

# Codifying the Oral Traditions, Resisting the Colonial Machinery: A Study of Leslie Marmon Silko's *Storyteller*

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## Abstract

Leslie Marmon Silko is one of the most important Native writers of America. The remarkable thing about her writings is that they never move away from tradition of her ancestors. She uses her writings to preserve and resuscitate the culture of the Natives and for that purpose she uses the oral tradition of her people. Her writings serve both the purposes: they codify the Native culture and traditions and at the same time they maintain the originality of the oral tradition. *Storyteller*, for instance, is one book that transcends the generic limitations posed by the Euro-American tradition. The codification of the oral tradition at the same time becomes a site for resistance of colonial policies. By codifying the oral tradition, she makes it more durable so that it is available for future generations and at the same time she exposes the reality of the colonial institutions. The book contains fiction, poetry, history, autobiography and photographs of the family. The book may seem like an interesting assortment of different genres, but it also carries an important message that it is the vitality of the culture of the Natives that has allowed them to survive against the colonial juggernaut. The paper is a study of Leslie Marmon Silko's book *Storyteller*.

**Keywords:** Story, culture, oral tradition, whites.

## Introduction

The importance of tradition to writers, especially poets, was underlined by T.S. Eliot in his famous essay "Tradition and Individual Talent." The writer who follows the tradition "must know that heritage as a participant, not as a scholar" (Clements 65). While commenting on the consciousness of tradition among the writers, Eliot anticipates the arrival of Native literature in the twentieth century. The Native texts that were churned out of American and Australian continents have remained faithful to the tradition of their ancestors. When Australian Aboriginal writer Alexis Wright writes *Carpentaria*, she pays a tribute to the story telling tradition of her ancestors. Similarly, when a Native American writer writes a book like *Ceremony*, she "tries to embody" the "characteristics" of "oral tradition" (Hirsch 1).

By following the oral tradition of her people, Silko transcends the limitation imposed by what Frederic Jameson calls the "master narratives" (1981, 29) and "reconfigures the structural boundaries of the Euro-American literary genres" (Carsten 2006, 107) in the process.

Leslie Marmon Silko rejects Euro-American literary genres for many reasons. First reason is that she knows that if Native American culture has to survive then the writings will play the most important role. Writings that record, narrate, explain the native experience will be crucial, since oral narratives are more vulnerable to times than writings.

By writing her book in the traditional way or by codifying the oral tradition in a script she seeks a long life and permanence for the stories that act as a reservoir of culture, history and traditions of her people. She uses creativity to resuscitate the native tradition; but this creativity also involves the pronounced breaking-away from the Euro-American paradigm, motifs, world-view. When she consciously breaks the narrative rules of the 'master narratives,' her writing becomes a site of resistance against the colonial machinery as "these conventions have historically served to maintain and propagate ideologies of domination over American Indian culture" (Carsten 107)

### **Transcending Egotism, Glorifying Tradition, Crediting the spirits with Authorship:**

Silko's dedication to the oral tradition is obvious in the beginning of her novel *Ceremony* where she writes about "Thought-woman, the Spider":

She is sitting in her room  
thinking of a story now  
I'm telling you the story  
She is thinking (2006, 1)

In these lines, Silko gives the credit of writing the story to the "Thought-woman." *Ceremony* is not the only novel which she credits the spirits with. In an interview with Ellen Arnold, Silko credits the spirits with writing of her novel *Almanac of the Dead* (1998, p.6).

This is the clear violation of egotistical Euro-American tradition where the writer enthusiastically takes credit for creation of stories.

By effacing her credit for creating a novel like *Ceremony*, and *Almanac of The Dead* Silko makes a subtle but strong gesture. Her self-effacement is an acknowledgement of the role of 'tradition' in the creating such a masterpiece. Ironically, a very perceptive reader will be able to apprehend the revolutionary nature of this community-oriented approach that offers an alternative to the individualistic endeavour that literary production has become in the Western canon. Danielson points out that oral tradition followed by Silko in *Storyteller* pose a challenge to the western narrative model:

So in the effacing her own authorship, crediting the community, mixing once-sacrosanct genres, and abjuring linear structure- in short, by denying the standards and customs of white male dominated literary criticism- Silko reclaims the making of books from white male establishment. (1988, 330)

Silko effaces her own authorship because she knows that the stories told in oral tradition belong to nobody. The stories told in oral tradition are incremental where everybody contributes to the development of these stories. Silko acknowledges the contribution of these people more directly in *Storyteller*:

As with any generation  
the oral tradition depends upon each person  
listening and remembering a portion  
and it is together-  
all of us remembering what we have heard together  
that creates the whole story  
the long story of the people. (6-7)

Silko thus does not seek glory for herself, rather she stresses on her identity as a tribal woman purportedly to get the due recognition to the distinctive merits unjustly and unscrupulously denied in the prior representations of her people following the Eurocentric conventions. Her mixing of "multiple genres – fiction, poetry, historical narrative" (Carsten, p. 107) reinforces the debt she owes to the storytellers of the community.

The structure of the book *Storyteller* is important in the sense that it establishes that the work is distinctively Indian; written in the oral tradition of the Lagunas. However, the structure of the book is not the only important thing; the message delivered by the book is also important. The book is only a medium; a way to preserve the culture; to expose racism inherent in the mainstream tradition and to show resilience and robustness of Indian culture that has allowed them to survive in the adverse circumstances.

### **Resisting Colonialism, Establishing Identity**

The first prose story of the book "Storyteller" brings home the message. One of the most noticeable 'facts' about the story is that it is not about Silko's native land Laguna, rather it is about Alaska where Silko stayed for some time. The placement of Alaskan story in the beginning accentuates the universality of oral tradition among the Natives living in the different parts of the continent. At the same time Silko delivers the message that Native culture is under threat in all the parts of America. A lot many people have been deracinated and de-cultured; being assimilated in the dominant cultural and religious practices, they have developed contempt for their own language and culture. The point is brought home by the jailer who does not prefer to speak his native language:

The tailor was an Eskimo, but he would not speak Yupik to her. She had watched people in other cells, when they spoke to him in Yupik he ignored them until they spoke English. (18)

Silko does not elaborate on reason behind jailor's preference for English over his native language, but she drops enough hints as to the reasons for the preference.

The Jailor is obviously a product of "the big school" (19) where the children who "refused to speak in English" were "whipped with a leather belt" (19). Silko is critical of the Native schools which were started to "kill the Indian and save the man" (Smith 90). There is undeniable irony as it is with the Indianness, the manhood as well as humanity is lost simply, because the Indianness was innate and connected to the way of life in tune with the biotic surroundings of these people. The 'man' left behind after subtracting the 'Indianness' would be nothing but a poor and depraved imitation of the European. The targeted Indianness too, was perhaps, not residing in a particular Indian but in his relationships and his place in the community and its cultural practices.

Silko mixes autobiographical elements with the fictional elements in the book. She shows the impact of de-culturation of jailer who is a fictional character; but reinforces the impact of schools on the Native through Aunt Susie who was her father's aunt:

She must have realized  
that the atmosphere and conditions  
which had maintained this oral tradition in Laguna culture  
had been irrevocably altered by the European intrusion  
principally the practice of taking the children  
away from Laguna to Indian Schools,  
taking the children away from the tellers who had  
in all past generations  
told the children  
an entire culture, an entire identity of a people. (6)

The reference of a real life person Aunt Susie in connection with the 'Indian Schools' makes clear that the book is not a work of fiction. Moreover, no character in the story is named. This is another ploy used by Silko to drive home the point that these problems exist among all the Natives. The ruinous impact of Indian schools is a recurring theme in the works of Leslie Marmon Silko. In her most famous novel *Ceremony* she writes about the impact of Boarding schools on Rocky:

After their first year at boarding school in Albuquerque, Tayo saw how Rocky deliberately avoided the old time ways. Old Grandma shook her head at him, but he called it superstition, and he opened the text books to show her. (47)

In "Storyteller," readers come across an "Eskimo" (20) matron who thinks that people who are living in traditional setups are "backwards" (19). The children who studied in Indian schools became totally dependent "Gussucks" (White) food because "after all those years away at the school, they had forgotten how to set nets in the river and where to hunt seals in the fall" (22). Virender Pal convincingly argues that these Indian schools were started by the colonizers to obliterate Indigenous cultures and to break native societies (Pal, 2017, 196). Kuokkanen also makes same assertion about the "Indian Schools":

Educational institutions in particular have played a central role in colonizing indigenous peoples. Colonial school system despite its geographical location has also been very effective tool in implementing these racist theories and indoctrinating them in children (Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike) worldwide. (Kuokkanen 2003, p. 697-698)

The protagonist of the story, a Native girl, also realizes that "she did not see what the Gussuck school would do to her until she walked into the dormitory" (19). The Native children were taught that "the raw fish and fermented meat" they eat as a food was dirty (22). Leslie Marmon Silko returns to the theme of Indian schools in the story "Lullaby" where she shows how the children were taken away by the authorities against the will of the parents so that they might be shorn of their culture. She is actually aware of the fact that if Native culture has to be preserved and resuscitated then the writers have to play an important part.

She adopts a multipronged strategy to play her role: firstly she codifies the ancient knowledge contained in the oral tradition; secondly she reminds the deracinated Indians about their own culture and tells them what whites have done to them; exposes the inherent racism of the whites and their policies; tries to correct erroneous history and shatters the stereotypes prevalent in the society. To achieve this end she adopts the time tested method of her ancestors:

The ancient Pueblo people depended on collective memory through successive generations to maintain and transmit an entire culture, a world view complete with proven strategies for survival. The oral narrative, or story became medium through which the complex of Pueblo knowledge and belief was maintained. Whatever the event or subject, the ancient people perceived the worlds as part of an ancient continuous story composed of innumerable bundles of other stories. (Yellow Woman 30-31)

### **Exposing Ethnocentrism/ racism of the 'Civilized'**

In *Storyteller* Silko continues with the same oral tradition to reach out her people as well the majority whites. One of the problems was that the whites were "blinded by ethnocentrism" (Pal 2019, p. 3) where whiteness or white culture was used as a yardstick to evaluate the Native American culture. This ethnocentrism resulted in racist policies where supposedly inferior culture was to make way for the superior white culture. Silko exposes racism of the whites. She uses a poem to set the tempo by a real-life incidence that happened with her Grandma Hank:

Grandma Hank said that when the hotel manager  
spotted him and Kenneth  
the manager stopped them.  
He told Grandma Marmon that he was always welcome when he was alone  
but when he had Indians with him  
he should use the back entrance to reach the cafe  
My great-grandma said "These are my sons." (17)

The autobiographical piece is followed by a fictional piece which further exposes the racism of the whites. In the story "Storyteller," readers are told that Eskimos or Indian were not allowed to sit at the tables (23).

Even the priest "warned" the Native against mixing with the whites. The priest also believes in the superiority of the Whites. Silko is aware that readers might give benefit of doubt to the priest because of his noble profession. The readers influenced by the noble profession of the priest may think that he does not want whites and Indians to mingle to save the gullible Natives from the unscrupulous whites, but Silko does not leave a chance for the readers to give a benefit of doubt to him. She narrates another incident which confirms that the priest also suffers from the superiority complex. Priest's racism is foregrounded when protagonist's grand-mother tells the priest that her son and daughter-in-law have been murdered by the storeman. The priest does not respond and remains passive; the grandmother tells the protagonist: "I wasn't surprised when the priest did nothing" (25). It is clear that protagonist's grandmother is aware of the racism sitting deep in the heart and mind of the priest.

It is obvious that the priest considers Indians as inferior that is why he fails to take any action against the storeman who happened to be a white. In this lopsided world Indians are treated like animals who can be murdered at will, only white lives that matters. In the story Silko exposes the hierarchy of "relative importance for living beings" (Brown 171) created by whites.

"Storyteller" exposes the racism at multiple levels. The only white character that seems to be sympathetic to the protagonist is the attorney and yet he tries to convince the girl to say that the murder of the storeman was "an accident" (31). The writer makes clear that the attorney does not want to proclaim the murder as an accident because of his sympathy for the protagonist, but

because of the racism embedded in his mind. The attorney tells the protagonist through the interpreter:

Tell her that she could not have killed him that way. He was a white man. He ran after her without a parka or mittens. She could not have planned that. (31)

The above statement shows the racism embedded in the mind of the attorney. The narrative voice and focalization suggest that the attorney wants the protagonist to tell the judge that it was "an accident" because he wants to save her; but he does not want the world to know that a white man was fooled by a Native. It is deeply ironic, that racism has to be a pretext for self-defense too and truth shall be colored by racial discourse, only new narratives can counter the mechanical habit of thinking through stereotypes.

The white who considered themselves as intellectually superior could not digest that a white man can be outwitted by a Native. Silko says: "A great deal of the story is believed to be inside the listener and the story teller's role is to draw the story out of the listeners" (Cited in Danielson 1988, 330). The notion of drawing the story out of listener seems to inform Silko's "storyteller" too. Here the readers/listeners can assume that the attorney is also aware of the oral tradition of the Natives.

He knows that the story of a Native girl outwitting a white man will travel down the generations and it will be a big setback to racially superior notions of the whites. The posterity of the whites will never be able to claim their superiority over the Natives, even when the White Man commits a heinous or deviant act, his whiteness has to be exonerated and canonized representations should prevail and persist.

### **Transmitting /Preserving History through Tradition**

Stories in oral tradition are not only stories rather they transmit history of the Natives. Luther Standing Bear comments:

So we went to school to copy, to imitate, not to exchange language and ideas and not to develop the best traits that had come out of uncountable experiences of hundreds and thousands of years living upon this continent. Our annals, all-happening of human import were stored in our song and dance rituals, our history differing in that it was not stored in books, but in the living memory. (Cited in Fitz, 2004, p. 13)

The girl also knows that the story she has lived in will enter as a historical episode in the oral tradition of her people. That is why she refuses to alter her statement on the directions of attorney. She tells him, "I will not change the story not even to escape this place and go home. I intended that he die. The story must be told as it is" (31). The girl had the option of escaping the punishment but she does not tell a lie about the murder she planned because by rendering the murder as accident would have taken heroism away from the girl and her people.

This would have allowed whites to reclaim that they conquered American territory without any resistance from the Natives. Moreover, the story of the girl might have an impact on the acculturated (Ruoff 1993, p. 71) people (though 'de-cultured' would be a more preferable term as it highlights the more probable scenario in which a person who loses his roots finds herself, since she is not ever able to navigate to the artificial or the other culture) like the jailer and the matron and they may see through racism and colonial policies of the whites. The girl stresses again and again that the story should be told as it is because otherwise authenticity of oral tradition may be compromised.

Through the story, Silko writes back to the whites. The whites in the story appear as greedy people who think they can “suck” anything valuable “out” of the earth or cut it from the mountains” (29). Silko uses image of the dog as a parallel for the whites. In the “Storyteller” the girl tells that before indulging in sexual act with her the red-haired man “taped” something on wall behind the bed where he could see it while he lay on the top of her” (23-24). The red-haired man never allowed the girl to see what he taped on the wall: After he finished each time, he reached up and pulled it loose, folding it carefully so that she could not see it” (24).

The girl ultimately sees that the picture that was taped on the wall every time by the red-haired man featured “A woman with a big dog on top of her” (24). It is obvious that the red-haired man tried to feature himself as a greedy dog who would like to devour the girl. The picture “doesn't surprise” (24) the old man because he always knew about the animal nature of the whites. In giving the white man's view of the natives and the native's view of the white- people who hold adverse positions in the racial or colonial dialectics, Silko underlines the ‘dehumanization’ that constantly marks such relationships of power.

The girl also plans the murder of storeman as if she is planning the hunt of an animal. She shows the patience of a hunter and plans meticulously for the hunt. In the beginning of the story, Silko tells the readers/listeners that the girl laughed loudly at the dogs to make them “howl and snarl” (21). At that point of the story the reader/listeners could not understand the importance of the incidence; but later on, they realize that the girl was training herself to irritate the storeman: “She wanted to laugh at the storeman the way she laughed at the dogs straining against the chains, howling at her” (23). Towards the end, the metaphor becomes even clearer when Silko writes” He was like a dog tied up all winter, watching while the others got fed” (29). It is sad that Indians who were found to be close to nature and in harmony with their environment, has to participate in the European paradigms of understanding scenarios (beasts as enemies), to subvert the order or seek revenge. Through such writings, a less explored connection between history and psychology is suggested. Psychology is a part of history, especially as it is shaped by discursive practices of colonialism. It may be that the emphasis on individual psychology is misplaced as discourse tries to shape how communities think, and perceive themselves even to the extent of apprehending not just their own world but their own community and selves through an alien media. The novel through its narrative offers a counter-discourse as well as an investigation to the reigning discourse propagated by the White man.

Silko clearly establishes that the storeman is like an animal and the girl and her grandmother had planned his murder meticulously and patiently like a hunt. The writer does not tell anything explicitly and any careless listeners/reader might miss the obvious connections. Silko for instance tells the readers/listeners that “the old woman had saved everything they would need when the time came” (24).

Suddenly the connections between the different parts become clear. The readers/listeners now realize why the grandmother had instructed the old man to bury her in “an old black sweater and to give parka to girl” (20). The parka was special because it was white in color and it blended with “the tundra in the winter” and she was invisible in the snow” (20).

The girl also nails a red tin on the log walls. Here again Silko tells the readers/listeners specifically that while the village people used the tins to “mend walls and roofs for winter” (28) while the girl “nailed it on the log walls for its color” (28). She even tests the visibility of red color in midst of “the impenetrable white” by walking away from the house. When the winter sets in the

girl realized that “it was time” (28). She lures the storeman towards thinning ice on the river and kills him.

While commenting on the story telling tradition among the Pueblos, Silko comments:

For those of you accustomed to a structure that moves from point A to point B to point B to point C, this presentation may be somewhat difficult to follow because the structure of Pueblo expressions resembles something like a spider’s web with many little threads radiating from a center, criss-crossing each other, As with the web, the structure will emerge as it is made and you simply listen and trust as the pueblo people do, that meaning will be made (48 *Language and Literature*)

When one looks at the book *Storyteller*, it seems like a collage of different narratives without any link with one another. The relation emerges between the different parts when one looks closely. For instance, the second prose story “Lullaby” is closely related to the first story “Storyteller”. The first story “Storyteller” is based in Alaska while second is based in Silko’s native land. Silko has strategically placed Alaskan story in the beginning of the book. In “Storyteller” readers/listeners come across two natives a ‘jailor’ and a ‘matron’ In all other stories of Silko, natives are employed only as soldiers or cowboys. Through the story “Storyteller” Silko tells that the jobs like that of a jailer and matron are available to Natives only in Alaska because the whites are not available in Alaska due to harsh weather. Both the natives are de-cultured Natives who despise their own mother tongue and traditions.

## **Resilience and Culture**

In “Lullaby” the reader/listeners come across another de-cultured native man Chato, who “spoke English like a white man. Spoke Spanish too” (44). He did not feel any emotion when his children are taken away by the doctors and policemen, he is accepted even by the whites:

The bar owner didn’t like Indians in there, especially Navajos, but he let Chato come in because he could talk Spanish like them. (48)

Chato is a de-cultured Indian who is acceptable among the whites; but this acceptability does not mean he is not discriminated against. The white man is clinical and accepts Chato only till the time he has some utility. Silko narrates two incidents which show that even de-cultured Indians does not win a permanent place among the whites. The first incident is when Chato breaks his leg:

When a horse fell with the Chato and broke his leg and the white rancher told them he wouldn’t pay Chato until he could work again. (45)

While narrating the second incidence, Silko is more confrontational:

The illness came after the white rancher told Chato he was too old to work for him anymore, and Chato and his old woman should be "out of the shack by the next afternoon because the rancher has hired new people to work there. That has satisfied her. To see how the white man repaid Chato's years of loyalty and work. All the Chato's fine-sounding English talk didn't change things. (47)

In the above quotation last line is important because it shows that the de-cultured English speaking Indians were meted out the same treatment by the whites. The story is told from the point of the Ayah who believes that "learning their (white's) or any of their ways: it endangered you" (47). Towards the end of the story her stand is vindicated.



Her husband Chato had become a pseudo-white who accepted every policy of the whites without any protest. He did not protest even when his children were taken by the whites. But his acquired whiteness could not save his job and he is kicked out when his utility is over.

He becomes destitute and a drunkard who tries to drown his grief in wine. The story lays bare the problems of the Natives. She remarks: "Indian life today is full of terror and death and great suffering (cited in Seyersted 24). Unlike others who become part of political movements to ameliorate the lives of Indians, Silko chooses to write.

She writes because she knows that the text has the potential to "transform consciousness and social structures" (Kumholz 90). She proclaims that "I think it is more effective to write story like "Lullaby" than to rant and rave. I think it is more effective in reaching people" (Arnold 7-8). The story shows the resilience of Native culture. Ayah remains rooted in her culture. She commits only one mistake and that was to learn how to "sign her name" (45). This learning of alien and oppressive culture's writing system costs her children. The Native literature is very critical of writing system. Louise Erdrich also addresses the theme in her novel *The Game of Silence*:

We signed a paper that said they could take trees. We signed a paper that said they could take the copper from the earth. (20).

The same thing resonates in the statement of Joy Harjo:

To write is often still suspect in our tribal communities, and understandably so. It is through writing in the colonizer languages that our lands have been stolen, children taken away. We have often been there by those who first learned to write and to speak the language of the occupier of our lands. Yet to speak well in our communities in whatever form is still respected. This is dichotomy we will always deal with as long as our cultures are predominately expressed in oral literatures. (Harjo 73)

Silko tells that "written speech or statement is highly suspect" (Language and Literature) among the Pueblos.

In the story 'Lullaby' it seems that Chato has shunned his culture in favour of the white culture. Silko suggests that by shunning his culture Chato has shunned his humanity. His emotions have dried up. His response on Jimmy's death bewilders even the white man who brought the news. Chato tells "the military man they could keep the body if they found it" (45). The response shows that he has no emotional attachment with his son. White man's bewilderment shows Chato has surpassed even the white man in his nonchalance. Silko confirms that this response of Chato was not a result of sadness or confusion. He displays his clinical attitude again when he tells Ayah, "It is too late now. The policeman is with them. You signed the paper" (45-47), says he. Not even once does he show any sadness. The readers/listeners are bewildered when Ayah tells about children: "They don't spit blood. The whites lie" (46). As a father he is also aware of the health of his children, but he does not try to clarify even once. The reader/listeners know that Ayah cannot know English, but Chato speaks their language fluently; still he maintains a stoic silence. His silence implies that he supports the policies of the whites. To showcase his loyalty towards whites he is even ready to give up his children. This de-cultured man betrays his wife and children. He is too ready to believe the whites.

In the old age this de-cultured man smells of "woodsmoke and urine" (50) and Ayah was feared by "men in the bar" (49). The strength of culture is visible in Ayah who remains strong enough to take care of Chato; while the de-cultured Chato becomes a drunkard and loses his memory. He calls "Ayah by his sister's name" (50). The story ends with the lullaby:

The earth is your mother,  
 She holds you.  
 The Sky is your Father,  
 He protects you. (51)

The Lullaby is sung by Ayah. This lullaby also showcases cultural continuity. Silko comments: "She could not remember if she had ever sung it to her children, but she knew that her grandmother had sung it and her mother had sung it" (51). The lullaby sung by Ayah shows the cultural continuity that remained with her but she could not transmit this to next generation because of the white policy of taking away children. 'Lullaby' is only suggestive of the loss that had occurred due to the white intervention.

The ancient Indians "depended upon collective memory through successive generations to maintain and transmit an entire culture (Silko, *Yellow women* 30-31), but in case of Ayah gap has occurred. Her son Jimmie who stayed with her in childhood and who was nurtured in the Indian culture died; and the other two children were taken away. So the culture could not be transmitted to them. For the Native Indians, literature is not only a source of history or mirror to the society and social customs or simple entertainment rather it is a means of survival:

In American Indian traditional cultures good song and stories are useful, fostering the survival of people and their culture. The verbal arts sustain cosmic relationship testify to sources of creative energy, teaching young people, heal the sick bring lovers together or reprimand the socially irresponsible. (Danielson, 1989, p.21).

In *Ceremony* Silko showed how Tayo recovers himself after going through a Native ceremony and created a new story for the coming generations.

## Reclaiming Culture

In fact, Silko's writings are a kind of antidote against cultural amnesia induced by the colonial system. Pal & Divyajyoti Singh (2019) have also argued that "re-storying" is a part of an attempt to resuscitate the culture and identity by the Natives. The Natives have been made to believe that whites were inherently superior to the Natives by the "Master Narrative" of American whites. A Master narrative of American whites is a "narrative that simultaneously erases, embraces and consumes American Indians; a narrative that denies our colonial past, our colonial present, and the existence of contemporary colonized people" (Krumholz 1999, p.63). Silko shakes the readers out of the cultural amnesia. Silko's writing "resists appropriation by initiating the reader into a Native American reading practice that defies and subvert the Master narratives." (Krumholz 63).

In the centuries of white colonial rule, the Natives have been conditioned to believe that whites are infallible; they are demi-gods who cannot do anything wrong. In *Ceremony*, Tayo battles with himself to accuse Floyd Lee, a white man, of stealing his cattle: "He had to crazy desire to believe that there had been some mistake, that Floyd Lee had gotten them, innocently, maybe buying them before real thieves" (177). He ultimately realizes that he had been conditioned to believe that only Natives and Mexicans can be thieves. Tayo's response shows that Native mind has been captivated by lies taught to them in the colonial institutions where the color of skin is associated with the crime:

He knew then he had learned the lie by heart- the lie which they had wanted him to learn: only brown skinned people were thieves; white people didn't steal. (177)

Silko through her writings tries to pierce through the crust of lies that has gathered on Native mind. Her writings bring out the reality and challenges the myths perpetrated about the infallibility of whites.

In "Tony's Story," Leon asks his friend, "What's the matter, have they brainwashed you into believing that a 30-30 won't kill a white man?" Ultimately Leon's friend Tony kills the cop and gets free of the notion that a white man cannot be killed by a gun.

Silko's story is remarkable as the theme of the conditioned de-cultured Indian and the Indian living in his cultural setting is again foregrounded. Leon is an army man, he is aware of his "rights" (127), he speaks English fluently (126) which show that he is a man who has been living near the whites. A strong comment on the white man's mystic and ultimate, demystification which is inevitable just as desperate protest is inevitable in the face of the improbability of the end of exploitation.

Jaskoski rightly comments: "Ex-serviceman Leon..... understands rights", he is familiar with "procedures, he believes in committees, meetings and letter to the higher authorities" (91-92). But it is Leon who faces the 'racist' attack of the policeman and gets stitches around his mouth. (124). Leon keeps on showing impotent rage and keeps on saying "I'll kill the big bastard if he comes around here again." (125). But this rage proves out to be futile; ramblings of a de-cultured man; a man capable of only articulating. He reminds of Chato of "Lullaby" who is kicked out of ranch as soon as his utility is over, his good English couldn't save him.

Similar is the case of Leon; he is an ex-serviceman; trained in weapons, but he cannot act; his life in the white institution has made him incapable of acting against the whites. That is why he could not save himself from the cop and when Tony kills him, he is terrified: "Tony! you killed him- you killed the cop!" He becomes "pale and says: My God, Tony what's wrong with you? That's a state cop you killed" (129). On the other hand Tony remains calm and tells Leon:

Don't worry, everything is O.K. now, Leon:

It is killed, they sometime take on strange forms. (129)

## Conclusion

The *Storyteller* tries to resuscitate and preserve the Native culture. The stories and poems in the book show how the literature that was reservoir of culture, tradition and history was lost as "the last initiates of particular tribes and societies within the tribes died, leaving no successors" (Allen 1993, p. 3). The wealth of culture could not be transmitted because the children were taken away which stopped the transmission of culture. In her writings, Silko tries to codify whatever culture is left so that it is transmitted to the future generations. It is important because Silko believes that it is the robustness of Indian culture that has allowed them to survive the colonial onslaught for last many centuries. Culture helps you to survive, while de-culturation makes you incapable of fighting not just physically, but psychologically; and seeing things as they are. Ayah in "Lullabuy," unnamed narrator in the "Storyteller" and Tony in "Tony's Story" are the people who have remained connected with their culture and roots. That is why they are able to fight for survival; de-cultured people like Leon and Chato can only fear the pain or become alcoholics.

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