

VIOLENCE, TRAUMA, AND CULTURAL MEMORY IN LESLIE SILKO'S *CEREMONY*

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The interplay of psychological as well as physical violence against Native America and trauma therapy via constructions of cultural (i.e. collective) memory, history, and ethnic identity are of prime interest in Leslie Silko's *Ceremony* (1977). In her seminal novel, she examines the roles of both collective and personal memory as well as of a multiple heritage in the de/construction of hybrid ethnic identities that in turn is a healing device for collective trauma. *Ceremony* tells the story of Tayo, a crossblood who returns from World War II to the Laguna Pueblo reservation in New Mexico and finds himself alienated from his surroundings because of a severe war trauma. In this article, I argue that the violence Tayo has suffered is not only deeply inscribed in his mind, but also affects his physical being; the protagonist is forced to grapple with the many conflicting aspects of his hybrid ethnic body in order to return from his metaphorical state of suspended animation.

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In Aleida Assmann's influential study of cultural memory, *Erinnerungsräume*,¹ the body is treated as a medium of memory. Bodily experiences, according to Assmann, inscribe themselves as memories on the body itself; the body is correspondingly a trace into one's history and identity. Collective memory, too, is written directly and indelibly on the body, as Nietzsche has concluded in his *Genealogy of Morals*. According to Nietzsche, agents of socialization and institutions of control and punishment have always inscribed the body culturally, in order to construct, determine, and stabilize a "memory of morals" (quoted in *ER* 245).

¹ Quoted as "ER" hereafter.

An instance of this kind of bodily inscription is found in the injured soldier's body: the physical wound—the scar—represents a site of memory more enduring than any other, and functions as the body-historiography of battles and other events in war. As traumata of war (“battle shocks” or “shell shocks”) are mostly characterized by a loss or repression of memory, they therefore function as a sort of “anti-memory”: despite the fact that traumatic memories of war are not consciously remembered by the soldier (or indeed any victim of war), they become indelible bodily inscriptions.

Memories inscribed on the body are, like other forms of memory, crucial for any construction of identity; however, as Peter Middleton and Tim Woods have pointed out, “[m]emory’s role in the maintenance of identity has ... long been recognized as vulnerable to loss” (Middleton and Woods 95). In the aftermath of a traumatic experience, for example, memories in fact destroy (rather than constitute the basis for) the possibility to create identity because they are inaccessible for a conscious procession through the mind (*ER* 248):

An experience whose excessive quality overwhelms the psychophysical capacity of a person destroys the possibility of an integral constitution of self in the aftermath. Traumata stabilize experiences which are inaccessible for the mind and settle down in the shadow of the mind as a latent presence. (*ER* 258-259)²

Remembrance and oblivion represent acts of trade and exchange, and are thus inseparable. Assmann notes that traumatic experiences seem to block such an exchange³ because they prevent remembering and, consequently, forgetting, which always presupposes the processing of memories.⁴ Affective layers of memory are separated from cognitive layers, and that is why verbal expressions cannot represent the wounded memory of the soldier (*ER* 260).

² “Durch eine Erfahrung, deren Exzeß das psychophysische Fassungsvermögen übersteigt, wird anschließend die Möglichkeit einer integralen Selbstkonstitution zerschlagen. Das Trauma stabilisiert eine Erfahrung, die dem Bewußtsein nicht zugänglich ist und sich im Schatten dieses Bewußtseins als eine latente Präsenz festsetzt.” All the translations from German into English are my own.

³ See *ER* 278: “Constitutive for any memory is the distance to itself, which makes possible self-encounter, monologue, self-doubling, self-reflection, self-disguise, self-production, self-experience; a distance which does not occur after traumatic experience...” (“Das für Erinnerungen konstitutive Selbstverhältnis der Distanz, welches Selbstbegegnung, Selbstgespräch, Selbstverdoppelung, Selbstspiegung, Selbstverstellung, Selbst-inszenierung, Selbsterfahrung ermöglicht, kommt beim Trauma nicht zustande ...”).

⁴ This is the reason many (psycho-)therapeutical methods that are primarily targeted on forgetting prove unsuccessful (*ER* 279).

When the conscious processing of one's individual memories has become impossible, these painful memories take on a demonic nature, i.e., they haunt the person by uncontrollable recurrence (*ER* 174-175): "A past that is not pacified rises from the dead unexpectedly and haunts the present like a vampire."⁵ Successful trauma therapy, therefore, centers on the reconfiguration and de-/restructuring of memory in that it attempts at rendering mnemonic processes conscious and more inclusive. By means of self-reflection, auto-aggressive blockades are being mitigated. No wonder, then, that the term "story" is crucial for Assmann in relation to therapy, as the life story that one "inhabits" (*ER* 134) connects memories and experience into "a structure that determines life as a formative self-image and that gives orientation to one's actions."⁶ Memories lost in or distorted by a trauma have to be (re)appropriated (i.e. gradually evaluated, selected, made accessible, and interpreted) by means of binding them into a narrative structure (*ER* 134-135). To make sense of one's life, thus, means to make sense of one's (hi)story, and to be able to tell it.

Likewise, most of these considerations apply equally for cultural traumata, i.e. traumatic experiences that affect the collective memory, such as the Holocaust, the cruelties of the slave system, or 9/11 more recently. The collective trauma also translates from generation to generation and often remains unspoken and tabooed for a long time (*ER* 175). Guilt, as long as it is being denied or repressed by the dominant politics of memory, haunts the present and has a grip on it until it is acknowledged. In contrast to individual trauma, collective trauma can only be inscribed into an abstract body, and thus does not bring along physical wounds. Furthermore, memories of cultural traumata, which are often hidden in strictly regulated institutions such as (closed) archives, can be made accessible by the changing agents of mnemopolitics.

In *Ceremony*, the protagonist returns from the Philippine battlefields to his homeland, the Laguna Pueblo reservation. The battles against Japanese soldiers, in which Tayo lost his (full-blooded) cousin Rocky, have traumatized him severely, but because the white doctors at the Veteran's Hospital in Los Angeles are unable to help

⁵ *ER* 175: "Eine unbefriedete Vergangenheit steht unerwartet wieder auf und sucht wie ein Vampir die Gegenwart heim."

⁶ *ER* 134-135: "Die Lebensgeschichte, die man 'bewohnt', bindet Erinnerungen und Erfahrungen in einer Struktur, die als formatives Selbstbild das Leben bestimmt und dem Handeln Orientierung gibt."

him, he is sent back to his reservation, where he finds himself just as alienated from the outside world as in the hospital. Tayo even expresses the desire to return to the vet's hospital, because uneasy "visions and memories of the past did not penetrate there" (15). Silko employs metaphors of white smoke at this point in order to describe Tayo's state of mind:

[h]e had drifted in colors of smoke, where there was no plan, only pale, pale gray of the north wall by his bed. *Their medicine drained memory out of his thin arms* and replaced it with a twilight cloud behind his eyes. It was not possible to cry on the remote and foggy mountain. If they had not dressed him and led him to the car, he would still be there, drifting along the north wall, invisible in the gray twilight. (15; my emphasis)

The trauma of war has left Tayo estranged not only from his sense of self, but, as the story unfolds, also from his past, his family and friends, and his homeland. As Aleida Assmann puts it:

Ceremony is a novel about the relation between trauma and identity. The trauma of war renders the mixed-blooded hero's problem of identity dramatically visible.⁷ (290)

Thus the story of Tayo becomes a story of refiguring identity within a highly conformist community of Native Americans.⁸ This deconstruction of Tayo's social status as an outsider, a role he has internalized on from his early childhood, involves an intense (and often painful) confrontation with both his Pueblo and White legacies as conflicting fragments of identity that are united within himself. Therefore, the protagonist has to face oppression from both the Laguna community and a White hegemony that seems to be in control of Native American land, culture, and history. As one might expect, this confrontation involves Tayo's active remembering of both personal and collective memories, which seems almost impossible for the traumatized protagonist—whose war experiences are inscribed on Tayo psychologically as well as physically. As soon as he tries to remember, Tayo starts to tremble, to vomit, to faint:

⁷ ER 290: "Ceremony ist ein Roman über den Zusammenhang von Trauma und Identität. Das Kriegstrauma macht das Identitätsproblem für den Helden, der ein Mischling ist, dramatisch deutlich."

⁸ See 57: "Tayo was used to it by now. Since he could remember, he had known Auntie's shame for him." Another narratorial comment on the conformism of this society concerns Laura, Tayo's deceased mother, who had sexual relations with both whites and Mexicans: "[t]he things Laura had done weren't easily forgotten by the people" (65).

He felt the shivering then; it began at the tips of his fingers and pulsed into his arms. He shivered because all the facts, all the reasons made no difference anymore; he could hear [his dead cousin] Rocky's words, and he could follow the logic of what Rocky said, but he could not feel anything except a swelling in his belly, a great swollen grief that was pushing into his throat. (8-9)

As far as Tayo knows at this point in the story, the only remedy against his seizures is "to keep busy . . . , to keep moving so that the sinews connected behind his eyes did not slip loose and spin his eyes to the interior of his skull where the scenes waited for him" (9). His memories of the war experience are clearly located in "the interior of his skull," but as they are completely entangled, he is unable to work with them, or to put them at least into an order: "as he tried to pull them apart, and rewind them into their places, they snagged and tangled even more" (7). Thus, Tayo is helplessly haunted by the violence of the war scenes that appear repeatedly in his dreams, which "did not wait any more for night; they came out any time" (56), e.g. by Rocky's death or by what is termed "battle fatigue" by the Army doctors (31) when they refer to his inability to kill a Japanese soldier who reminds him too much of his uncle Josiah (19).

In *Ceremony*, Tayo's trauma therapy is conceived of as a painful *journey* (e.g. in Arturo J. Aldama's essay, "Tayo's Journey Home") that also includes geographical movement, as to reappropriate collective memory necessarily involves a spiritual reappropriation of the homeland. In Assmann's words:

From an Indian perspective, the trauma of war is not only inscribed into the body of the soldier; the nuclear defence industry with its growing power to destroy inscribes itself also into the earth. Therefore, trauma therapy can never be individual therapy alone, but is closely entangled with the macrohistory of a traumatized earth.⁹

However, the overall purpose of this ceremony is not to create a unified sense of self, a "being whole"¹⁰ that would be merely fictitious

⁹ ER 294: "In indianischer Perspektive ist das Kriegstrauma nicht nur in die Körper von Soldaten eingeschrieben; die nukleare Rüstungsindustrie schreibt sich mit ihrem wachsenden Zerstörungspotential auch in den Erdkörper ein. Deshalb kann Traumatherapie auch niemals Individualtherapie sein, sondern steht in engstem Zusammenhang mit der Makrogeschichte einer ebenfalls traumatisierten Erde."

¹⁰ It is noteworthy that a substantial number of analyses of *Ceremony* do not take into account the influx of postmodernism on contemporary conceptions of identity and thus center upon the issue of Tayo's "becoming whole" again. In my view, this clearly hints at the persistence of the romanticizing notion that Native America is close to an "original" state of nature and therefore beyond the reach of postmodern fragmentation (see for example the analyses of Moss or Seyersted).

anyway, since it is impossible for either the tortured land or the traumatized protagonist to undo (historical) processes of fragmentation and hybridization. What can be achieved, however, as Assmann states, is an understanding of these processes and consequently a transformation of the conception of personal and collective identity, which involves the liberation from the passivity of the victimized Indian (*ER* 296).

Accordingly, Tayo's transformation—and thus his healing—consists in his active search for a heritage of his own as well as in the dissolution of outwardly assigned roles such as the helpless victim, the nineteenth-century motif of the “tragic mixed-blood,” or the traditional Indian who cannot cope with twentieth-century America and is therefore doomed to vanish (on the latter, see Sequoya 92-93). For the protagonist, the reinvention of identity is informed by rediscovering the cultural memory of the Laguna Pueblo as well as by remembering a land that can be regained symbolically by the narrative act of telling its story (Assmann, “Space, Place, Land” 63-65). In the end, Tayo finds a place from where “there was no sign the White people had ever come to this land; they had no existence then, *except as he remembered them*” (184-185; emphasis mine).

Tayo's geographical journey functions as a trajectory that leads him out of the trappings of the passive victim of multiple oppressions (both within and outside the Laguna community). His development is of a non-linear, gradual, and highly complex nature, as it involves not only Tayo's view of his own identity, but is made possible only by his de/construction of Native American history and heritage, as well as of the land itself, as “the Indian concept of transition is territorialized, taken from and bound to the life and persistence of the land” (Assmann, “Space, Place, Land” 64). The transition is thus not limited to a personal level, but is extended to the conception of ethnic identity in contemporary America.

In this context, Silko uses various helper-figures who accompany Tayo on his journey. Ku'oosh and Betonie are both medicine men, but while Ku'oosh's power is limited to the traditions of the Laguna Pueblo and therefore offers only temporary relief (39), the half-Mexican Navajo Betonie transcends the old ceremonies of his tribe by integrating aspects of the colonizers' culture, like coke bottles and phone books. In his hogan, he had

a medicine man's paraphernalia, laid beside the painted gourd rattles and deer-hoof clackers of the ceremony. But with this old man it did not end there; under the medicine bags ..., he [Tayo] saw layers of old calendars, the sequences of years confused and lost... (120)

Although the calendars would be useless with regard to traditional Pueblo conceptions of time—which are cyclical rather than linear—and are therefore not kept in chronological order,¹¹ Betonie’s Mexican grandmother started collecting them out of a necessity to keep abreast with the times: “[i]n the old days it was simple. A medicine person could get by without all these things. But nowadays...” (121). In order to be able to confront contemporary problems of hybrid ethnic identity, Betonie’s wisdom has to transcend traditions and tribal borders and cannot end where a different culture begins; as Aleida Assmann points out, he “knows that the ceremonies must keep changing as the world changes” (“Space, Place, Land” 65).

As a medicine man, Betonie traditionally functions as guard of the Navajo cultural memory, since he is one of the community’s storytellers, who, together with the responsive audience, keep its vital oral tradition alive. This responsibility, however, has been a cross-cultural (or inter-tribal, as John Peacock terms it throughout his essay “Un-writing Empire by Writing Oral Tradition”) task since the first contact with other peoples, and especially since Spanish and Anglo domination of the Americas has started: oppression and ethnic diversification through population changes have left their traces. The storyteller Betonie acknowledges these “new stories,” which seem to be the main reason for his “keeping track of things” (121), i.e. his mania to collect “the leftover things the whites didn’t want” (127). In this context, Assmann views Betonie’s practice of collecting things as clearly countering the white “throwaway society” (*ER* 386).

[C]ardboard boxes filled the big room; the sides of some boxes were broken down, sagging over with old clothing and rags spilling out...Inside the boxes without lids, the erect brown string handles of [Woolworth] shopping bags poked out He [Tayo] could see bundles of newspapers, their edges curled stiff and brown, barricading piles of telephone books... Light from the door worked paths through the thick bluish green glass of the Coke bottles... (119-120)

Betonie’s mnemopolitic agency focuses on the subversion of traditional media of memory: he is an agent of waste, as for him, all the things that are thrown away are alive as long as their stories are remembered (121). Consequently, he exhumes and reactivates Tayo’s narrative reservoirs, as Karsten Düsdieler mentions (249). Tayo is taught to remember everything he has seen: the stories of

¹¹ With regard to the calendars, Betonie’s disrespect for chronological time can be viewed as a subversion of the supremacy of white models of linear time.

the war as well as those he chooses to inherit, e.g. the stories his uncle (and surrogate father) Josiah told him—but also the stories of the land and of the Laguna Pueblo that are produced by a White hegemonic discourse. As Gabriel Motzkin states,

... the memory of the constituted other [in this case, of the white world] is necessary for the definition of self, but this memory itself is so traumatic that it can only be cured through the therapeutic mediation of the transformed other. (271)

Remembering (and *selectively* telling) both the stories of oneself and of the Other, therefore, constitutes a vital part of both the active acquisition of a heritage and the creation of a new legacy.

In this respect, Ku'oosh is much more traditional and conservative; he fails to transform his rituals in order to meet the demands of contemporary ethnic identity-construction, and eventually “has only dead ceremonies, pale ceremonies” (Copeland 160). Therefore, he is not very helpful beyond his analysis of the world Tayo lives in, which he terms “fragile”: “filled with the intricacies of a continuing process, and with a strength inherent in spider webs ...” (35). Although Ku'oosh “begins the process of unwinding Tayo’s memory from the depths of his being” (Copeland 160) and also heightens the protagonist’s awareness for his communal responsibility to tell “the story behind each word ... so there could be no mistake in the meaning of what had been said” (35-36), he is unable to offer any prospects for how to live in this world. Ku'oosh has to admit that “[t]here are some things we can’t cure like we used to ..., not since the white people came” (38). On the other hand, as Suzanne M. Austgen has put it:

Betonie ... integrates the current realities of Indian life into traditional ritual [and] demonstrates ritual’s potential for reflexivity. Betonie’s new ceremonies not only reflect changes in the Pueblo culture, but are a means for endorsing these changes. (Austgen 5)

Betonie is one of the characters in *Ceremony* who is privileged in the negotiation of traditions—of memories and of heritages. Throughout the novel, the crossblood is not a tragic, but a powerful, creative character. Not only in Native American literature are crossbloods often presented as privileged in the negotiation of heritages. Due to their problematic ethnic, cultural, and social status of in-betweenness, they are often depicted in their function as a bridge (a spatial metaphor Homi Bhabha coined) between different cultural contexts throughout so-called “ethnic” texts. As the “divided culture hero” Kenneth Lincoln speaks of (236), Tayo, as a polycultural protagonist

... represents a mediating principle between contesting social formations – as it does in the notion of the “mixed-blood” as “bridge” – the Native American protagonist reprises the historic role of the bicultural translator. (Sequoya 91)

Neither fully integrated into the Laguna Pueblo community and far from being accepted by White hegemony, Tayo’s painful task is to create a sense of self that transcends internalized stereotypes of the “tragic half-breed”: he has to subvert these ascriptions in order to generate both self-respect and social agency. This de/constructive process eventually helps him acknowledge the positive qualities of being in-between, such as the possibility to bridge gaps between Native American, Chicano/a, and White cultures (i.e. to function as a cultural translator), or a basic openness to constructions of new identities, which Michael Fischer terms “the creative sense of being of mixed heritage” (224).

In *Ceremony*, Silko uses various characters of mixed ancestry and emphasizes their outstanding qualities as agents of cultural, social, and historical transition. In all of her fiction, Rachel Stein notes,

[i]t is often people at the margins of tribal/dominant culture—people of mixed descent, ... those who bear the conflict between cultures in their own persons and who must inevitably negotiate the entanglement of competing cultures—who are driven to create new stories that reframe the relations of native culture and dominant white culture ... (Stein 122)

Tayo and Betonie, due to their being crossbloods, are placed at a certain distance from their respective communities, a fact that enables them to develop a more inclusive worldview which counteracts dichotomization—just as they themselves cannot be placed into dichotomous categories of ethnicity and of cultural belonging.

Even Josiah’s speckled cattle¹² are half-breeds, “full of meat like domestic Anglo cattle but wild and rangy like Indian stock” (Flores 117), and unlike the “weak, soft Herefords” (Silko 74) the white ranchers breed (Silko 186), his are intelligent survivors, “designed by their genes to survive the changing conditions of their environment” (Copeland 166). The speckled cattle have never been separated from the land and are so “wild” that they could not be kept in barns or corrals. It exemplifies the crossblood’s subversion of a dichotomized

¹² Ronnow notes yet another function of the wild cattle: “[t]o breed wild cattle ... had always been Josiah’s desire. Tayo ... learns that to desire as Josiah desired is enough to reinstate Josiah into his on-going story [and] becom[es] more comfortable in the presence of the dead” (80).

white world: in that it even crosses fences (79), Josiah's cattle undermine the White concept of property; and, as Tayo notes, their whole design ridicules scientific breeding: "he thought of the diagram of the ideal beef cow which had been in the back of one of the [White science] books, and these cattle were everything that the ideal cow was not" (75).

White science loses its claim to universality, for the books Tayo and Josiah read do not consider "drought or winter blizzards or dry thistles, which the cattle had to live with" (75). Silko contrasts the two kinds of cattle as she contrasts Betonie and Ku'oosh. In the same manner, Tayo is everything the ideal Indian is not: he represents the double Other, who is discriminated against by both Whites and Natives. Still, he is the one to survive (the war as well as the crisis thereafter) because he can cope with many worlds—something which his cousin Rocky, who always wanted to be as white as possible, does not. Like many of his peers on the reservation, Rocky struggled for full integration into the White system and thus tried to deny the legacies of the Pueblo:

[Rocky] was an A-student and all-state in football and track. He had to win; he said he was always going to win. ...Rocky understood what he had to do to win in the white outside world. ...Tayo saw how Rocky deliberately avoided the old-time ways. (51)

Rocky tries to forget where he comes from by "whitewashing" himself; his incentive to fight for "the white people's war" (36) is part of this process, as in its time of need, the army promises that "[t]hey were America the Beautiful too, this was the land of the free just like the teachers said in school" (42).

While Rocky dies in the Philippines, many of his Indian comrades survive, but have to realize that without the uniform, they are again as "un(wanted)-American(s)" as they were before the war. Their disappointment and their hatred for the White world turn against Tayo because he is part White; Emo, "who prides himself on being a full-breed" (Assmann, "Space, Place, Land" 65), insults him: "You drink like an Indian, and you're crazy like one too—but you aren't shit, white trash. You love Japs the way your mother loved to screw white men" (63).

Emo measures Tayo against internalized stereotypes that are designed by Whites—the drunk and the crazy Indian. As he cannot dissociate himself from White categorizations, he constantly tries to live up to them and eventually kills Pinkie, one of his friends, in an accident while getting drunk (259-260). Thus, Emo "becomes one of the displaced and uprooted war-veterans who ... succumb to fits of

alcohol and aggression” (Assmann, “Space, Place, Land” 65).

All of the surviving veterans are haunted by what they have seen: by “what the white people had made from the stolen land” (169), but also by those who died in the war. Temporal borders between the world of the dead and that of the living have become pervious; but in contrast to his comrades, Tayo does not try to silence the ghosts of the land and of the war by drinking himself to death.¹³ As a crossblood, he is familiar with the transgression of borders, and thus is able to confront the dead in the course of his trauma therapy. At the end of the novel, Naomi Rand says, he “chooses a ‘voluntary’ Indian identity” which “gives him a way of coming to terms with his own dead” (Rand 18).

The transgression of all sorts of borders seems to be of foremost importance throughout the novel. Even borders between (what seems to be) reality and imagination are challenged, as can be seen when Tayo takes a Japanese soldier for his uncle Josiah and thus is unable to kill him. What White medicine declares a hallucination, or “war fatigue,” becomes part of a historical reality as soon as Betonie reveals to Tayo that “[i]t isn’t surprising that you saw [Josiah] with [the Japanese]. You saw who they were. Thirty thousand years ago they were not strangers” (124). The protagonist’s “hallucination” clearly shows that his outside (or, “double Other”) status as a half-breed enables him to unmask constructions of both temporal and geographical borders, and consequently to embrace a worldview that is inclusive rather than based on dichotomous constructions of categories of identity, such as ethnicity. As Jennifer Brice points out, “it is precisely the blurring of self and other that distinguishes him from the destroyers” (Brice 132). The construction of the Japanese as enemy is therefore clearly a product of White arbitrariness and cannot be sustained by Tayo.

The arbitrary construction of evil is also shown in the creation myth that is retold in the novel, in which White people are created in an Indian witchery contest between all the tribes of the world (“[s]ome had slanty eyes/ others had black skin,” 133). One of the witches, whose tribe and gender remain unknown (134), creates the White people as inimical to the world, and so reveals that evil is a construction. Betonie helps Tayo to understand that witchcraft

13 See 169: [e]very day they had to look at the land, from horizon to horizon, and every day the loss was with them; it was the dead unburied, and the mourning of the lost going on forever. So they tried to sink the loss in booze, and silence their grief with war stories about their courage, defending the land they had already lost.

... want[s] us to believe all evil resides with white people. Then we will look no further to see what is really happening. They want us to separate ourselves from white people, to be ignorant and helpless as we watch our own destruction. But white people are only tools that the witchery manipulates; and I tell you, we can deal with white people, with their machines and their beliefs. (132)

Here, the witchery functions as a metaphor for hatred and violent destruction as well as for borders that exclude and split up the world, so that boundaries prevent transitions. In the course of the novel, Tayo has to re/learn that “there were no boundaries”: temporal, spatial, spiritual, or ethnic (145). He has to remember and accommodate the creation stories, which are part of the cultural memory of his tribe, in order to re-member the world. Of course, collective stories and myths are always changing; they are not a given, and therefore must be actively accessed (or, inherited) by Tayo, who then also bridges the gap across cultures, and, like Betonie, negotiates different heritages. As Melody Graulich notes, the protagonist claims his identity by the stories he accepts as his own (Graulich 5).

In *Ceremony*, the crossblood—as a direct embodiment of transition and border-crossing—is privileged in the constant accommodation to and of a (postmodern) world that is complex, fragile, and always changing in its design. As Aleida Assmann puts it,

[t]hose who have crossed borderlines are ambivalent persons, developing a sense for complexity, dismissing rigid black-and-white patterns and clear-cut polarizations of values. (“Space, Place, Land” 65)

Yet she also contends that “transition is an exposed, particularly fragile and risky state” (Assmann, “Space, Place, Land” 65). Therefore Tayo, whose collective responsibility it is to understand transitions and negotiate cultural heritages in order to de/construct (and thus accommodate) collective identities of the Laguna Pueblo, needs experienced helpers, like Betonie or many of the female figures in the book.

The stories Tayo is told re/shape his sense of self, and in turn, the stories he himself constructs and, at the end of the book, tells the Laguna elders carry the potential to re/write tribal history, as they subvert the manifold dichotomizations that penetrate Western worldviews. As Toni Flores has observed:

[Tayo] comes to terms with that part of his past which is implicated in the actions of the victimizer—American, violent, male—and with that part which is implicated in the role of the victim—Indian, suffering, female. Resolved to accept neither of these roles, rejecting the necessity of dichotomizing them, he tells the story in a new way, making good rather than evil and active creation rather than passive suffering the salient principles. (Flores 120)

From a cross-temporal perspective, one always lives with stories of the past in the present, and is responsible for the continuous rehabilitation of narrative space. To create and/or continue a counter-discourse that constructs “the Indian” as the surviving, not as the *Vanishing American* also means to do justice to the many Pueblo ancestors who were engaged in resisting both Spanish and Anglo usurpation, and to render their lives meaningful: that the tribe lives on and remembers its heritages and traditions is—at least partly—their merit. The remembrance and re/creation of constructive (rather than destructive) stories continue the history of resistance and active opposition to White stories of war and oppression.

Leslie Silko employs spectropolitical agency in her novel in order to reconcile the protagonist with his many selves and his heterogeneous surroundings. The reconciliation, however, does not include the violent, destructive elements in any of these cultures, which are presented as the main source for conflicts between ethnicities in the novel.

As a crossblood, Tayo must learn to work with the multiple nature of his ancestry. From his status of in-betweenness, he is bound to confront both oppressor and oppressed, both the white hegemonic system and non-WASPS—especially America’s most paradoxical Other, its indigenous peoples. In a continuous re-negotiation between these conflicting worlds, Tayo, due to his multiple heritages, is a privileged agent, whose ultimate achievement is the hybridization of both the Pueblo and Anglo collective memories: from the Navajo/Mexican Betonie, he learns that Native America needs to acknowledge the impact of the colonizers’ culture/s and to integrate as well as de/construct their hi/stories. The Anglo part, in turn, will have to live with Other stories, stories that fragment and counter its Grand Narratives, and eventually debase any claims to universality or objectivity.

Hybridization is everywhere in *Ceremony*, from its formal properties and multivocal narration to the many fragmented and/or traumatized personalities that either withdraw to stories of loss, despair, hatred, and violence, and thus are destined to die, or embrace their fragmentation and work with rather than against this phenomenon in that they create new and livable stories. These figures in Silko’s book do not counter cultural trauma with violence; in contrast, they reject violent acts in order to break the traumatic spell. The new *Vanishing*

Americans are those who ignore that the world is always in transition and refuse to acknowledge a hybrid cultural heritage that, as Silko makes clear in *Ceremony*, is even capable of healing both mental and physical war wounds.

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