



Research article

Challenging the Episteme with Storytelling: Learning without Limits the Native Way

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Abstract

Leslie Marmon Silko is an eminent writer among the Native Americans who is trying to resuscitate Native culture and reconstruct the identity of her people. In her novels like *Ceremony* and *Almanac of the Dead*, she has extensively written about the Native way of life. Her short stories are also an endeavour to construct the identity of her people. Due to her concern with the construction of the identity of her people, she often compares white institutions with the Native institutions. In her short story "Man to Bring the Rainclouds", she compares the death rituals of her people with the Christian rituals and establishes that the Pueblo customs were deeply connected with the land. The current paper is a study of her short story "Humaweepi, The Warrior the Priest." In the story, she compares the whites' methods of educating the children to her people's methods of educating the younger generation. She establishes in the story that the Pueblo way of educating the children was superior because it did not put any strain on the learner; rather the student learned everything without any stress or labour. Moreover, the Native system of education taught the learner about the importance of developing a bond with the natural world and hence trained the students to become eco-warriors.

Keywords: Leslie Marmon Silko, Native, Education, White.



Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

Introduction

The stories of the indigenous people and the narratives evocative of the indigenous contexts can only be adequately understood when approached independent of Western biases and free of preconceived notions constructed by hegemonizing discourses (to use Gramsci's term). There is a clear recognition that most readings of texts are ideological and prompted by dominant theories that become manifest in subconscious ways and affect the narrative reception. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith states, "Indigenous peoples have been, in many ways, oppressed by theory" (2012, p. 38). Naturally, this apprehension led indigenous people to explore methodologies and theories that

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could support them and, as Smith claims, would be “grounded in a real sense of, and sensitivity towards, what it means to be an indigenous person” (2012, p. 38).

This study undertakes a discourse analysis of Silko’s stories using approaches such as New Historicism and its affiliated theory of post-colonialism qualified by indigenous research precepts rather than Western principles. The paper refers to a new ‘decolonized’ theoretical framework that brings the perspectives of the indigenous people into focus and questions the foundations of Western discourse. The alternate frames and research methodologies articulated by Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Shawn Wilson are characterized by a skeptical approach to Western assumptions, perspectives and claims about knowledge and history. Smith astutely observes, “Coming to know the past’ has been part of the critical pedagogy of decolonization. To hold alternative histories is to hold alternative knowledge” (2012, p. 34).

Indeed, the present paper foregrounds the indigenous writers’ reassessment and evaluation of existing ideas about what knowledge constitutes and how knowledge can be apprehended led by the West. Most importantly, the stories of Native writers prompt an investigation of the existing concept of ‘episteme’ associated with ‘science’, ‘reason,’ ‘progress’ and ‘development’. The narrative mediation by indigenous writers reveals how this ostensibly ‘rational’ and ‘objective’ approach to the world and environment based on negating relationships ultimately leads to apathy with the environment, which in the long-term has resulted in the ecological crisis that humanity faces at present. Shawn Wilson (2008) underlines the research methodologies suited to indigenous contexts that emphasize the value of contextualization.

This paper takes a perspective of the oeuvre of the Native American writer Leslie Marmon Silko to assess its value as a critique of reigning discourses propagated by the Western civilization and emphasize its efficacy as a possible antidote to the continued stereotyping that necessarily prevails even in the aftermath of Western imperial encounters with the Native culture considering the apprehended realities of ‘biocolonization’ that sanctions the exploitation of the Natives, their land and the environmental resources. There is a clear recognition of the subservience of dominant discourses to the capitalist or neo-imperialist agenda- this agenda is spuriously critiqued but ultimately legitimized through the execution of formalities that conclude with mere lip-service being paid to environmental concerns. In all earnestness, the discursive powers are keen to maintain the status quo where the centre and the margin are fixed to suit the objectives of the White Settlers of yore and their capitalist successors.

Shawn Wilson introduces and underlines a new paradigm even in research that treats research as lived experience rather than detached observation, admit subjectivity, foster research ‘with’ indigenous people rather than ‘on’ them, establish a community relationship by ensuring that the community understands the purpose of the research, recognize that ‘traditional decision-making-processes are consensus-based, are community-based, are clan-based’ (Wilson, 2008, 110) and utilize this to enhance decision-making during the research; accept that knowledge can be ‘extra-intellectual’ and can come as a ‘flash of inspiration’ (Wilson 2008, 111); prioritize relationship building and therefore, allow for delayed records from memory to avoid being ‘obtrusive or invasive’ (Wilson, 2008, 115), acknowledge that “ knowledge cannot be ‘owned’ as it is discovered in a relationship’ (Wilson, 2008, 114), maintain that ‘naming’ of indigenous sources like community Elders seems ethical than unethical in an ‘indigenous research paradigm’(Wilson, 2008, 115),

apprehend that lifelong learning cultivated by the indigenous communities follows intuitive logic which is a non-linear form of logic and analysis (Wilson, 2008, 116,119), recognize as a bottom-line that "the environment is the knowledge" (Wilson, 2008, 118). Wilson apprehends that "when we're based in Indigenous reality and Indigenous ways of thinking, we start with synthesis" - thus, it is about building relationships with the people, the community, the beasts and birds and the environment rather than isolating the subject of study. Ultimately, turning the tables on Western research methods that legitimise objectivity, alienation and distancing of the researcher from the subject, Wilson asserts that research with indigenous community 'changes' the participants involved (Wilson, 2008, p. 135) and maintains that an absence of change underscores a fundamental error in approach to the indigenous paradigm. The research methodologies developed stem from the understanding that the writings on indigenous people and by indigenous people should be 'reconciling and reprioritizing what is important about the past with what is important about the present' (Smith, 2012, p. 39).

For Linda Tuhiwai Smith, the recovery of indigenous stories is 'inextricably bound to a recovery of our language and epistemological foundations' (Smith, 2012, p. 39). Smith emphasizes the ideas that need to be countered to put indigenous stories in the right frame, including the idea that 'history is a totalizing discourse', 'that there is a universal history', 'that history is one large chronology', 'that history is about development', 'that history is about self-actualization of some important human subject' and the idea that the story of history can be told in one coherent narrative' (Smith, 2012, p. 30). The challenge to these ideas seems to be inspired by New Historicism and works like Hayden White's *Metahistory* (where history is identified as a construct and its 'narrative' or textual aspects are highlighted) and even post-structuralism and post-modernism. Smith, however, in the section of her book bearing the title 'Contested Histories' (2012, p. 33) dismisses Western claims to pioneering even the most radical theoretical perspectives: "For indigenous peoples, the critique of history is not unfamiliar, although it has now been claimed by postmodern theories. The idea of contested stories and multiple discourses about the past by different communities is closely linked to the politics of everyday contemporary indigenous life. It is a part of the fabric of communities that value "oral ways of knowing" (2012, p. 33).

Smith in her seminal book *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* asserts, "Decolonization, however, does not mean and has not meant a total rejection of all, theory or research or Western knowledge. Rather, it is about centring our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our perspectives and for our own purposes". Furthermore, Smith argues against the idea of history as an 'innocent' discipline (2012, p. 31). She challenges the notion of conflating the Western 'discovery' of 'the indigenous' territory or people as the chronological 'beginning' of history and the resigned acceptance of the 'Othering' by the Occidental subjects as in Edward Said's *Orientalism*. The salvaging of indigenous culture through writing and text cannot take place unless the intellectual space is liberated from the influence of Western discourse. An indigenous story can be comprehended only when the interpretive paradigm is shifted. The subject 'our' or 'we' has to refer to the indigenous person now and be no more the articulation of White Western male identity or subjectivity.

Storytelling

Storytelling (Silko, 1981, p. 247) is an important aspect of the Native cultures. Though stories are recognized transmitters of cultural knowledge, they have an inestimable value in the indigenous culture. Stories are told not only to transmit culture and for entertainment, but they are the shaping factors of human beings: "The stories we hear and tell, those we inherit and those we generate, all shape who we are and who we might become" (Wong et al., 2008, p. XIII). Native American writers especially recognize the formative role of stories, not considering stories from any critical perspective or theoretical framework and emphasizing their ideological implications but they do so from a more apolitical or ecologically-informed perspective. It must be understood that imperialism has not died, it "still hurts, still destroys and still reforming itself constantly" (Smith, 2012, p.20).

T.V. Reed prefers the term 'decolonial' approaches to 'postcolonial' approaches to both social contexts and literary works. Reed notes that the 'Movements linking social justice to environmental degradation' are deservedly poised to take centre-stage in the realm of literary criticism. The new critical propensity is to not just question but invert the reigning binary oppositions and to intercept how discourse may function as a double-edged sword in the hands of imperial powers who benefit from it by getting required concessions to keep exploiting the Native as the 'Other'. Indigenous writers have responded by presenting stories that 'centre' the natives and emphasise their perspective. Moreover, these stories in implicit or explicit ways, raise significant questions about Western perception of knowledge and what gets acknowledged, accepted or assimilated as 'episteme'. This whole process of legitimisation and giving weight or value to Western approaches to the world finally led to the devaluation of the Native worldview and in turn, the Native. Therefore, central to the stories is assigning significance to the erstwhile devalued things and reviewing old discursive claims to uncover their implication in power politics.

In 'Impossible Futures: Fictions of Risk in the Longue Durée' J Hurley draws attention to how 'a risk-based realism is used to maintain the status quo of settler colonialism' and points out how Leslie Marmon Silko's oeuvre could offer 'a counter modelling of the futures of nuclear waste.'

In the essay 'Toxic Colonialism, Environmental Justice, and Native Resistance in Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*,' TV Reed asserts that 'environmental justice eco-criticism' had entered its second wave and was, therefore a recognisable domain emerging out of the critical analysis of works like the *Almanac of the Dead* by Silko. Mughal, Quratulain and Wajid Hussain in 'Deconstructing the Discursive Construction of Environmental Colonialism in Native America: A Study of Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* and *Almanac of the Dead*' intercept a clever discursive turn called 'biocolonization'. Inferring its mechanism, Mughal and Hussain note: "biocolonization involves exploitation of the natural resources and the land of the natives through the misuse of power, so it re-echoes the concepts of ideology and power. In biocolonization, therefore, the eco-poco discourse is deconstructed (it is detached from its prior impartial meanings) and reconstructed (by global colonial power structures to accomplish explicit purposes) with the construction of new ideologies and power relations" (2019, p. 365). Furthermore, they observe how Indigenous writers like Leslie Marmon Silko successfully convey through their stories an apprehension of the 'commodification' and continued marginalization of the Native people. The stories contribute to a narrative critique that unravels "the subtle process of the formation, establishment and perpetuation of this dominant environmental discourse and view" (2019, p. 371), where the Native

is relegated to the role of the secondary category who is even the beneficiary of 'reservation' and consideration by the Nation –State.

Smith argues that research is also a tool to exercise control over the Indigenous communities by misrepresenting them and their culture. According to her, Indigenous knowledge has to be looked at from an Indigenous perspective rather than from the Western point of view. She notes that all the Native writers write from their own perspective so judging them from the perspective of Western models makes them look ludicrous.

The stories in Native tradition offer contrast to Western approaches to the world that emphasize the value of 'reason,' 'objectivity' and 'analysis' notwithstanding the limitations of these concepts. The Western 'episteme' is exclusionary rather than one that fosters inclusivity and synthesis. Native culture, on the other hand, values stories. These are not just fabulous or fictitious for the Native; they offer a satisfying alternative to mere sensory experience or ostensibly rational approaches. Thus, storytelling is an approach that offers a contrast and poses a challenge to the Western equation of episteme with knowledge. Episteme as defined in *Merriam-Webster* dictionary is 'specifically: intellectually certain knowledge.' Similarly, Wikipedia explicating the term 'Episteme' refers to its Ancient Greek roots as well as French connection and links it to both the narrower concept of 'science' and the wider one of 'knowledge'. Since 'episteme' is explicitly a Western concept and a great premium is placed on episteme, scientific methodology and knowledge as Enlightenment ideals which automatically translates into undermining of non-Western approaches to learning like the Native American one that relied on intuitive learning and experiential education.

The stories allow discussion and criticism of the issues that otherwise remain sacrosanct, taboo or 'open secrets' in any society. According to Catherine Rainwater, Native writers "exercise narrative resistance to the habitual construction of the world according to dominant, ethnocentric "rules" (1999, p. 34). Achebe exercises this resistance when he calls Christianity "a totalitarian religion" (Bonneti, 1989, p. 77).

Native American writers like Leslie Marmon Silko criticize the policies adopted by the successive White governments and the stories become the vehicle of resistance for her. All the works of Leslie Marmon Silko showcase her "activist agenda" (Rainwater, 1999, p. 40). Her works not only show her dedication and commitment to the resuscitation of Native culture and traditions, but she stages an intellectual coup; she turns the tables on the Western discourse by ignoring the discredit placed on the Native narratives by Western epistemology that upholds scientific approach and objectivity as the supreme means of gaining knowledge. In almost all of her works, she is critical of the schools run by managements that have the mission to school the natives to make them conform to the Christian or Western understanding of civilization or courtesy or even education. The policy of taking away the children has been termed as a "genocide" because "the destruction of the cultural and social life of the 'oppressed' group and imposition of the national pattern of the 'oppressor'" also comes under the scope of the term (Bringing them Home, 1997, p. 235). The epithet is not a simple exaggeration but rather hides a disturbing reality of numerous imperial injunctions and settlers' impositions that break the spirit through the body and vice versa.

The concept of schools and organized educational institutions was alien to the Natives. The policy has been termed "one of the most devastating policies" (Duran & Duran, 1995, p. 33) implemented

by the White colonial government. The Natives did not train the children in the captive environment, rather, the children learnt while getting entertained. Most of the instruction was passed on by telling the stories. The children also learnt by watching their elders. The concept of education of Native children is explored and elaborated in the story "From Humaweepee, the Warrior Priest."

The story opens with a sentence, "The old man didn't really teach him much; mostly they just lived" (1992, p. 161). The opening sentence of the story makes clear that the author thinks that the education system followed by her people was more effective. Through the story, the author makes clear that education cannot be restricted to the institutionalized education as started by the whites in the Americas; rather the Natives had their own way of instruction that was long-lasting and fruitful. The education for the natives did not mean proficiency in script and bookish knowledge, rather it was an attempt to gain wholeness, for understanding one's place in the world.

The boy who is living with the old man does not know that he has been taught. The story further makes clear that the boy has learnt all the things without even knowing. This kind of learning is much better than the 'institutional' learning introduced by the Whites because it is effortless, and since it is engraved in the unconscious of the pupil. So, it lasts longer. The boy/the disciple in the story himself seems to be disappointed with his stay with the old man. He thinks that the old man is keeping him to himself because he wants somebody to do his chores: "When he was twelve, he thought he had it all figured out; the old man just wanted someone to live with him and help him with the goat and to chop wood and carry water" (1992, p. 61-62).

The readers are also unaware of the real theme of the story till this point. The boy, Humaweepee, suddenly makes the revelation: "Humaweepee discovered that after all these years of sitting beside his uncle in the evenings, he knew all the songs and chants for all the seasons and he was beginning to learn the prayers for the trees and plants and animals" (1992, p. 162). The prayers for trees and plants show the ecological philosophy of the Natives. The Native sense of family is not restricted to human beings only, rather, it includes the animals and plants also. This ecological side of natives has often been devalued and ignored by the dominant society.

Humaweepee suddenly realises and reveals to the readers: "I have been learning all this time and I didn't even know it" (1992, p. 162). The readers also realise that the old man was teaching the young boy all along even without making him realise. In institutionalised learning, a child remains under constant pressure to memorize and perform, but here, Humaweepee has learnt all the things flawlessly without feeling any pressure to perform. The Native American schools established by the whites seem like diabolic institutions when compared to the system of education used by Humaweepee's uncle. K. Tsianina Loawaima writes about the Native schools:

They were schools that took schooling to extremes and in the blast furnace of colonialism welded the worst aspects of schooling – rigidity, homogenization, abuse of power, mindless bureaucracy, demanding labor and role "learning" with racism oppression and dispossession to eliminate the Native. (2017, p. IX)

While reading the story, readers realize that Silko has a "laser light ability to zero in on the contradictions, deceptions and lies which defined the so-called "Western Civilization" (George-

Kanentiio, 2005, p. 2). The people were told that the only purpose of the Native schools was to train the Natives in civilizational etiquette; to bring them on par with the whites.

Silko's fiction shows how damaging these institutions were to her people. These schools were responsible for shearing the Natives away from their culture. In her celebrated novel *Ceremony*, she writes about the impact of studying in such a school on a boy called 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 textbook to show her. (1977, p. 47)

In the schools they were taught that the Native life was full of superstitions and the children were forced to practice Christianity. The children were not allowed to speak in their Native tongue. All these things lead to the debilitation of Native social structure and family ties.

The Natives survived all these policies because of the vitality of their culture. In Native culture "a strong respect for elders is common" and "generosity, sharing and giving are highly valued" (Weaver & White, 1997, 69). The story shows that Humaweepe can learn in the company of his uncle only because his culture has taught him to respect the elders. Silko makes clear that Humaweepe thinks that his uncle is keeping him in the secluded place only because of his utility as a servant (1992, p.61-62). At the same time, the story showcases another aspect of Native culture where Humaweepe who is an orphan is not left on his own. His uncle adopts him and educates him to survive in the world on his own. These cultural values allow them to transmit the culture and survive as a distinct community.

This explains why medicine men lived in solitude. The secluded places allowed them to travel inside and understand the "Great Mystery."

Humaweepe has internalized all the teachings of his uncle. The readers, as well as Humaweepe, are unaware of his internalization of all the teachings of his uncle. His uncle leads Humaweepe to a boulder "that lay half in the lake and half on the shore" (1992, p.165). Humaweepe starts singing after touching that boulder:

I ask you for your power
I am the warrior priest.
I ask for your power
I am the warrior priest. (1992, p.166)

Humaweepe is himself bewildered at his song. "It wasn't until he had finished singing the song that Humaweepe realised what the words said" (166). His response to his song shows that the way of teaching of his uncle was very successful. He was made to realize his role as a warrior priest without even telling him. A. Lavonne Ruoff points out that in the story Silko presents the theme of the "transmission of Pueblo religion and ritual through oral tradition" (1978, p. 8).

Native Americans were called Indians because of "an enormous geographical misperception" (Page, 2004, p. 8). However, this mistake has stuck, and it homogenizes almost 500 cultures of great variety and difference into one unit. This term enforces a uniform identity on diverse people and obliterates their diversity and identity. Paul Chaat Smith points out that "America pre-

Columbus was a riot of vastly different cultures"(2009, p.19). Certain beliefs were common among all the Indians and one of them was respect for the natural world. Their worldview was totally opposed to the white worldview. The whites thought that everything in the world was made for man only and that man was superior to all other beings. The Native worldview is brought out by Vine Deloria Jr:

All species and all forms of life have equal status before the presence of the universal power to which they are subject. The religious requirement of all life forms is thus harmony, and this requirement holds for every species, ours included. (1979, p.153-54)

In the story, Humaweepee is told not only about the flowers and herbs but also about the animal world. Bear is an important animal in the Keresian world. In Keresian culture, the bear is also "identified with spiritual well-being and with physical health and healing" (Shepard and Sanders, 1985, p. 102). It is clear in Silko's writing bear occupies a special place, a healer who could heal the people. In the *Ceremony*, Silko shows the bear as a healer. In the novel, Betonie, the medicine man, and his assistant draw bear prints on the ground with sand to start the healing ceremony of Tayo (1977, p. 131).

The theme of education comes up in the novel *Ceremony* which has been hailed as the "most realized novel" (Chakvin, 2007, p. 3) of Indian life. The novel shows how the people have been deracinated by colonial policies. The greatest factors that have affected the Indians are Christianity and the Native schools.

The influence of Christianity and the changes it has brought to the Indian psyche is evident in the character of Auntie. Native American literature shows that the family ties among the Indians were very strong and the concept of cousin did not exist. Jerry Watchman writes about such relations: "In Navajo kinship, the distinction of brothers and cousins does not exist"(2017, p. 70). Louise Erdrich in her novel *The Birchbark House* shows how the orphans are welcomed in the family and brought up as their own. In *Ceremony*, Auntie does not show any of these traits:

When Josiah or old Grandma or Robert was there, the agreement was suspended, and she pretended to treat him the same as she treated Rocky but they both knew it was temporary. (1977, p.61)

In the novel, Silko makes clear that this transformation in Auntie is a result of the influence of Christianity because it "separated the people from themselves"(1977, p. 62). Auntie is "Bible-brained"(Glancy 48). Silko accentuates the fact through many incidences in the novel. Auntie is a Christian and her only endeavour is to show that she is a devout Christian and not a pagan like her family members to the other church-going members (1977, p. 71).

The second important policy that was responsible for the 'deracination' of the Natives was the Native schools. Silko in all her writings is critical of this policy in almost all of her works. For her, this diabolical policy was devised to eliminate the Natives. In these school, the Native culture and Native knowledge was discredited by the whites. The Natives were systematically degraded, and the students were eventually made to hate their own culture and ancestral traditions.

This also brings into focus the issue of Western 'Eurocentric' truth versus the tribal/ Native truth. In the last two centuries, Europe has dominated the discourse produced around the world, and through their systematic exploitation, they have made everybody believe that the version of truth

propounded by the whites is the only truth. This truth is backed by Western scientific discoveries and all truths have been reduced to mere superstitions. These superstitious truths were important because the survival of the people has come from this knowledge and environment (Smith, 2012, p.13).

In *Ceremony*, Silko shows readers how the schools run by the white government brainwashed the Native children against their traditions (1977, p. 87). The science books in the school are used to undermine and discredit the Native beliefs. Science is used as a weapon against the Native beliefs, but they did not use science to save the ecology and environment. The novelist is critical of the damage that has been done to the Ecology of the continents of America by predatory white materialism.

In *Ceremony*, readers come across many Native characters who had become pseudo-whites due to their education in white educational institutions. In the story "From Humaweepee the Warrior Priest," Silko shows readers the process of imparting education to a young boy who has not been tainted by Western education. In *Ceremony*, the problem is complex because here, the characters have been conditioned by the Western education and shorn of their culture. They have nurtured serious doubts about their own culture and traditions. That is why the strategy used by Humaweepee's uncle cannot work on these characters.

In *Ceremony*, Silko shows the readers how the main character of the novel, Tayo, has to undergo a practical lesson to understand the Indian way of life. In the novel, Tayo, the protagonist, goes through the spiritual world and becomes a Native in true spirit. For his transformation, he had to break the outer coverings that had been put on by the white educational institutions. In many episodes, the writer shows that the conditioning done by the white school is very strong and Tayo shows an active resistance to the process of un-conditioning. He starts the process only because he has no other option left: "He was tired of fighting. In there was no one left to trust, then he had no more reason to live" (1977, p.113).

Time and again, Tayo's old self resurfaces. Tayo has been brainwashed, and things have been taught to him which were lies. The lies were repeated so many times to him and by him that they became a part of his unconscious. He had a tough time removing those lies from his mind. When he starts his journey towards self-realization, his white self obstructs his path. He has been taught that whites are the paragons of virtue and that only Mexicans and Indians are capable of committing crimes. He has internalized all these teachings of the whites. That is why when he realizes that Floyd Lee, a white man, has stolen his cattle, his internalized beliefs come into the foreground:

He had a crazy desire to believe that he had gotten them innocently, maybe buying them from the real thieves. Why did he hesitate to accuse a white man of stealing but not a Mexican or an Indian? (1977, p.177)

By this time, his process of un-conditioning has started, and he realizes that his education in white institutions has rendered him incapable of blaming a white man for theft. Through this episode, Silko seems to suggest that white institutions were an attempt to legitimize the theft committed by the Whites in the continents of America. If they can produce two or more such generations who hesitate in believing that whites could commit the thefts, then nobody will blame the whites.

Here, Silko suggests that learning the Native way of life also means retrieving the continents of America. Studying in white institutions meant forgetting the culture, traditions and history of the Natives. Forgetting history meant legitimizing the occupation of the continents by the Whites.

Thus, Silko shows that the education of Natives in their cultural settings is important. The education system of the Natives is flexible and easy when compared to the White education system. In this education system, a young boy like Humaweepee and a young man Tayo could be educated. The central concept in this education system is self-reliance, oneness with the ecological surroundings and ultimately, learning to be a part of Nature. Humaweepee and Tayo both learn this through experience which is ultimately transformed into a story. These stories are cultural capital and ensure survival in the face of denigrating cultural assault and assimilation. A radical reassessment of the Western idea of 'episteme' is required to realize the proper significance of the disenfranchised Natives who were considered devoid of knowledge or culture because the Western discourse deliberately failed to acknowledge their value. Silko like the other Native writers succeeds in effectively challenging the Western concept of 'episteme' by telling the story of her community and showing how knowledge cannot be limited to or limited by the White man's conception of it as 'to know' or 'to understand.' A paradigm shift in research methodologies and framework has ensured that the socio-political critique of 'biocolonization' and the narrative resistance to new forms of exploitation, including 'the commodification' of people and resources is not just pronounced as valid but informs perceptions and action in research.

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The author declares no potential conflicts of interest.

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