

Environmental Justice and Indigenous Feminism: An Eco-Critical Study of Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*

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Abstract

This research paper anatomizes Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977) from the perspective of Joni Adamson's theory of Environmental Justice and Indigenous Feminism. Adamson's Eco-critical approach focuses on the common theme of the manipulation of nature and females. Since time immemorial, indigenous females, whose native tradition stems from nature, have stayed in a close relationship with nature. Owing to their life sharing bond of interdependence with nature, they identify themselves with it. European colonizers have wreaked havoc in the life of indigenous females by displacing them from the natural environment of their homeland. Since European colonization, the females and natural resources have been callously exploited hence; hence, environmental exploitation continues to marginalize the females perpetually. Although the destruction of nature has caused poverty and fatal diseases, the females are considered responsible for all ills and calamities. The loss of nature has inflicted great pain and suffering on them; even they have lost their very identity and religious beliefs. The destructive activities of the colonizers have obliterated their life by separating them from their beloved environment. This not only made them impoverished but also destroyed their mental peace and their tribal identity. The present paper projects the importance of nature in Native Americans' life as well as the renowned features of indigenous females in relation with their natural environment. It shows that nature reflects indigenous female's life, besides offering an interpretation of the restoration of their lost identity by challenging the relegation of nature and the females to a lower stratum to be destroyed and dominated.

Keywords: *nature, indigenous feminism, environmental justice, European colonization*

Introduction

In order to dominate indigenous females and nature, European colonizers have undermined their existence. The European colonizers' urge to make progress is not only detrimental to the natural world but also shows disregard for the females. Both nature and the females have become equal victims of the resulting derision. Nature has great significance in indigenous females' life as it cements their relationship with their tribal community. The colonizers have ruined the close association of the females with nature; they have never acknowledged the significant role played by the females in protecting nature and sharing the natural resources with their tribal people. Indigenous females' natural way of life is classed as backward and primitive. Their association with nature is given such a dark portrayal that they are declared subhuman as if they have no domestic

life and their voice is also

suppressed. Through such stereotypical presentation, the colonizers have used the females as an instrument for pleasure. Silko exposes the hypocrisy of the colonizers who support the females only when they are fit into their stereotypical concepts.

Leslie Marmon Silko confutes the colonizing approach by presenting indigenous females as wise and strong characters who have reciprocal relationship with nature; cultivate different types of plants and vegetable as well as support their male fellows in renovation of their health and lost tribal identity. Indigenous females have firm beliefs in nature that is a part of their religion and culture. The colonizers have distorted their beliefs and cultural values as well as misused them along with nature. Being an adherent of her tribal culture, Silko attempts to restore the lost religious beliefs and socio- cultural values. She opines that the females deserve respect for performing their efficient role in the spheres of agricultural and domestic life. Silko challenges the colonizers discriminatory policies and also calls for equal rights of all living beings regardless of gender and racial differences. She “recognizes ethnic and national particularities and yet transcends ethnic and national boundaries” (Adamson & Solvic, 2009, pp. 6-7). Silko believes that a healthy environment is essential for the survival of all human and non- human beings. This research paper contributes to restore the lost identity of indigenous females and justifies their relationship with nature. It also challenges the European colonizers’ inequitable activities as well as marginalization of the females and destruction of nature. To meet the research objective, the paper searches for the relevant material from Silko’s *Ceremony* from the perspective of Joni Adamson’s Eco-critical approach.

Research Questions

This investigation has been conducted to answer the following questions:

1. How does *Ceremony* deal with environmental problems and develop the concept of environmental justice from the perspective of indigenous females?
2. How does the selected novel help in restoring indigenous females’ lost identity, by correlating their issues of race, gender, class and power with their environmental problems?
3. How does Silko respond to the European colonizers’ maltreatment of indigenous females and of their environment?

Literature Review

Acholonu (1995) admits that “since the past thirty years, the world has been experiencing unprecedented interest in matters concerning women on one hand, and ecological issues on the other” (p. 199). The contemporary eco-critics realize that in patriarchal society “the men not only try to dominate nature outside but it is also the nature of women and nature as woman which must be tamed” (Halkes, 1991, p. 12). In such a male dominated society nature and females are considered inferior and equally subjugated. These limited “traditional theories of representation are under attack because of narrowness of their interests”

(Cohen, 1998, p. 29). In response to such a

narrow perception of nature the eco-critics propose a broader theory that comprises “post national and post-ethnic visions of human experience of the environment . . . the wave of “material” eco-feminism . . . and the concept of ‘animality” (Slovic, 2010, p. 7). This broader Eco-critical approach omits the boundaries between man and his natural environment along with class and gender differences. Leslie Marmon Silko presents the indigenous females’ problems from the perspective of environmental issues. She pays equal respect to the females and nature as she knows that both nature and the females have great contribution to the survival of tribal community. The tribal people have strong beliefs in nature; nature is their life, religion and culture. Indigenous females keep vast knowledge of their tribal cultural values and religious beliefs that are engrained in nature. They have medicinal and spiritual power. They cure their male fellows spiritually and physically by restoring their lost identity.

According to European colonizers, indigenous females must be commodified because they are inferior beings. They are termed “alien to nature and also as a loathsome natural representation” (Donovan, 1994, p. 100). The colonizers declared the females indifferent to the natural environment who consider nature a sign of disaster and hopelessness. The females are fully cognizant of the reasons for the natural disasters. In fact, they are appalled and shocked to see the natural catastrophes; they enlighten their tribal people that the environmental destruction only causes sufferings and troubles for humans and non-human beings alike. They are also criticized on the basis of their relationship with the male partners. Donovan (1994) argues that indigenous females are supportive and strong “on a superficial level, but they also have a fundamental impulse to subservience, sexual and otherwise, to a man” (pp. 114-15). Actually, they are very strong and cooperative community members. They help their bewildered tribal people in developing their relationship with the natural world. Nonetheless, they have been criticized on the basis that they sexually deceive their male partners and take them away from “the healing possibilities of ritual and landscape” (Donovan, 1994, p. 102). Mary Douglas (1986) states that though the “lines of structure, cosmic or social, are clearly defined” yet indigenous females violate the prevailing socio-cultural values (p. 112). The “Scholars saw Native cultures as too primitive, too few, and too backward” (Stoll & Adam, 2007, p. 19). Many critics and scholars have failed to understand the indigenous females’ socio-cultural norms and religious beliefs.

Silko aims at protecting the strong beliefs and cultural values of indigenous females. Therefore, she keeps on reviving their ancestral culture and religious beliefs and by sharing their tribal stories; she challenges the European colonizers’ misrepresentation of the females’ communal relationship with their physical environment. But Silko has been criticized for her sharing the tribal secrets with the non-native communities. Paula Gunn Allen censures Silko for her sharing the

tribal stories with other than native tribes in *Ceremony*. According to Allen, the tribal secrets should not be told outside the native community. Allen (1986) believes that “the primary

purpose of stories in ceremony is to depict Laguna oral tradition” (p. 383). In fact, Silko resuscitates indigenous females’ lost and distorted religious beliefs and socio-cultural values by presenting them through the tribal stories. Allen declares indigenous females too weak and simple who fail to comprehend the grand design behind the colonizers’ destructive activities. As a result, they can easily be manipulated and victimized. They can also be an easy prey for humiliation and brutality. But, reality is other way around; indigenous females are wise and strong characters who assist their tribe in restoring their lost identity as well as resisting the colonizers’ destructive activities. In *Ceremony*, the indigenous female characters play main role in making the male protagonist aware of the socio-cultural values of his ancestors so that his tribal identity will not be lost.

Nevertheless, *Ceremony* is one of the most critically analyzed novels. It “is one of the most realized works of fiction devoted to Indian life that has been written in this country, and it is a splendid achievement” (Chavkin, 2002, p. 18). It is infused with indigenous females’ wisdom. The present paper analyzes *Ceremony* in the backdrop of Joni Adamson’s Eco-critical theory of environmental justice and indigenous feminism. The paper deals with environmental problems from the perspective of the issues of gender and class differences and develops the concept of environmental justice. Moreover, it examines how nature and its protectors, indigenous females are appropriated by the European colonizers to exploit them; the paper also challenges the colonizers’ stereotypical representation of indigenous females and nature.

Theoretical Framework and Research Method

The present research paper is based on Joni Adamson’s eco-critical approach. Initially, the eco-critics follow the Euro-American’s concept of nature that disregards the relationship between human and non-human nature. Euro-Americans believe that we are not “part of the natural process. We are superior to nature, contemptuous of it willing to use it for our slightest whim” (Jr, 1996, p. 12). Adamson disapproves of such a human centred concept of nature that views natural entities inferior and excludes human beings from nature. Her Eco-critical theory gives equal respect to nature and females. According to Adamson, an environment is a place in which all human and non-human beings live and work freely. She believes that all living beings have right to use the natural resources irrespective of any difference. Adamson (2002) denounces:

The blame on the world’s poorest people, particularly women, who are the least responsible for global warming . . . focus on the global threats of poor women’s fertility has also justified the design and implementation of aggressive and coercive population control mechanisms and contraceptive technologies that restrict women’s reproductive rights and endanger their health. (p. 209)

Adamson associates the ruination of environment with the marginalization

of the poor women. She opposes the Euro-Americans' point of view who have

shifted responsibility of the environmental problems “on to the bodies of women of color and poor women around the world” (Adamson, 2002, p. 209). In Adamson’s point of view the environmental destruction is interrelated to gender, racial and social problems. As human beings are coexisted and interrelated with their physical environment in the same way environmental and social problems are interconnected. Adamson’s Eco-critical approach promotes an idea that there is an indivisible link between environmental and feminist issues that are the existing social problems.

Research Method

The nature of the present research is qualitative and the research method of the study is textual analysis (content analysis) proposed by Catherine Belsey. “Textual analysis is indispensable to research in cultural criticism, cultural history and cultural studies, as well as any other discipline that focuses on texts” (Griffin, 1988, p. 157). Text presents not only the important events but also the circumstances in which it is written. Textual analysis interprets the meaning and message of any text in perspective of its existed environment and historical background. The present research focuses on the following two aspects of textual analysis proposed by Catherine Belsey:

- i- Historical background.
- ii- Socio-cultural environments.

As “any specific textual analysis is made at a particular historical moment and from within a specific culture” (Griffin, 1988, p. 166). The study analyses the selected work with reference to historical background and specific circumstances in which it is produced. *Silko* suffers from unfavourable circumstances and also derives ideas from the history of indigenous females’ communal relationship with nature as well as “the history of imperialism” (Griffin, 1988, p 170), in which indigenous females suffer under European colonization. European colonizers have exploited nature and this exploitation reached its climax during the World War II. *Silko* depicts white people as the agents of destruction, for their mode of isolation from and dominion over nature causes violence and destruction.

Data Analysis

Ceremony presents close “connection between social injustices and environmental degradation” (Adamson, 1958, p. 20). Social and environmental problems are interlinked. In the presence of social discriminations, environmental problems cannot be resolved. *Silko* presents the European colonizers abuse of nature and indigenous females as well as challenges the colonizers’ stereotypical presentation of the bond of mutual relationship between the females and nature. The females are presented in such a negative way as if they have neither civilization nor any cultural background. On the other hand, they are advised to abandon their natural way of life. As Tayo’s mother, Laura is encouraged by the colonizers to abandon her tribal lifestyle and native land: “These people urged her to break away from her home” (*Silko*, 1977, p. 63). By separating the females from their environment the colonizers weaken them and have a hold over their native

land. The females are labelled as primitive, disgusting and underdeveloped race, who are “part of a wild, untamed nature that must be unexploited and controlled” (Adamson 132). Since European colonization, indigenous females and nature have been mercilessly exploited. The colonizers’ incursion into Native Americans’ regions resulted destruction and repression: “Every day they had to look at the land, from horizon to horizon, and every day the loss was with them” (Silko, 1977, p. 169). Silko depicts the colonizers as the agents of destruction, for their mode of isolation from and dominion over indigenous females and nature causes violence and destruction. Their violent actions lead to the greater destruction that causes fear and death. Silko criticises the colonizers on the basis of their violent and destructive temperament and declares them “destroyers” (Silko, 1977, p. 128). They ruin the ecology by making people forget their relationship with the planet and each other. When human beings fail to remember the importance of their relationship with the earth, they suffer from different problems. Silko presents: “The general problem of ecological denial or alienation through the lens of gender . . . yet at the same time symbolically coded as female—an arena of potential domination analogous to the female body” (Buell, 2011, p. 109). The unjust treatment of the colonizers causes historical trauma to indigenous females. Their violence against the females results in despair and hatred; the colonizers have destroyed the natural world and misrepresented the females’ relationship with their physical environment. The oppression of nature means the subjugation of the females. Indigenous females narrate this violent and bloody history to their coming generations in order to revive their suppressed native social and cultural values. As the Thought-Woman shares socio-cultural values of her ancestors with her people to make them acquainted with their heritage. With the help of the stories of their ancestors, Native Americans come to know:

Long time ago
in the beginning
there were no white people in this world
there was nothing European . . .
This world was already complete. (Silko, 1977, p. 122)

Before the European colonization, Native Americans deemed the world complete; they lived in the form of a single community. Silko shares the tribal stories and relates incidents from the ancient social and cultural experiences of her ancestors to justify their legal rights to their native land. The stories are not narrated for the mere purpose of entertainment but they reflect the strong association of Native Americans with the natural world.

During the European colonization, “Minority and low income populations are subject to environmental risks” (Adamson, 1958, p. 52). The poor people, especially indigenous females and their natural resources have been ignored by the colonizers. The females fight to get back their native land to restore the natural resources and their very identity which is associated with their motherland. The destruction of

natural resources has caused fatal diseases and poverty; hence, environmental degradation

continues to marginalise the females perpetually. The destructive activities of the colonizers wreaked havoc in the females' life by separating them from their beloved environment. This not only made the females impoverished but also destroyed their mental peace. "The destroyers are working for drought to sear the land, to kill the livestock, to stunt the corn plants and squash in the gardens, leaving the people more and more vulnerable" (Silko, 1977, p. 231). Due to the loss of nature indigenous females have been enduring great pain; even they have lost their very identity and religious beliefs. Silko knows: "The roots of poverty, injustice, and environmental degradation lie at the heart of western culture's favorite story about itself" (Adamson, 1958 p. 21). In pursuit of their own interest the colonizers have commodified the earth and the females. "They exploded the first atomic bomb . . . it knew no boundaries" (Silko, 1977, p. 228). Atomic bomb destroyed ecology in vast areas regardless of boundaries and limitations. The colonizers fail to realize that "land was a living thing that had to be nursed . . . the sun, moon and stars influenced both the human body and the earth body" (Adamson, 1958, p. 143). The mother earth and indigenous females are used by the colonizers to gratify their lustful thirst and to fulfil their materialistic aims. Indigenous females realize the colonizers' intentions in their "greedy feeble love-making" (Silko, 1977, p. 63). They know that the colonizers use them for enjoyment. Silko claims that the earth is a home to all human and non- human beings and therefore it is an equal right of all beings to use its natural resources.

The very existence of the poor population is demolished by the discriminatory distribution of the natural resources. "The conditions, under which the poor and marginalized live and work in toxically contaminated regions, are both socially and environmentally unjust" (Adamson, 1958, p. 69). The poor indigenous females are linked to nature in a negative way. On the other hand, they suffer deprivation of their natural landscape. They are compelled to stay at reservations that were the polluted areas where they suffered from severe diseases and depression. At reservation areas, they are unable to lead peaceful and healthy life, besides losing their mutual relationship with nature. Indigenous females' alienation from the natural landscape targets their marginalization. European colonizers consider it their moral and social privilege to victimize the females by occupying their homeland. Their motherland and tribal identity are snatched away from them. The colonizers declare indigenous females inferior beings and feel pleasure in exploiting them and their natural world. As Tayo's mother, Laura is looked down upon because of her affiliation with a Euro-American and giving birth to a mixed blooded child. Tayo feels shame for his mixed breed because whenever Euro-Americans look at him "they remember things that happened" (Silko, 1977, p. 92). European colonizers exploit indigenous females for their lust on the other hand look at them contemptuously for giving birth to mixed blooded children.

The colonizing approach “relies on keeping out of sight and out of mind the harm being done to the bodies of poor women and children’s bodies and the poisoning of their local environments” (Adamson, 2002, p.

208). The colonizers have exploited nature and indigenous females without realizing that it is injustice to the poor females and non-human species. These exploiters fail to grasp that the females' ethics are associated with the natural world. Whatever is sacred for the females has been exploited by European settlers. "They logged the trees, they killed the deer, bear, and mountain lions, they built their fences high" (Silko, 1977, p. 204). The devastation of the natural world is detrimental to indigenous females' health and control over nature is equivalent to the exploitation of the females. "Human suffering and the degradation of the environment" are interrelated (Adamson, 1958, p. 17). Man and nature are interlinked and interdependent like "spider webs woven across paths through sand hills where early in the morning the sun becomes entangled in each filament of web" (Silko, 1977, p. 32). The symbol of the spider web shows interconnected relationship between all the living creatures.

Before European colonization, indigenous females lived like a community in which all humans and non-humans shared the natural resources equally. European colonizers categorize human and non-human beings to maintain boundaries between different groups. They tend to undermine the importance of nature as a legitimate source of the females' survival and are unwilling to appreciate their association with nature. Tayo's grandmother remembers a time before Europeans' arrival "when the people shared a single clan name" (Silko, 1977, p. 62). Along with colonization, the consciousness of unity is going to vanish, the world has entangled with the European tradition "all of creation suddenly had two names: an Indian name and a white name" (p. 62). The European colonization has destructively affected indigenous females' consciousness and shattered their age-old relationship with the natural environment. The colonizers have crushed the single clan name and taught the lesson of competition and individuality "because Jesus Christ would save only the individual soul" (p. 63). The females cooperate with all life on the mother earth, cultivate plants and stand for the protection of all creatures. They believe that the earth is the mother of humans and non-humans, it nourishes all the living beings but Christianity does not give lesson of mutuality and communal life: "Jesus Christ is not like mother who loved and cared for them as her children, as her family" (ibid.). The horrible consequence of the European beliefs and practices was the vast exploitation of fauna and flora which caused starvation and diseases. The earth which provided indigenous females with sustenance was usurped. This deprived the females of a substantial source on which their existence depended.

According to Adamson, social issues give birth to environmental issues. She emphasizes "upon texts that incorporate racial, ethnic, class, and sexual difference, and that emphasize intersections between social oppressions and environmental issues" (Adamson, Evans, & Stein, 2002, p. 9). *Ceremony* incorporates gender and racial issues into environmental problems. It exposes that the roots of environmental devastation lie in racial and class distinctions. The detrimental impact of European

colonization on

nature has suppressed and misrepresented the indigenous females' religious beliefs and socio-cultural values. After European colonization "the balance of the world had been disturbed" (Silko, 1977, p. 176). When the colonizers started buying land, logging, mining, killing bears and mountain lions for sport, not for need, there would be "droughts and harder days to come" (ibid.). The destruction of animal life is to enfeeble the females who live in perfect harmony with nature. By devastating the natural world the colonizers "destroy the feeling, people have for each other" (p. 229). All the ills afflicting the lives of indigenous females are the result of the colonizers' ill-treatment of nature. As environmental justice is interlinked to social justice likewise "ecological exploitation is always coordinate with social exploitation" (Bate, 2000, p. 48). Silko integrates environmental and social problems from the perspective of gender and class differences. Social inequalities cause the environmental problems.

Silko presents the real image of indigenous females to neutralize the colonizers' design of misrepresenting nature and its lover the females. She believes that the females play their constructive role in tribal community. All the indigenous female characters in *Ceremony* play a pivotal role in connecting the disappointed and confused protagonist, Tayo to the natural world and also restore his lost tribal identity. They know the cure for the problem of Tayo and heal him accordingly. First of all, Tayo's grandmother, who is proud of her Laguna heritage, reestablishes his connection with the tribal culture. She not only reveres the elders of her generation but also admires their tribal methods for curing Native Americans through natural ways. She has potential and skills to manage the family affairs; she also embodies the Natives' spirit. The grandmother is also a storyteller who tells to her grandsons the "long ago, time immemorial stories" (Silko, 1977, p. 95). By sharing the tribal stories, she transfers her ancestors' culture from one generation to the next. Night Swan, a mature Mexican woman, urges Betonie, a medicine man, to cure Tayo's problem by restoring his relationship with the natural world of his ancestors. Another indigenous woman, Ku'oosh also teaches Betonie that human beings are interconnected with the "delicate strands of the web" of the relationship (p. 27). If a person breaks this web of the cosmos all living beings equally suffer. Tayo comes to know that the cure for his diseases and mental trauma lies in following the guidelines of the females. Ku'oosh guides him to appreciate nature and identify himself with the mother earth. Night Swan and Ku'oosh reconnect Tayo with the natural world by teaching him the forgotten lesson that all humans and non-humans are interconnected and interdependent. Ku'oosh teaches Tayo: "This world is fragile" in which no one can live alone (p. 32). All human and non-human beings are interconnected in a kind of a spider web. Suffering of a single living soul disturbs the equilibrium of the web of relationship. Every individual should be held accountable if in any way he is involved in the evil process of the destruction of the web of relationship. When Tayo is alienated from the natural world, he suffers from mental trauma and the sound of rain, splashing leaves and water get louder and disturb him. The sound of rain strikes him like daggers and

the air saturated with water appears to him

heavy. This situation highlights Tayo's loss of contact with the natural landscape. With the help of indigenous females, he is reattached to the land and his tribal community. The indigenous females' mutual relationship with the earth does not mean that they only live in the natural environment but they have had mental harmony with nature.

The female characters assist Tayo in restoring his lost tribal identity in relation to nature. They also perform their important role in healing his sufferings through natural medicines. After the WWII, Tayo suffers from mental trauma; Ts'eh who is known the spirit of the mountain, restores his mental peace by connecting him with the natural world of his ancestors. "He went with her to learn about the roots and plants she had gathered" (Silko, 1977, p. 208). She heals Tayo with the help of the natural remedies, warning him of the evils he will face in future. She is a living animation of nature for Tayo. Ts'eh not only heals him but also protects him from coming evils. Through her affection and protection, Tayo succeeds in restoring his health and peace of mind. It is because of her love that Tayo manages to restore relationship with the natural landscape of his ancestors. Ts'eh helps him establish a compatible relationship with nature; she also enables him to feel sense of harmony with his native land. As a result, at his ancestral land, Tayo recovers the mental and physical strength and brings back the lost cattle. Ts'eh introduces to Tayo the plants that reproduce "the light of the stars, and the moon penetrating at night" (p. 211). She also imparts the knowledge of different plants, which keep the earth alive and bring rain. The females attribute their divine and healing power to the natural elements even the minor objects of nature have great significance for them. They are in direct communication with the natural entities which are their helper and provide them with sustenance. Nature is their religion; a source of their survival; a center of their social and religious practices. Silko presents their culture and heritage as modes of communication with nature.

Silko gives a meaningful role to indigenous females who have created the universe as well as protect nature from dangers. They possess creative mind and great strength. Ts'its'tsi' Nako, also known as Thought Woman or Spider Woman, and her sister; ". . . together they created the universe" (1977, p. 1). The Spider Woman also names the things and creates the natural entities. These female characters are endowed with power and abilities to accomplish extraordinary assignments. Although, they are well acquainted with the negative effect of the European mechanized world, they stay in connection with the industrialized world to understand the emerging environmental issues and their solution. They share the tribal secrets with the coming generation in order to stimulate their people to resist the European colonizers' policy of ruination and exploitation. Their optimism makes them feel that the restoration of the lost tribal cultural values will bring about a great change in the American continent. Ts'eh warns Tayo against the

colonizers who “work to see how much can be lost, how much can be forgotten. “They destroy the feeling people have for each other” (p. 229). The colonizers attempt to destroy the communal life of the tribal

people. Ts'eh advises Tayo that he needs to understand the religious and traditional values of his ancestors for defeating the evil minds of the colonizers. The females infuse the spirit of unity into their tribal people to help them take on the destroyer of the natural world. They motivate their tribal people to raise their voice against injustice by reminding them of their rich history of resistance against violence and destructive activities. They condemn the colonizers' possession of the mother earth. The females know that the colonizers' destructive activities are the outcome of their desecration of the mother earth. Ts'eh guides Tayo to identify himself with the earth. Moreover, like the mother earth she takes care of him; with the help of her healing power and love, he is enabled to victimize the evil power. Her love for Tayo symbolizes the strong bond between Tayo and the mother earth.

Environmental justice activists have presented number of principles of environmental justice. The first principle states that the mother earth must be guarded against all types of damage and devastation and the interdependence of all its creatures must be kept intact at all costs. According to the final principle as presented by Lawrence Buell (2005):

Environmental justice requires that we, as individuals, make personal and consumer choices to consume as little of Mother Earth's resources and to produce as little waste as possible; and make the conscious decision to challenge and reprioritize our life-styles to insure the health of the natural world for present and future generations. (p. 114)

European colonizers show no reverence and honor for the sanctity of the mother earth. They desecrate the earth and ultimately destroy its living creatures. They look down upon the indigenous females and negatively assimilate them with the earthly creatures. The natural resources of the earth and the females are equally exterminated. The females realize that on account of their association with nature they are sneered at by the colonizers. Apparently, the colonizers love them but the females: "could feel the truth in their fists and in their greedy feeble love-making" (Silko, 1977, p. 63). They know that the colonizers use them as a tool for pleasure.

The manipulation of nature and indigenous females is "the colonizing effort to claim power over nature and society" (Adamson, 1958, p. 144). European colonizers have cruelly exploited nature and the females. Silko challenges the colonizers ill-treatment of the females and the natural world. The colonizers are blind to the females' belief in and association with nature. Through their hegemonic discourse they negate the females' beliefs in nature. The importance of the females' link with nature has never been heard because they have always been considered inferior creatures and their voice is also suppressed "The problem was the books were written by white people" (Silko, 1977, p. 69). European canonical literature and media have misrepresented indigenous females as uncivilized and wild because of their close association with nature.

Further, they have been deprived of their homeland and its natural resources owing to the view that they are

incompetent to possess American land. In Euro-American civilized society there is no room for the females' communal relationship with the natural life and their love of the mother earth. It is believed that the primitive females have made no contribution to the modern world of civilization and progress. Since Columbus, they have been badly suffering due to the destruction of their natural world and because of the rift created between them and their environment. Euro-Americans' literature and media exclude them from human category to subhuman; consequently, they have lost their identity; they are almost extinct. On one hand the colonizers destroy the natural world but on the other hand, they blame and criticise the poor Native Americans especially indigenous females for diseases and poverty. According to Adamson et al (2002):

When Europeans arrived in America, two conflicting stories about the human relationship to nature were thrown into confrontation, and the European story of human dominion over nature authorized white settlers' ruthless subjugation of the Indian peoples, who viewed themselves as kin to the spirits of the land. (p. 131)

European colonizers proclaim themselves superior race and claim to be the owner of American land. They plan to dominate nature and the poor indigenous females. The females warn their native community against the colonizers' exploitation. They realize that with European colonization "the balance of the world had been disturbed" (Silko, 1977, p. 176). When the colonizers start buying land, logging, mining, killing bears and mountain lions for sport, not need, there will be "droughts and harder days to come" (p. 176). The destruction of the mother earth and animal life is to enfeeble the females who live in perfect harmony with nature. All the ills afflicting the lives of the females are the result of the colonizers' ill-treatment of the natural environment. In reaction to the colonizers' ruinous activities, the females make their tribal people aware about the importance of human relationship with nature and condemn the colonizers' seizure of American land and the manipulation of its inhabitants.

Indigenous females declare the colonizers' attitude inhuman by "pointing to the state and corporation committed to the scientific development and progress to the prime anti-ecological force in the world" (Adamson, 2001, p. 172). With the emergence of industrialisation and science; animal life and the earth become just a commodity to be misused. Nature is a type of laboratory for Euro-Americans where they do different experiences to have control of the natural environment. As a European science teacher brought a tubful of dead frogs for experiment a student "raised her hand and said the people always told the kids not to kill frogs" (Silko, 1977, p. 181). As the natural world is a dead object for Euro-Americans, they see no life in the earth, the sun, trees and animals. They live away from the earth and all of its creatures. The females know that European planning of development and progress causes ecological destruction and deadly diseases. They encourage their tribal people to

fight against “illness and death” (p. 3). The females are

fully aware that nature holds a lot of importance in human life and warn their tribal people about the harmful results of the loss of nature. In consequences of the destruction of nature “there was no rain . . . the people and the animals were thirsty. They were starving” (ibid.). The females opine that in past, environment was clean and healthy but the pursuance of modernization of human civilization has rendered irreparable damage to their own home. Emerging environmental issues are heralding the future problems. The females know that life would almost cease to exist on the planet owing to the rapid obliteration of nature and the exploitation of the tribal people. “Under present conditions [a Navajo woman] fears the loss of sheep ... She thinks that by taking the sheep, we are taking the food out of the mouths of her children” (Adamson, 2013, p. 54). The females endorse their traditional view that an individual cannot live in separation from the community that is knotted by the ecological web of relationship.

By devastating the natural world European colonizers “destroy the feeling, people have for each other” (Silko, 1977, p. 229). Indigenous females know how to respond the colonizers’ maltreatment rendered to their tribal community and nature. Night Swan shows Tayo the way of tackling the colonizers, who demean the females and nature alike. Tayo feels shame for being a mixed blooded child; he tells Night Swan that Euro-Americans heap scorn on him for his mother’s illicit relationship with a Euro-American. Swan censures the European attitude as she states: “They blame us, the ones who look different. That way they don’t have to think about what has happened inside themselves” (Silko, 1977, p. 96). She condemns Euro-Americans’ discriminatory activities and enlightens her people about their inseparable communal relationship with nature. Tayo follows her instructions and comes to know that he is an inseparable part of the ecological community. In company of Night Swan, he is able to recognize the significance of his tribal culture and the vitality of man-nature relationship. She provides him with mental peace and cures his physical diseases.

Silko’s approach is attuned to the rights and fundamental needs of indigenous females. She condemns Euro-Americans’ blame on the poor women for contagious diseases and global warming. The discriminatory policies of Euro-Americans are a great threat to the survival of the females and nature as well. Through their hegemonic discourse the colonizers justify their exploitative activities and tend to negate the indigenous females’ beliefs as well as unwilling to appreciate their association with nature. The colonizers have deprived the females of the natural resources of their motherland consequently they suffer from poverty and diseases. Contrariwise, the females are held responsible for all these calamities. The colonizers’ disgust for the females is because of their repulsion for nature. Nature is framed as a laboratory of experiments to domesticate the natural environment and to annihilate its inhabitants. Silko despises the colonizers ideal and scientific development for it grants certain privileges to some people and specific places. She not only stresses the need for equal rights

for all the living beings but also demands protection for every part of the earth.

She thinks holistically and offers a community in which human and nonhuman beings are coexisted and have equal access to the natural resources.

Indigenous females are indispensable part of this ecologically bounded community. They have close intimacy with the natural world. The height of mutuality with nature is that when Ts'eh walks in "the thick yellow light under the edges of the sun," her eyes also "shone yellow" as well as her hair caught "needles of light" (Silko, 1977, p. 217). She is also surrounded by yellow flowers. Silko's depiction of femininity and the mother figure has great importance; the earth is also called the Mother Earth. Drought afflicts human and non-human life when the sacred figure like mother is ignored. When Native American desecrate the mother earth or ignore their fellow indigenous females, Nau'ts'ity'l "took the plants and grass from them. No baby animals were born. "She took the rainclouds with her" (p. 45). All human and non-human beings equally suffer by ignoring their caretaker, indigenous females as well as the mother earth that feeds and protects all the living beings. *Ceremony* provides an insight into the exploration of the same environmental problems which affect human and non-human life equally. Silko's concept of one mother earth for all beings negates gender and racial distinction. She demands the protection of all living beings from environmental hazards irrespective of any difference.

Conclusion

Silko rectifies "the disproportionate incidence of environmental contamination in communities of the poor" (Adamson et al., 2002, p. 4). Being a true representative of her tribal culture, she condemns the European colonizers' discriminatory approach. She believes in fair treatment irrespective of any difference and appeals for the basic rights of the healthy environment for all beings. To deprive someone of the natural resources is a crime because "common resources cannot be walled off only for the rich and privileged but must be equitably shared if we hope to create an ecologically fair world for all the planet's citizens" (Adamson, 2013, p. 158). Since European colonization, the natural resources and indigenous females have been mercilessly misused. For Euro-Americans, they are not "worth anything anyway" (Silko, 1977, p. 23). European canonical literature and media have excluded the females from human category to subhuman; as a result, they have lost their tribal identity. Their mutual relationship with the natural environment has been misrepresented or overlooked and the possibility of their existence depends on their capacity not to feel. European colonizers intended to deprive the females of their herds and decided that no one would be permitted to possess a herd. The decision was made "by the all-male Tribal Council; women were simply not consulted by the federal agents nor regarded as important political or economic actors" (Adamson, 2013, p. 54). The females are denied any role in political and economic spheres as well. They are termed contemptible and uncivilized. There is no justice available to indigenous females in the federal law.

They are considered foreigners in their own motherland and viewed incompetent guardians of nature. Being

intoxicated by this unwarranted notion, the colonizers believe that it is their duty to civilize indigenous females. In the disguise of civilization, they have destroyed the females' natural lifestyle and seized their native land. The colonizers built their nation "on stolen land" (Silko, 1977, p. 191). They claim that because of their cultural and social superiority they have the right to get hold over the females and usurp their motherland.

According to Silko, the earth is home to all human and non-human beings and therefore, no one can be victimized or deprived of its natural resources. She accords equal significance to the mother earth and indigenous females; she uses the term rape for humiliation of the females and exploitation of the earth as well. In response to the European colonizers' maltreatment of the females and nature, Silko has given great importance to the femaleness and the mother figure. The earth is also attributed with feminine characteristics and called mother. Indigenous females warn their tribal community against the destroyers who have come "to ruin this world" (1977, p. 189). The females know that in order to defeat this evil, they need to follow the religious and traditional values of their ancestors. The indigenous female characters of the novel are such a wise and strong that reconnect the tribal people with their native land and enable them to practise their ancestors' tradition and religious beliefs. They not only identify themselves with nature but also have a life sharing bond of interdependence with it. They also preserve the socio-cultural values of their ancestors and share with the coming generations the rich history of "Long time ago" (Silko, 1977, p. 122). They have spiritual as well as medicinal knowledge and can cure the tribal people's physical diseases and spiritual crises with the help of the natural medicines. Adamson's Eco-critical perspective helps us understand Silko's depiction of the importance of indigenous females and the natural entities that cannot be bested or ignored.

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