited and retold to educate, or to establish norms of behavior and even to advise and provide information, which was necessary for everyday life, or to simply entertain. The narrative of history is mingled with the fictional plot. History becomes a guarantee of ontological realism, mainly since it is imagined as an incarnation of objectivity, truth and reality. It is parallel to story; in other words, both history and story are in narrative forms. This provides a means by which to authenticate the fictional narrative, which relates to historical narrative. The process of involving the historical structure with the fictional space is characteristic of Native American writers' fiction. History becomes the essential reference in a literary narrative, which is supposed to report what really happened. The fictional narrative is set in motion on top of a history that lies just beneath the surface, a history that is implicit in the course of its recounting.

Storytellers play the role of historiographers; thus, their stories act as a way the people have to recover their past and think of it. To tell, listen, narrate and read the stories is a way to history, to know about a nation's ancestors and learn from them and to make past present in the structure of the story. They relate the people to the environment, which surrounds them. In this regard, Silko writes for the recognition of Native American literature and oral traditions. In her novels, she deals with traditional storytelling. She describes Pueblo storytelling and imagination as a way to reconstruct communal identities and memories. Indigenous cultural traditions have recognized the depth and principles of storytelling as a mediating element of knowing who they are, where they are from, and to what they belong. Silko shares this view, proposing that storytelling is not just entertainment; it is essential to identity, connecting with past, present, and future. She has a close relation to Pueblo oral tradition, stories and culture in general of her native tribe. Stories and storytelling are the channels by means of which the Native American writers retell the story of their ancestors, their ritual ceremonies and history, and at the same time these stories help the native people be in a continues interconnection with each other and their land. Therefore, as the writers give voice to the land and all living and non-living beings through their storytelling, the stories determine the voice of these writers.

4. Cultural Trauma as Collective Memory

The flow of interest in trauma preoccupied the mind of different writers who more or less were entangled in the regional and cultural crisis. In the context of discussions on trauma, one is bound to speak about certain traumatized bodies and point out the specificity of their traumas. Cathy Caruth's account of trauma assumes a linear relationship between a past trauma and a present symptom that always places trauma in the historical past and, further, that sets a linear model of history as normative. Therefore, to write about trauma, in any form of its own, could be considered as a type of historiography in accordance with the writer's ability to emplot the events. In storytelling, the trauma story becomes a proof. Trauma is characterized and recognized by recurring suffering of the incident. Consequently, this shows that to listen to a catastrophe of a trauma is not just to listen to the incident, but rather to hear in the authentication the survivor's departure from it. Historical trauma may to some extent be motivated by a prevention of an encounter or engagement with trans-historical trauma, which definitely brings the feeling that one has lost or lacks what one could not possibly ever have or have had. While large groups of people might have experienced various types of traumas in their history, only certain cases remain alive over many years. A peoples' trauma involves experiences that come to represent their inmost intimidations and fears through feelings of hollowness and discrimination. It reverberates the traumatized past generation's incapacity for enclosing injuries, connected to the shared traumatic event, as well as its failure to communicate the wound to the peoples' confidence and deprivation.

Collective memory is represented and reproduced in narrative form through various means, such as oral storytelling and literature, to name just a few. Through such media and related ritual practices, the stories and myths that set as collective memory function as a basis upon which collective identity rests. In relation to nations, there is no single collective memory. Nevertheless, many voices accomplish some consistent precision. A cultural trauma is a broad response to a disruption in the social structure, happening when one or a chain of apparently interrelated occurrences shakes the foundations of established collective identity. For Jeffrey C. Alexander, "cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" ("Toward a Theory" 1). National or cultural trauma is originated in an event or series of events, but not necessarily in their direct experience. Such an experience is usually mediated, through mass media, for example, which involves a spatial as well as temporal distance between the event and its experience.

Similar to physical or psychic trauma, the articulating discourse surrounding cultural trauma is a process of mediation involving alternative strategies and alternative voices. It is a process, which intends to reconstruct a collective identity through collective representation, as a way of repairing the problem in the social structure. A traumatic gap suggests the need to recount new bases, which includes reinterpreting the past as a means towards reconciling present/future needs. Cultural trauma cannot be defined only as a given historical or social event at the time of its occurrence; rather, it develops into a distinct discourse during long symbolical arguments, dialogues between different groups of witnesses. The discourse of cultural trauma is a possible explanation of what has happened, created in the public sphere and stored in the collective memory. In this discourse, the traumatic event is understood to be a turning point in the history of the community or nation, which particularly changes and forms the meanings people give to themselves and their life point of view. The specialty of cultural trauma as a discourse, for usable past, is that it appears in a condition when a specific community has been conquered and consequently, identities are rigorously impaired or questioned altogether.

Stories and storytelling are one of the ways through which Native Americans privilege and resume their native culture. In this way, they dismantle and resist against the Euro-American dominant discourse, which silenced the voice of the Indigenous people in different ways. Stories and storytelling have close connection with memory. It is fundamental to personal and collective identity and history, and is nevertheless not a simple record of the past, but a repository that protects a nation's personal and cultural history, at the same time it is an interpretative reconstruction of the past of individuals and community. People might remember a trauma concerning their past continuously; hence, a traumatic memory. Not only historical cultural trauma haunted Native American writers' lives but also their works are under the spell of it. One of the common grounds among most of the critical projects done on the Native American writers' fiction is the portrayal of different kinds of trauma. For instance:

> Back in time immemorial, things were different, the animals could talk to human beings and many magical things still happened. He never lost the feeling he had in his chest when she spoke those words, as she did each time she told them stories; and he still felt it was true, despite all they had taught him in school–that long long ago things had been different, and human beings could understand what the animals said, and once the Gambler had trapped the storm clouds on his mountaintop. (Silko *Ceremony* 94-5)

By referring to Tayo, in Silko's *Ceremony*, who suffers a nervous breakdown owing to his failure to solve his identity crisis, one could come to this conclusion that different types of traumas surrendered not only Silko and her characters' life but also her works and her land. One could see to what extent the Native people's tribal ways of life, values, attitudes and traditions are tied to community and the land, as well their relationship with the natural world and communion with the spiritual world. For Native people the land had a life and language of its own, and was the place where generations of family members were born, lived and died, and would be buried. For them, connection to land is a vital component of their identity. When they lost their land, which was so dear for them, as a result, their tribal way of life was changed from a hunting and gathering existence to a capitalistic one. In this new land, the community must become accustomed to new ways of living, eating, interacting, surviving and assimilating for the sake of survival; henceforth, they feel being foreign within their own land. This in turn, becomes a trauma which is in close connection with land; hence, trauma of land. Concerning this, the Native American literature also focuses on trauma of land because of which not only the Native people suffer but the writers, their works and characters suffer; accordingly, a nation will be born that is traumatized and haunted by past memory, history, cultural identity and land. It will be transferred from one generation to the next generation. To free himself/herself from such a trauma, the Native American writer resorts to storytelling by means of which he/she weaves the past, history, mythology, spirituality, tradition, language and identity to preserve his/her culture. Silko shows this in her works, in example:

> What had lasting impact on me was that the old folks told their stories in their own words, in the Laguna language, and that together they stood the test in a high court of an alien culture. Maybe this is where I got the notion that if I could tell the story clearly enough then all that was taken, including the land, might be returned. (*The Turquoise Ledge*, 43)

For most Indigenous aboriginal populations, changes have been imposed or created always through war, colonization, legislation, disease, and industrialization. The confrontation of cultures in the contact zones and the consequential changes are what collectively has come to be known as acculturation. In its simplest meaning, acculturation embraces all the changes that arise following contact between individuals and groups of different cultural backgrounds. De-historicizing and acculturation interact with each other in such a way to transform and assimilate the marginalized groups. In contrast to this, the Native American writers try to revitalize their own ancestral heritage and culture by means of recounting and storytelling in their works. Their storytelling is at odds with the process of Euro-American de-historicizing, acculturation and assimilation, which were imposed on the Indigenous life through education in English, the change of language, intermarriage, to name just a few.

In contrast to such changes, Silko, by means of her writing, gives voice to her ancestral culture and heritage as well as her lost past. In this regard, the questions of cultural survival become important for Native American communities. By re-telling the oral ethnicities as a verbal resistance for the sake of survival, Silko constructs and "emplots", in Hayden White's words, a model of history, in which history consists of the collective memory of firsthand tribal experiences, which is at odds with the predetermined emplotment of Euro-American historiography. She weaves together threads of myth, memory, legend, and history to convey the historical events that have been forgotten or silenced by the dominant culture. Silko aims to subvert those clichéd views of the 'Noble Savage' and the vanishing Indian. Her works are mainly populated by mixed-bloods who struggle to come to terms with both American and Indian ethnicity. She attempts to articulate her identity by rediscovering a sense of place and community. For Silko, "storytelling among the family and clan members served as a group rehearsal of survival strategies that had worked for the Pueblo people for thousands of years. This was the case among the Pueblo people of the southwest and at Laguna Pueblo, where I am from" (*Storyteller* 14). Silko's *Storyteller* is a collection of tribal tales, short stories, personal recollections, and family lore, poems, and family photographs. Together, the collection shows how storytelling is important to the process of connecting the historical and mythical past to the events of the present. Taken, as a whole, *Storyteller* speaks mainly of Laguna Pueblo culture and traditions. Silko links her personal history to cultural history by conveying traditional stories in the voices that transferred them to her, especially those of her grandmother and her aunt, Susie.

The stories are sometimes set in a comparatively contemporary moment; many, however, are set during the legendary past, before events can be placed according to historical time. These legendary stories often feature characters common to Laguna mythology, such as Yellow Woman, Spider Woman, the twin brothers, and coyote. Moreover, in *Ceremony*, Silko writes about the importance of the stories: "I will tell you something about stories, [he said] They aren't just entertainment. Don't be fooled. They are all we have, you see, all we have to fight off illness and death. You don't have anything if you don't have the stories" (20). Elsewhere, she writes, Tayo "made a story for all of them, a story to give them strength. The words of the story poured out of his mouth as if they had substance, pebbles and stone extending to hold the corporal up, to keep his knees from buckling, to keep his hands from letting go of the blanket" (27). Furthermore, she puts emphasis on the role and importance of story and storytelling in another work: "All my life at Laguna I was surrounded by people who loved to tell stories because it was through the spoken word and human memory that for thousands of years the Pueblo people had recorded and maintained their entire culture." (*Turquoise Ledge* 99). Concerning this, one could see how Native American writers, here Silko, reconstruct

the silenced cultural signs as a resistance against the dominant hegemony, which aims at de-historicizing the history of Native people and ultimately assimilating them to Euro-American codes of life. Silko compacted her works with varieties of cultural, historical, ritual, social, narrative and mythological signs to help her people survive.

Different types of traumas, which such a nation has experienced and is experiencing now, pave the way for the Native American leading members to give voice to their people and land to talk about their past, culture and recount through retelling their stories which reflect all about them. Consequently, if the Native peoples' life depends on storytelling, they rightly find the way to preserve their past and ancestral culture, heritage and at the same time unhinge the Euro-American historiography, which marginalized and silenced them. In this regard, Silko emplots the structure of her fictions based on such a background to help her past survive and continue in line with her own cultural codes and signs. In other words, for her storytelling was used as a survival tool to protect her cultural heritage and it has been important to pass on the oral narrative through generations. Knowing the tales and being able to pass them on, is crucial to the survival of the culture and belief system of the Pueblo people. Native American history is a field dominated by white, male historians who rarely ask or care what the Indians they study have to say about their work. Very few authors have attempted to find out how Native people would interpret, analyze, or question the documents they confront, nor have they asked if the Native people they are studying have their own various versions or stories of their own past. The Native American authors write about themselves, their history etc. Because of this (non-Indian perceptions of Native American history) the Native American authors started to write their own history in a different way. On the one hand, the works of Native American authors are written with the aim to dismantle and decentralize the non-Indian stereotypical representations of Indigenous people, and on the other hand, to revitalize the past and solidify their identity. They write to change the Euro-American perception about their history, which has been written through the lenses of non-Indians.

5. Conclusion

Despite of the fact that the Euro-American writers have recorded the dislocation of Indian American in accordance with the dominant white discourse of de-historicizing their past, the Indian American authors, here Leslie Marmon Silko, through their works and storytelling bring back and revitalize their own history, past and cultural heritage. For Indian people, history does not rotate around abstract questions of identity, but rather, they believe every historical narrative has the potential to change life of the people in the world. Silko's works show that storytelling and survival are linked, thematically portrayed and represented in the many narrative layers of her texts. Her works are constructed to show how storytelling is a means of survival. Both are recurrent patterns

in her works. Not only are represented storytelling and writing as survival strategies for Silko and her characters in her fictional works, but also as a strategy to resist against the Euro-American master narratives. Based on the Indian American worldview, survival is intrinsically linked to storytelling and writing, in the sense that words, language and narration are the features that still connect the characters to human culture. When these characters tell stories, they put themselves at the center of the narrative, voicing their views, opinions and perspectives. Furthermore, it is through the act of telling stories that the characters are able to cope with and survive in the inhospitable environment surrounding them.

In relation to American Indian people, one could refer to the process of remembering through retelling and re-narrating their past and history. Therefore, memory and storytelling overlap and interact with each other. The trauma they suffer from never left their life and are transferred from one generation to the next one. For a writer like Leslie Marmon Silko who has the trauma of dislocation within her own homeland, and paradoxically is considered as an outsider, the state of in-betweenness, internal exile and un-belonging paves the way for her to rewrite and in turn restore her historical and cultural roots and belongings to heal her sense of marginality and detached identity. Silko adapted fiction to express the experience of political awakening on reconnection with Indigenous land, community, and oral literature. Indeed, she has made the novel her place of both formal and social improvement resistance, which acts for the sake of healing different traumas her people suffer from, here cultural trauma, and preserving the past. In short, despite the fact her mind is preoccupied with different kinds of trauma, she has tried to find a remedy for the pains and suffering of Indigenous people and at the same time to revive her lost past.

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