

**A STUDY OF NATIVE AMERICAN LITERARY THEORY:
ITS POETICS AND POLITICS**

**Lalrinchani
Department of English**

Submitted

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DECLARATION

I, Lalrinchhani, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form the basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University or Institute.

This is being submitted to Mizoram University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English.

(LALRINCHHANI)

(Prof. MARGARET L. PACHUAU)

(Dr. CHERRIE LALNUNZIRI CHHANGTE)

Head

Supervisor

Department of English

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

MIZORAM UNIVERSITY

AIZAWL: 796004

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “A STUDY OF NATIVE AMERICAN LITERARY THEORY: ITS POETICS AND POLITICS” is the bonafide research conducted by Ms. Lalrinchhani under my supervision. Ms. Lalrinchhani worked methodically for her thesis being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of English, Mizoram University.

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Dated:

Place:

(Dr. CHERRIE LALNUNZIRI CHHANGTE)

SUPERVISOR

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Literatures produced by a specific community or people sharing the same history or experiences often have a hypernym that members of the group can associate with. Particularly for communities like the Native Americans, literature has surpassed the boundaries set by conventional American history in that it tells the truths about the past that history cannot articulate. Native American literature today has established a stable ground for itself in excavating and communicating those histories that were ignored, limited, or utterly misrepresented by conventional histories. Through time, it has continued to assert a different experience of American history by presenting an altered perception of the past from the Native's perspective. Its strategic objective has been in considering how, 'the past is conceptualized within Native cultures at the tribal and cross-tribal level and how this has informed the literary projects of specific Native writers' (Allen 122). The fact that Native Americans are not just fictional but have survived as a nation is an important issue taken up by the Native American writers today. With this, there is a wider recognition and acceptance of the fact that American literature had begun not from 1492 when Columbus "discovered" America but as early as the voice of the first human expression of language in the landscape now called as the United States.

The colonial regime clouded the perception of colonized nations around the world as the European discernments of the encountered "Others" were dominated from the outset by a hierarchical perspective. In this practice, the European perception of diversity usually implied subservience to the European norm and a state of being inferior according to the European standard. With new encounters, and newly "discovered" societies, Europeans started using terms like "savage" and "barbarians" to denote people who were diverse in terms of language, culture, or religion. These terms in the modern world continue to signify people who supposedly fail to

meet the rudimentary of a “civilized” society. Hence, according to this standard, the Native Americans whom Columbus claimed to have discovered were viewed as immoral and cruel savages lacking moral and political norms and showing susceptibility to inhumane practices. Because they practiced no “formal” religion, their social life according to the Europeans seemed to lack any kind of political and economic organization. European observations and opinions about the history and culture of these nomads were initially recorded in historical, religious, juridical, and philosophical works that were made accessible for the educated European public. These accounts and narratives were mostly prejudiced as they covered merely the voice of the Europeans while the Natives were rendered voiceless. The stereotypes of the “bad” and “immoral savage” continue to develop and influence the perception of the Europeans and the rest of the world towards the Native Americans.

With growing stress on the subject of identity in the academic field, more and more contemporary Native American theorists and writers have come up with different worldviews and methodologies but at the same time, collective theories in reading and understanding Native American literature. The diversity in the number of different Native American tribes produces different histories, cultures, languages, and myths among Native Americans themselves. It is therefore no surprising that the debate or confusion starts from the term or label used in categorizing or classifying them as a community.

Generally, the term “native” is often used interchangeably with terms like “aboriginal”, “indigenous” and “tribal” however with slight differences between them. There is a certain perplexity regarding the use of the term “native” as most people in the world are native to their

countries in the sense of being descendants of those who were born in them. As regards to the Native Americans, terms like “American Indians”, “Indians”, “Amerindians”, “Indigenous”, “Aboriginal”, or “Original Americans” have been interchangeably used amidst the number of controversies regarding the naming of the natives of America. Till today there has not been a single term that has been universally accepted.

Situating herself within the debate of names and the importance of asserting one’s ethnic identity, a former Miss Navajo Nation, and the founder of the “Strong Spirit: Life is Beautiful not Abusive” campaign, Radmilla Cody addresses how she lives in a time when names and pejorative references to Native people are being challenged in popular culture.

Wherever I go, from the reservation to the city, through the halls of academia, from younger to older, to the grassroots, and in social media, I hear numerous discussions and debates around how people choose to identify with certain references, e.g., which word is the most appropriate: Native American? Native? Indian? American Indian? Indigenous? Each time we choose to elect our own names and references we are empowered.
(Blackhorse np)

The argument of which term is better seems to be redundant for her as she stresses on the importance of having the liberty to choose. According to Cody, an individual should have a clear conscience in choosing a name and should have the courage to reject out rightly any pejorative references to a name, which in the case of Native Americans can include terms like “redskins”, “squaw”, and “savages”, to name a few. She declared enthusiastically, ‘We must reclaim our identity and stop allowing the settler-colonialists to define who we are’ (Blackhorse np).

Since the term “Indian”¹ has been alluded to the natives of America by Christopher Columbus, it is often regarded as a misnomer- as these people were not after all the Indians of the East Indies that Columbus thought he had met in the Caribbean. It has also been disapproved largely because it was a term coined by the colonizers and over the years it has gained a pejorative meaning. There are cultural critics who prefer the term “Native American” to “Indian” and find it more accurate. However, the term “Indian” too has not been out of favour.

‘I say “Indian” a lot,’ says Bobby Wilson, a Sisseton-Wahpeton Dakota who is a renowned member of the five-piece comedy troupe “The 1491s”. Despite certain sensitivity and misgivings regarding the use of the term “Indian”, for Bobby it is a term that seems to be universal and other people of his tribe can identify with.

In her essay "What's in a Name? Indians and Political Correctness," Christina Berry, a Cherokee writer, argues that people should be referred to by their tribe names while terms like “Indian” and “Native American” should be avoided:

In the end, the term you choose to use (as an Indian or non-Indian) is your own personal choice. ... Very few Indians that I know care either way. The recommended method is to refer to a person by their tribe, if that information is known. What matters in the long run is not which term is used but the intention with which it is used. (Gaffney np)

The diversity in the type of name individuals and groups possess can be very confounding at times. For example, the Cherokees are known by possibly fifteen designations; the Ojibwe are also popularly referred to as Ojibwa, Chippewa, Anishinabe and Saginaw. Likewise a renowned Native American writer like Louise Erdrich has changed how she identifies herself over time as when she changed her identification from Turtle Mountain Chippewa to

Turtle Mountain Ojibwe (Potter, Joy, and Kenneth xvii). Names and their developments consequently cannot be ignored since they provide useful means to understanding the self-perception of Native Americans as individuals or groups contributing to a deeper knowledge of their interactions and the places they inhabit.

The term “Native American” was popularized long after Christopher Columbus discovered America and named the indigenous settlers, the people he claimed to have discovered as “Red Indians”. It has now grown into an umbrella term for the hundreds of different tribes or nations that spread throughout North and South America. The term “Native American” can be technically regarded as a widely accepted term that has also been popularized among the intellectuals giving birth to a body of literature termed as Native American literature.

It is nonetheless a challenge to speak in general, in a universalizing way about Native American writings keeping in mind the exceptionally comprehensive definition of the term “Native” itself as has been discussed earlier. It is crucial to note that there were, and still are, a number of different Native American tribes that still function as distinct communities till today. Every Native American tribe strongly claims to have its own history, culture, ceremonies, myths, stories, and language and every tribe considers itself different from the other. For example, the Creeks considered themselves a nation different from the Cherokees in the mountains, the Mobiles to the south and the Choctaws and Chikasaws to the west and vice versa. Nevertheless there are many, among Native Americans themselves who believe that one can speak broadly of a shared or collective Native American worldview. Amidst all these uncertainties regarding the definition of what Native American writing is, a requisite of it is that, it is a reflection of a shared or collective consciousness, an identifiable world view.

With a growing awareness and education among indigenous populations of the world regarding cultural hybridity and the influence of European Imperialism, terms and concepts in reference to indigenous people have become more problematic and questionable in the contemporary era. The imperialist expansion of Europe has enforced awareness of being socially, culturally, and psychologically inferior or lower among the colonized states. European education has ironically instilled a sense of inferiority among the educated local, indigenous cultures that influenced them to see their native lifeways and worldview as exotic and the European counterparts as “normal”. As such, language has become a site for both colonization and resistance in the context of both colonialism and post-colonialism. There are certain terms that were formulated by the Europeans and continued to be adopted by the indigenous people themselves. However, these denotations that continued to be used by indigenous people themselves often come with an insightful clarification of why they are being adopted in the struggle for ethnic, cultural, and political autonomy. For instance, there is a certain sensitivity that is required of a person in using terms like “tribe” or “tribal” as it was adopted by the colonizers to represent a society that lacks positive traits of the modern society and thus constitutes a simple, illiterate, and backward society.

The general sense of tribe as most people understand it is linked to its roots in anthropological foundations that developed connotations having hierarchical definitions such as primitiveness or the primeval stage, a state of being uncivilized, isolated and savage and to live in an outdated condition. Many Africans today for example reject the use of the term “tribe” because of its associations with terms like “primitive”, “ancient”, and “uncivilized” which try to deny reality. Consequently many anthropologists and sociologists use alternatives like “ethnic group”, “nation” or “indigenous people” in place of the term “tribe”.

On the other hand, the term “tribe” is also used by many tribal people themselves. Almost all Native Americans use the word “tribe” to describe themselves to others. They name themselves as the Cherokee tribe, the Northern Arapaho tribe, or the Navajo tribe to name a few. In 1998, there were 554 federally recognized tribes in the United States, according to the Bureau of Indian Affairs (Handoo 22). They also have important terms like “Tribal Council”, “Tribal Election”, “Tribal Sovereignty”, “Tribal Chairman”, or “Tribal Chief”.

Native Americans have therefore continued to use the term “tribe” for their own interests. Although the Native American tribal society no longer strictly exists in the traditional sense, tribalism or specifically Native American tribalism survives in the form of a strong cultural and ethnic identity that separates one member of a group from the members of another group. Consecutively, it becomes an important mark of social differentiation, an instrument of empowerment and an important tool through which Native Americans assert their identity.

Tribalism in the Native American concept thus denotes loyalty to a group or tribe, and its distinctiveness from mainstream society. It grows out of a strong feeling of identity with an allegiance to one’s tribe and one’s geographical location. In *D’Arcy McNickle: The Indian War that Never Ends, or the Incredible Survival of Tribalism*, the term tribalism is defined by Franco Meli as ‘the multiplicity of distinctive traditional cultures, which gives the lie to all stereotypes and resists the forces of assimilation’ (Meli 363). And according to D’Arcy McNickle in *Native American Tribalism: Indian Survivals and Renewals*, unlike Europeans, who generally lost their personal and political heritage when they immigrated and assimilated into the melting pot of American society, ‘the Indian political voice as well as their creative expression reject the values of the dominant society and turn inward for individual and group support’ (McNickle 170).

Therefore, by resisting complete incorporation into mainstream American culture, Native Americans have retained their tribal identity. A strong tribal feeling is inherent in the people and this growth can be traced back to the Reservation Era², a crucial period that drastically changed the lives of Native Americans. Conflicting this was a strong movement that was developed to eradicate Native American traditions during the last part of the nineteenth century. Natives were pushed out from their own lands and were forced to live in small reservations assigned by the federal government who claimed that setting the Native Americans on the course to “civilisation” best ensured their survival. Tribal customs were then forcibly altered and nomadic tribes became sedentary. The main goal of this was to rob tribal pride and disrupt tribal unity. (Rickard 4)

Tribalism or the tribal nature of the Native American community therefore became an important feature of the Native American text. Often, Native American novelists are summoned home and pulled inward; offering a distinctly different pattern that focuses on the importance of community to individuals in their works. N. Scott Momaday, a Kiowa, won the Pulitzer Prize for *House Made of Dawn* published in the year 1968. By chronicling the struggles of a young Native American man named Abel, Momaday was able to explore some of the issues and conflicts faced by the Native American community in the twentieth century. Since then, many Native American authors have produced a distinctly different pattern of fiction focussing on the importance of community to individuals. According to William Bevis, their aspirations of reintegration ‘constitute a profound and articulate continuing critique of modern European culture, combined with a persistent refusal to let go of tribal identity; a refusal to regard the past as inferior; a refusal- no matter how futile- of even the wish to assimilate’ (Bevis 255). For the protagonists of the books, the self lies with the tribal group, and this gives the characters a communal outlook.

Instead of seeing what is best for the self, Native American protagonists often gain an outlook that extends beyond the individual. This extension beyond the self and a concern for their community is reflected much in their narratives where we hear multiple voices each with a story to tell.

The desires of Native American writers to maintain a tribal focus in their texts often become a conscious oppositional reaction to the historical precedent of the removal and the extinguishing of Native American traditions. Native American authors such as Scott Momaday, James Welch, and Leslie Silko have all written novels that depict characters seeking tribal identity and themes that depict a reformation of tribal identity where the protagonist return to the reservation, meets a tribal elder and reforms a tribal identity. Their novels seek to find an identity based on the strong communal ties that have persevered through a history of oppression.

The Remembered Earth, an anthology of Native American writers, first published in 1979, mentions how Native Americans today are divided according to the following categories, namely: genetic, cultural, and social. A number of controversies arise among the Native Americans themselves as identification is also based on blood quantum as “full-bloods”, “half-bloods”, “one-fourths”, “one-eighths”, and so on. This is the genetic distinction. Cultural distinction is based on a person’s identification of his or her origin, his community and what their ways of life, religion, and language are like. Socially, a person is judged as a Native American on how he or she views the world, that is, his or her views about land, home, family, culture, and so on. The dominating theme of this anthology being “Land is people”, Hobson completes his categorization saying that it is not enough to be a Native American just by having a reasonable claim to Native American blood. Instead a Native American should be rather socially and culturally definable as a Native American.

Daniel Heath Justice, a Native American theorist in his book, *Our Fire Survives the Storm* attempts to clarify terms like “fullblood”, “mixedblood”, “traditional”, and “progressive” that has so often been used as benchmarks to identify the Native Americans.³ In his attempt to define or identify nationhood, Justice not only look into his old traditions and history but takes up the current issues, standards, and contemporary culture of his people. He therefore brings in terms like, “assimilation” and “acculturation”, terms that are so often conflated but clearly distinguished in his study.⁴ He is among the many theorists who propose in establishing a theory which is unique to the Native Americans. Tracing the expression of a Cherokee identity in the its literary tradition, Justice examines what it means to be a Cherokee through protest writings, memoirs, fictions, and retellings of traditional stories through cycles of war and peace, resistance and assimilation, trauma, and regeneration.

Studies about Native Americans have been embraced by numerous American Institutes today where academic researchers are growing more comfortable in studying Native history and culture, theorizing, and conducting research by being sensitive to the Native American experiences and issues at the same time. Nevertheless, the ultimate goal of accomplishing Native American Studies as a discipline and toward developing theory and research that presents a coherent theoretical and methodological approach to the study of indigenous peoples seems to be a far cry as relatively little conceptual progress has been made. It is rather disheartening to see that much of contemporary research and theorizing about Native American nations has been considered as variations on more general theories and thus clubbed alongside other disciplinary fields.

A variety of mainstream conceptualizations such as race, class, ethnicity, culture, and postmodern approach have constantly been applied to explore and understand the Native

American experience, which however often seems to result in an intellectual marginalization of Native American studies. Even though all these representations are applicable in conceptualizing the Native American experience, they however are not sufficient in offering a holistic approach that centers on Native American communities and interpretations. For instance, Critical Race Theory critically examines society and culture and appraises dominant group methods of oppression and control ultimately aiming at the pursuit of equality in matters of race and ethnicity. Native American nations however do not have this motive of assuming achievement of equality and inclusion into mainstream American society as its primary goal, although it has also suffered both individual and group oppression. It goes beyond such goals of social equality by centering on collective Native American goals such as preservation of land, self-government, and reclaiming history and culture.

Thus, often as the people themselves have been marginalized by the mainstream society, their issues have repeatedly been sidelined by contemporary theories or rather, Eurocentric theories, as they seem to be outside of the main focus of empirical interest. They are therefore relegated because contemporary theories do not easily conceptualize Native American communities, culture, language, and historical experience. Consequently, research and theory about Native Americans are broken into fragments and form part of many disciplines. As long as knowledge is understood within Western worldviews and epistemological understandings, Universities and academic disciplines remain to be oriented toward probing the concerns and conceptualizations that challenge American or Western civilization and in so doing, research and theory will only serve the purposes and reproduce the interests of Western civilization.

It is therefore not a surprise that the superficial conception of Native Americans often defines this group as vulnerable to exploitation and marginalization, those who were conquered

by people who are racially, ethnically or culturally superior from them. Contemporary Native American writers subsequently have made an effort in popularizing their stories about how they were prejudicially subordinated or incorporated in alien states, which treat them as outsiders and usually as inferiors. These writers strove to bring about a distinctive reading of their own writings by studying how as a nation, they have endured innumerable battles against their marauders, by popularizing their own interpretations regarding the many treaties they signed with the U.S. Government most of which were bigoted, the stories that they have humbly and passionately been passing on orally through many generations, the ceremonies that they have faithfully been practicing for centuries, and the on-going debates and controversies regarding names and references and in general the Native American identity.

A deeper understanding of Native American tribal ways of life reveals that they have their own interpretation of individual and collective well-being. Rather than seeking emancipation from colonial oppression, Native American world view seeks spiritual and moral balance with all living forms of the world. Elizabeth Cooklyn states with utter clarity in her Preface to *Anti-Indianism in Modern America*, why she writes about her culture and people:

I write because such days and places are unforgettable, and because the colonial dictatorship imposed on the very private lives of a very private people festers still and contaminates the life of a whole country. (Cooklyn "Preface" x)

Likewise, the main aim of Native American studies or literature is to revisit history through their own narratives, stories, songs, novels, poetry and rewrite the history that had formerly been written by non-Natives.

Although many writings by Native Americans were published before 1968, a drastic but much desirable change regarding the perception and reception of Native American writings materialized with the publication of *House Made of Dawn* in 1968 by N.Scott Momaday. Like many other tribal nations, Native Americans also have their earliest historical records about them written by the Europeans who immigrated to America. Social disruption followed along with extensive political tension and ethnic violence as a result of the differences in cultures between the established Native Americans and immigrant Europeans. Before Momaday's groundbreaking novel, Native Americans were viewed as sources of a unique national identity and literature discrete from European traditions. Thus, the trope of the "disappearing Indian"⁵ was employed in texts like *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) written by James Fenimore Cooper and *Song of Hiwatha* (1855) by Henry Longfellow. These texts presented the death of the Native Americans as natural, rather than the result of political exclusion or social discrimination denying indirectly the Indian Removal Act passed by the U.S. Congress in 1830 that forcibly removed Native Americans from their own homelands and relocate them in small reservations as a means to set them on the course to "civilization" that best ensured their survival.

Early Native American authors paved the way for Native American literature to flourish today. They wrote within a hostile political climate, and in response to a dominant literary tradition that sentimentalized the death of Native Americans. Authoring their own accounts of Native Americans, their narratives challenged stereotypical beliefs, demanded equal political rights, and proved that Native Americans were neither disappearing nor silent. The period between late 1960s and 1970s was termed as "Native American Renaissance," a period that saw the beginning of historical revisionism which attempted to document the history and colonization of the North American continent from a native perspective. A generation of Native Americans

emerged who were the first of their tribe to write about the issues of Native rights and the burdens of racial identities in their short stories and novels.

On a literary level, it is fair to say that Momaday's works brought about a reversal of roles: the Native American way of life was now given importance and often praised as an example to be followed by the white man. Of Kiowa descent, Momaday has been a remarkable force in the preservation and flourishing of Native American culture. *House Made of Dawn*, a novel that depicts the agonizing search for identity was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1969. There is much resemblance between Momaday himself and Abel, the protagonist in the novel who is conflicted between the contending prerogatives of Indian tradition and modern American culture. The idea of emphasizing the importance of Native American identity was again seen in *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (1969) and *The Names* (1976) where this concept evolved in a more individual context. Momaday also expressed his concern in his early essay, "The Morality of Indian Hating" (1964), regarding the generalization of the Native Americans in the mind of the white man. His people according to Momaday, had extensively been denied the acknowledgment of individuality and change, and had been made to become in theory what he could not become in fact, a synthesis of himself. The journey or the drive to recuperate wholeness and totality of self is thus the subject of much of Momaday's writing.

Native American literature continues to revise how Native American history has often been interpreted and misconstrued from the time of colonization. It aims to correct the history that has been narrated, interpreted, and studied by the white man, which is often in juxtaposition to the Natives' worldview and values. The White man's interruption necessitates a negation of the rich history of the Native Americans, their religion, customs and identity, as well as an

identification of the Native Americans as the “Other” who is uncivilized, and thus in need of the white man’s salvation.

It is difficult to do justice in summarizing what Native American literature is with regard to its magnitude and complexity, but it is possible to isolate aspects of belief thought of as common to most traditional Native American life-ways. Paula Gunn Allen points out that ‘the purpose of Native American literature is never one of pure self-expression. The “private soul at any public wall” is a concept that is so alien to native thought as to constitute an absurdity’ (Allen 112). As a consequence, what we have in Native American writings is a quest for balance, prerequisite to seek individual, communal, and environmental balance which includes a sense of interconnectedness and relationship between all things, between animals, land, people, and their language. Within contemporary Native American literature, the protagonists including the narrator of James Welch’s *Winter in the Blood* (1974), Abel in Momaday’s *House made of Dawn* (1968) and Cyprian in Louise Erdrich’s *The Master Butcher’s Singing Club* (2003) undertakes this quest for balance whether it is between various tribal, non-Native American, or social imperatives.

Besides Momaday, other Native American writers such as James Welch, Leslie Marmon Silko, Alexie Sherman, Gerald Vizenor, and Louis Erdrich have all written novels that depict characters seeking indigenous identity. Through their novels, they are able to explore some of the issues and conflicts faced by the Native American community in the twentieth century. Their works cover themes that depict reformation of their indigenous tribal identity making the novel a centerpiece for a program of both cultural transformation and continuity. Native American authors focus on the importance of community to individuals and their desire to maintain an

indigenous focus based on their history which encompasses the themes of loss and tragedy. They challenge the dominant culture to suppress or overcome minority literature and culture.

Situating “tribal” identity has always been the dominant theme in Native American literature. Writers emphasized on the importance of community and shared ethnic identity through rituals and rhetoric of spirit and soul concentrating on ethnic identity as internal structure and as a self-contained source of individual and group identity. Native American writers therefore use literature as a source of formulating the concept of nationhood which is affected by imagination in the way that citizens of tribal nations perceive their cultural and political identity.

Native American literature is not concerned with expression of subjective emotion; it is rather an ‘articulation and sharing of reality, a bringing together of the isolated private self into a harmonious balance with the external reality that forms the basis of communal life’ (Handoo 22). Native American oral genres which can be broadly classified into narrative, song, and ritual drama all were informed by a central belief that human beings should strive for harmony with the Universe. This concern for order and proportion is a constant pre-occupation in their tribal way of life and can be traced to the stories of origin where the birth of a child is seen in perfect harmony with the universe. Among many nations of the Southwest, the world was created by the Sky Father and Earth Mother. Thus, rather than viewing the world in terms of conflict, a prime concern of Native American oral poetics is to articulate a quest for balance and proportion. For example, an important part of the poetic quest of the Native American Navajo tribe is the search for an orderly design. The Navajo Night Chant is basically a healing ritual designed both to cure people who are sick and to restore the order and balance of human relationships within the Navajo universe. Once sickness and disorder has been removed, order and balance are restored through song, prayer, sand painting, and other aspects of the ceremony.

A comparison of Native American origin tales and the Biblical stories of origin that most Europeans believed illuminated profound cultural differences. Generally speaking, Native Americans traditionally did not believe in a single, supreme, autonomous, and eternal being who established the condition under which all beings must exist. Nor did they consider humans as having a radically different nature from the earth's inhabitants, which they conceived of as intelligent, self-willed, and communicative. Given such beliefs, Native Americans found that the proper relation between people and the earth should be one of familial and personal respect, a relation honorable because of a kinship derived from a common beginning.

Thus, Native American literature, while grounded in a traditional spiritually based world-view, is no less a call for liberation, survival and beyond, to affirmation. As the tradition of Native spirituality is inherent in the literature, beginning with European contact, so too is the tradition of addressing historical and secular concerns. Native culture may be appropriated due to the imbalance of power between colonizers and colonized; ironically, it is this very imbalance that makes it impossible for the dominant culture to position itself within the Native world-view.

In the process of reading and understanding Native American literature, there has been an on-going debate regarding the strategies involved in the analysis of Native American texts. Over the past few years, Native American writers and theorists have attempted to embark upon a coherent codification concerning Native American culture and literature, employing approaches that suggest a theory of reading produced largely from Native American cultural and intellectual traditions. This newly proposed approach is based solely on indigenous knowledge and has involved tribal languages, tribal knowledges, epistemology, and philosophy. However, on the other side of the debate are theorists who argue for a literary criticism that uses indigenous rhetoric but at the same time retain a Eurocentric focus in reading Native American literature.

They attempt to formulate a body of Native American Critical Theory which is largely generated from Native epistemology but which also subsumes to the forms and methods of Eurocentric discourse.

Penelope Myrtle Kelsey, Robert Allen Warrior, Craig Womack, Elizabeth Cooklyn, Jace Weaver, Daniel Heath Justice, and Angela Cavender Wilson are among the few authors who argue for a separate Tribal Theory that reflects the tribal nature of Native American culture, tradition and literature. They have long debated on the applicability of Eurocentric theories in the reading and understanding of Native American literature, calling for a set of critical frameworks appropriate to this distinctive body of texts. They can be seen as a group that has significantly altered the critical methodologies used to approach Native American literature. They situate indigenous knowledge as the basis of their theoretical framework regarding their proposed Tribal Theory. They question the extent to which Eurocentric theories can provide an adequate framework for the emergence of mature Native American theory and criticism, sensing the need to base their critical interpretation primarily on native sources. They also envision a separate theoretical framework dominated by the literature and more importantly, the criticism of Native American writers.

Considering the different approach that Native American literary critics have been undertaking, the following chapters aim to study the distinctiveness of Native American identity, examining how Native American literature is shaped by their tribal identity. A meticulous study of Native American oral tradition will be conducted, thereby exploring the importance of mythology within Native American culture that gives great significance and status to storytellers and regard mythology with great reverence as it forms the embryo of their ceremonialism. All

Native American stories can be said to be dominated with devotion and worship of nature as a spiritual as well as physical mother. A careful analysis of Native American creation stories, chants, lyrics, myths, proverbs, riddles, incantations, and legendary histories that find its way in contemporary Native American literature will be made, taking in many different social, cultural, historical, legendary, and spiritual perspectives. This study therefore attempts to explore how this distinct body of texts calls for an idiosyncratic reading that could be based solely on indigenous materials. In this process, a number of Native American writers and their works will be examined alongside the distinctive theories presented by Native and non-Native writers in examining the pattern found in Native American literary tradition. Exploring the desire to maintain a tribal focus in reading Native American literature, a careful and systematic analysis will be made on how tribal-centric theory functions as a response to the historical precedent of the removal and the extinguishing of Native American traditions.

NOTES

¹The beginning of Christopher Columbus's arrival to the land he thought was India was fraught with misunderstanding and misinterpretation. In the European imagination, the extensive concept of India covers all of Southern and Eastern Asia. When the sixteenth century Italian navigator, Amerigo Vespucci, after whose name America was derived, records accounts of his travels in 1502-4, it was evident that Columbus had in fact missed his intended destination India and had mistaken the people for Indians. Although the term "Indian" does not signify reality, it had stuck with the people who continued to use the term in a generic way. Both terms, "*American Indian*" and "*Native American*" continue to be used as interchangeable synonyms. Both the terms have been referred to in this study with respect to the interchangeable use by Native American writers.

²Reservation Era denotes the period during 1871 to 1928, when Native Americans were removed from their original lands to settle in reservations assigned for them. The Bureau of Indian Affairs was formulated to supervise reservations, following the process to assimilate Natives to the mainstream American culture. This subsequently makes the Natives more dependent on the U.S. Government.

³*Our Fire Survives the Storm* by Justice highlights the use of terms like fullblood, mixedblood, traditional, and progressive, that are often used as absolute terms. Fullbloods in this sense are seen as traditional while mixedbloods are viewed as assimilated or acculturated. Similarly, using an example of Cherokee tribe, Justice explains that the term "traditional" denotes those cultural

expressions and values most closely understood as having their origin linked to aboriginal lifeways and philosophies predating the arrival of the Europeans while “progressive” denotes mostly those Indians who do not resist the assimilating policies of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

⁴Assimilation according to Justice is the extensive denunciation of indigenous values and their replacement with Eurowestern values, which could be a result of choice, coercion or violence. Acculturation on the other hand, denotes the adaptation of Eurowestern ways into a larger Native context, by altering some cultural expressions and in the meantime upholding the centrality of Native identity and values.

⁵ The image of “the Disappearing Indian”, the noble, brave warrior who is yet fated to sacrifice both freedom and land for the making of America has for long been the myth that has misguided the American imagination. Consequently, many believe there are no more “Indians,” or at least no more “real Indians.” The emergence of Native American writers who have been outspoken regarding their history, culture and identity, continue to affirm their presence by challenging this myth. In an article written by David R.M Beck, an Associate Professor in the Department of Native American Studies in the University of Montana, he argues that the imagery of the “disappearing or vanishing Indian” had long been a part of popular culture. The series of historical events in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, like the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890, the end of the Plains Indian wars, the federal attempts to forcefully eradicate Indian culture and assimilate Indians into American society to name a few, all contributed to firmly cement the imagery of the myth of a vanishing race. Thus began the misguided notion that Indians are historical features of an American landscape, not functioning members in a modern society.

Beck argues however that the federal policy of forced assimilation was in itself ironically a recognition that Indians had not disappeared from America, and the official reversal of that policy in the 1930s also proved to be an acknowledgement that Indians had not vanished as either a people or as political communities. He debated passionately regarding how Indian cultures have persevered and survived in reality despite the continuous attempt to damage their existence.

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In Native American thought, God is known as the All-spirit, and other beings are also spirit- more spirit than body, more spirit than intellect, more spirit than mind. The natural state of existence is whole. (Allen 8)

Ceremony and rituals have long played an active and indispensable role in Native American culture. The awareness and acceptance that the earth is thriving and is alive in resemblance to human beings being alive underlines the fundamental belief of the Native Americans. This aliveness is seen in spiritual terms, in terms that are acquainted to the mystic or the psychic, and this view gives rise to a philosophical sense of reality that is an indelible part of a Native American awareness.

Spirituality in the Native American context implicates an understanding beyond simply practicing or following a particular religion. A primary foundation of Native American spirituality moves beyond the broad contemporary concept of religion that is often embedded in a polarity between ideas of the “holy and secular” or simply the “religious and irreligious.” Native Americans consider different forms of life and existence, for instance the sun, or the earth or a tree as symbol of an extraordinary truth. The “All-spirit,” is the rudimentary unit of consciousness from which all other insights arise and derive their power according to the Native American beliefs.

A broad analysis regarding the purpose of ceremony or ritual in the Native American concept includes integrating the individual with the community and the community with other kingdoms or the world beyond. This process restores the individual to conscious harmony with the universe. In addition to this universal purpose, each ceremony has its own specific purpose that usually varies from tribe to tribe and may be culture-specific. However, the sense of

community that remains the bedrock of tribal life lies at the core of all Native American ceremonies, irrespective of their purposes.

Spirituality in the Native American sense thus involves a connectedness to Native American core values and deep beliefs- 'a pervasive quality of life that develops out of an authentic participation in values and real-life practices meant to connect members of a community with the deepest foundations of personal affirmation and identity' (Allen 15). While cultures and customs varied among the tribes, they all believed that the universe was bound together by spirits of natural life, including animals, water, plants, the sky, and the earth itself. For this reason, the Native Americans harmoniously celebrated death, knowing that it was an end to life on earth, but, believing it to be the start of life in the spirit world. Rituals were also performed for the dead so that the spirit would not continue to roam the earth. Various tribes honoured the dead in several ways, by giving them food, herbs, and gifts to ensure a safe journey to the afterlife.

N. Scott Momaday defines the Native American oral tradition as that 'process by which the myths, legends, tales, and lore of a people are formulated, communicated, and preserved in language by word of mouth, as opposed to writing' (Momaday 103). Oral tradition serves the important function of upholding the people or the community, pervading all aspect of the believing individual's being or way of life. From birth, the Native American oral tradition provides instruction in the culture and beliefs of the people by transmitting a sense of self, kinship, and tribal identity. Not only does it assist in establishing a close relationship with nature, it furthermore unifies tribal history and reveals ambiguities and natural phenomena.

Series of Native American stories involve the experiences relating to sustenance such as their life of hunting and fishing along with their life experiences from birth to puberty and death.

Other stories explain the more distant origin of the world and emergence of the people. For example, Origin and Emergence stories are complex symbolic tales that characteristically dramatize the tribal explanation of the origin of the earth and its people.

Native American stories and myths are distinctively different from that of the mainstream American or European fairytales. While the latter traditionally begin with the vague allusion ‘once upon a time’, Native American myths often start with ‘before the people came’ or ‘when Coyote was a man’ with a very precise beginning. A version of the Earth-Diver story in some of the Native American tribes resembled that of Noah and the flood of Biblical tradition. A comparison of Native American origin tales and Biblical stories however illuminates profound cultural differences. For most of the Pueblo dwellers and many other Native American groups, the origin of man differs significantly from the Bible. Native American Emergence stories often narrates the passage from ‘darkness to light,’ from ‘chaos to order,’ and from ‘undetermined to distinctly human form’ by beginning in the womb of the Earth Mother, from which they are summoned into the daylight of their Sun Father. Life for the Native Americans is sacred as they believe the process of evolution interweaves all forms of life, and one form evolves from another. Regarding sickness and disturbances caused by natural phenomenon, they consider that a restoration can be achieved by a ritual return to the place of Emergence and recovery of original power from that place.

From the Native American discernment, medicine is more about renewing or restoring the person than curing a disease. Traditional healers worked to make the individual “whole,” believing that most ailments stem from spiritual problems. Sometimes healing rituals include whole communities as they comprehend sickness as a sign of disorder in society or the world which is then reflected in the sickness of an individual. Members of the community would

sing, dance, paint their bodies, and sometimes use mind-altering substances to influence the spirits to heal the sick person. Medical and emotional conditions were also treated using Native American healing that combines spirituality, herbal medicine, and rituals. Healing requires repairing or restructuring environmental concerns. Symbolic healing rituals and ceremonies were often held to bring participants into harmony with themselves, their tribe, and their environment. Ceremonies were used to help groups of people return to harmony.

Native American stories of origin, religious life, and social activity differed markedly from the Europeans, so does their stories explaining life's uncertainties. Native American mythologies often contain large groups of tales recounting the adventures of a distinguished mythical hero with supernatural elements, who transforms and in some instances creates the world, who rights great wrongs, and corrects great evils, yet who often stoops to trivial and vulgar pranks. Often stereotyped as rootless and wandering on the sidelines of the social world and alone, the Trickster figure frequently engages in socially unacceptable acts, to question the nature of established cultural patterns. Both scandalous and instructive, trickster stories ultimately offer cultural lessons. Told with delight, the stories ironically provide useful and necessary correctives to cultural self-satisfaction. Trickster tales illustrate a testing of the limits of cultural formation and practice. According to Paul Radin the Trickster, may appear in the mythologies of various tribes as Coyote, Hare, or Raven, as being simultaneously creator/destroyer, giver/negator, duper/duped. He is a dichotomy, a duality, as are all humans (Radin 253).

Native American mythology consists primarily of animal tales and stories of personal and social relationships; the actors and characters involved in these stories are also requisite guides to the beliefs and customs of the people. For example, the Navajo ceremonials, like the chants, are

based entirely on the characters and incidents in the mythology. Masks are made under strict ceremonial control and worn by the dancers to represent the gods. Only then the dancers could absorb spiritual strength.

The importance of mythology within Native American culture is reflected very clearly in the status of storytellers, the time assigned to this activity, and the relevance of mythology to ceremonialism. Ceremonies and Myth therefore form the embryo of Native American Literature. Major ceremonial cycle centers on the subjects of origin and creation, myths and legends, a celebration of new lands, and migration. It is this practice that nurtures the society with unity and prosperity that generates harmony and balance, establishing right relations within the social natural world.

The beginning of colonization marked by the flooding of the Europeans into Native American lands drastically alters the peaceful existence of the Native Americans and their understanding of the world. With the colonizers winning more lands and establishing steadier ground, the U.S Government instituted policies to force Natives onto reservations and also encouraged them to become integrated into the mainstream culture. The European colonizers not only removed the Natives from their own lands but spiritual warfare began when Christian missionaries rejected Native American spirituality as worthless superstition inspired by the Christian devil. The works of the early missionaries were then seen as an easy way to convert the Native Americans to Christianity.

Eventually in 1882, the U.S. Federal Government began to work towards prohibiting Native American Religious Rights, which impacted their ceremonies and their spiritual traditions. Henry M. Teller, the U.S. Interior Secretary at that time claimed that Native American oral traditions causes a great hindrance to civilization and thus barred Native Americans from

practicing all their dances and ceremonies on reservations. This was further supported the following year by Hiram Price, Commissioner of Native American Affairs, when his 1883 report stated:

...there is no good reason why an Indian should be permitted to indulge in practices which are alike repugnant to common decency and morality; and the preservation of good order on the reservations demands that some active measures should be taken to discourage and, if possible, put a stop to the demoralizing influence of heathenish rites. (Johansen 602)

The history and transformation of the southern Plains Kiowa serve as a good example of how Native American religion transformed with the introduction of Christianity. The transformation of Kiowa religion is often broken into four periods: traditional Kiowa religion (1832-69), the early reservation period (1869-1901), the post-allotment period (1901-45), and post-World War II until the present and is also paradigmatic for many Plains people. Kiowa religious viewpoint suffered radical transformations with the influence of missionary work by various Christian denominations such as the Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and Catholics. The concept of *dwk'i* or "God" was introduced with the metaphysics of good and evil (reinterpreted in terms of good and bad medicine), along with rebirth in Heaven with Jesus (influenced by the high degree of infant mortality among Plains peoples due to impoverished conditions), and the Jesus Road as leading away from all evil (Irwin 324).

Some Native Americans have been devout Christians for generations, and their practices today combine their traditional customs with Christian elements. A ceremony called 'The Ghost Dance' that swept through many Native American tribes of the west was actually a religious revitalization movement started by the powerful healing medicine man, a Paiute shaman,

Wovoka (Jack Wilson). His message was woven around a Gospel of salvation which was filled with Christian as well as Native American elements. Men and women were to purify themselves and dissociate from alcohol and violence. Calling himself the Messiah, Wovoka prophesied that a tidal wave of new soil would cover the earth which would bury the Whites and enable the Native Americans to live in the old way surrounded by plentiful game¹. To hasten the event, the Native Americans were to dance the Ghost Dance.

During the fall of 1890, the Ghost Dance spread through the Sioux villages of the Dakota reservations, revitalizing the Indians and bringing fear to the whites. As the Ghost Dance spread, the White settlers panicked. The United States Government soon outlawed the dance, and called for soldiers. Native Americans were immediately sought after and this was soon followed by the news of Chief Sitting Bull's death at the Standing Rock Reservation. Sitting Bull's death was followed by Chief Big Foot's death. The unending policies of the U.S. Government to overpower the traditions of the Native Americans ultimately led to the Massacre at Wounded Knee on December 29, 1890. The massacre at Wounded Knee eventually resulted in the death of approximately 300 Sioux. By this time, no Native Americans lived freely even in their own land. The once proud Sioux found their free-roaming life destroyed, the buffalo gone, themselves confined to reservations dependent on Native American Agents for their existence. Native Americans were divided even among themselves as they struggled to come to terms with the white man's world.

The Wounded Knee Massacre effectively ended the utopian expectations of the movement, although Ghost Dancing has persisted to the present as a dance form among some tribes. The Ghost Dance was essentially a far reaching movement, it carried a message of hope that prophesied a peaceful end to white American expansion and preached goals of clean living,

a truthful life, and cross-cultural cooperation by Native Americans. It was a dance to restore the past when Native American nations were free.

The insensitive histories of the Ghost Dance and the Wounded Knee massacre serve as a testimony to the kind of misinterpretation the Whites had over tribal traditions. It was the fear of the unknown as well as the aim of sabotaging the “savage” culture and tradition that led to one of the most ruthless genocides in history. The disconcerting history of religious oppression and rejection of Native religious rights, and the costs of representation and misrepresentation by non-Native “others,” generated an environment of restraint and uncertainty, and led to a sheltering of Native spirituality from the public eye. Though some traditions were lost along the way, many others survived despite the ban, and various tribes continue to follow many spiritual traditions. For example, “pow-wow,” today, exemplifies all of the traditional Native American events and words that were used to describe gatherings, such as celebration, doing, fair, feast, festival, and more. “Pow-wow” is a relatively modern word, which is derived from the Narragansett word “powwaw,” which means “spiritual leader.” A modern pow-wow can be any kind of event that both Native American and non-Native American people meet to dance, sing, socialize, and honor Native American culture. These events might be specific to a certain tribe or may be inter-tribal. In the meantime there are Native American tribes, particularly in the Southwest, that have retained their aboriginal traditions, and kept them mostly intact.

Native American culture struggled to survive after the white man invaded their lives. After numerous battles with forced displacements, war, famine, diseases, and assimilation, these strong and spiritual people managed to keep their many legends and stories alive. Many Native American tales that have been passed down through generations in spite of these hostile circumstances speak of timeless messages of peace, life, death, and harmony with nature.

Despite the continuing effect of the European presence that has proved detrimental to Native American populations and demoralize the integrity of their cultures, many Native American communities today still sustain viable oral literatures. Literacy has facilitated the development of masterful writing in English by Native American authors. In this manner, old forms have been preserved alongside new forms that evolved with years.

The oral tradition continues to be the bedrock of Native American literature. In recent times, Native American writers have become active participants in writing about their own culture, history, and oral practices as their identity is intricately linked with their own culture and spirituality and not with their assimilation to the mainstream culture. Folktales that have been part of the social and cultural life of Native Americans are reproduced creatively in literature. In the Native American culture, a good storyteller has the magic of transporting his/her listeners into another world. The effect was derived not only from the novelty of the tale itself but also from the imaginative skill of the narrator, who often added gestures and songs. Today, the task of the storyteller has been effectively transferred to writers who are able to capture the oral world of Native Americans through their writings.

It is necessary for the reader of contemporary Native American fiction to understand and appreciate the oral traditions and the role they play in each author's works. Laguna poet Paula Allen explains: 'The purpose of the ceremony is integration: the individual is integrated, fused with his fellows, the community of people is fused with that of other kingdoms, and this larger communal group with the worlds beyond this one' (Allen 119). For instance, the Pueblo mind sees all life as unified and interrelated, like the strands of a spider web, all forms of life are bound together, and all things connect. From the start, drought like sickness has been regarded as

a visible sign of conflict or imbalance. And so many tales in the oral tradition are concerned with performing a ceremony in order to bring the life-giving rains back to the people.

Leslie Marmon Silko's short story "The Man to Send Rain Clouds," deals with the idea of assuring rain for the people. The Pueblos believe that the clouds are the collective spirits of the dead and they come in from the home of gods and ghosts.

These clouds that come to the center, the village and its fields, bring the rains that feed the life-giving crops. And so a cycle is completed and another transformation made from life to death to life again. Because of this, special care is taken in the final ceremonies for the dead to insure their return in the form of clouds and rain. (Tyler 87)

Leslie Marmon Silko is a contemporary Native American writer who offers today's readers a different perception of the universe, but this outlook can only be consumed if it is unclouded. In order to clear the obscurity, the reader must be aware of Silko's beliefs and heritage that include the landscape of the Southwest, the history of the Queres and the Pueblo people and the stories of their beliefs and customs and their efforts in maintaining harmony in the universe. Silko incorporates all these elements into her literary works and this allows her readers to understand another perspective on life. Likewise, to understand the Laguna culture and oral tradition is to better understand Leslie Marmon Silko and her own search for harmony and oneness with the universe.

Her creative vision that is clearly shaped by the land and by the variety of oral and written storytelling performances is captured effectively in her first novel *Ceremony*. She celebrates the Laguna oral tradition in her works depicting the transformative power of story and place, the values of working together for life in a healing way. Her works function as a testament

to how the oral tradition has preserved the complex traditions of resistance and assimilation that have empowered the people to survive and adjust to innumerable external pressures.

The core or background of the novel, *Ceremony* is derived from the oral traditional stories that Silko grew up with. In one of the episodes set in the Chuska Mountains, the healing ritual that was performed for Tayo by the venerable old Navajo hataali (singer or medicine man) was weaved from materials found in Navajo story and ceremony. The narrative persona Keresan, from the onset of the novel aligns herself with the oral tradition by claiming to be one of the very long lines of storytellers. She further emphasizes that her role is to preserve and pass along the story set in motion by “Ts’its’tsi’nako, Thought Woman” also called Spider Woman.

In *Ceremony*, the quest is both an external and an internal search. Tayo's quest for self takes him to Old Betonie, the half-breed medicine man, and on a hunt for his Uncle Josiah's cattle. The outward expression of the protagonist's personal quest for an identity is an example of the external search that is enacted in an actual physical hunt. A realization of his identity and sense of self is revealed for the first time when he encountered and released the cattle on the mountain. It is then that he realizes that his earlier ‘dreams had been terror at loss, at something lost forever himself: but nothing was lost; all was retained between the sky and the earth, and within himself. He had lost nothing’. (Silko, 204) He knows who he is and where he belongs, and as Ts'eh reminds him, ‘as long as you remember what you have seen, then nothing is gone’ (Silko 231).

Numerous Native American tribes practiced the rite of vision quests², which was often taken by older children before puberty to “find themselves” and their life's direction. In what manner the rite was taken, its length and intensity, and at what age, varied greatly from tribe to tribe. Vision quests often require ardent preparation and commitment as the individual alone has

to undertake the journey into the wilderness in order to be in harmony with the spirit world. The individual embarks on a supernatural experience in order to obtain instruction and protection, and to establish a network or interaction with a guardian spirit, usually an animal.

From the Coyote tales of the Pueblo people and Laguna in particular, Silko weaves contemporary fiction which is a complex blending of the old and the new; the old stories of the Laguna oral tradition are presented alongside stories that are borrowed from other cultures. In the meantime, events in Laguna history are repeated in the framework of a coyote character type. Added to these is the influence of 'Silko herself as a clever trickster' (Evers and Carr 30).

Native American tales offer examples of archetypal relationships that show mutual and cyclic evolution, an evolution tied to a particular place. As the people believe in the interconnectedness between the universe and their existence, their tales explain that their beginning coincide with the universe evolving from chaos and disorder to balance and harmony. As the Zuni myth pertinently expresses it, the particular homeland that the Zuni, the Navajo, the Iroquois, and indeed each Native American people, have been occupying and claiming as their own since their beginning, is known to be the center. For most Native Americans, this center proved to be what sustains their identity and life, especially in times of tribal trouble, so much so that to move or be moved from their center was for these people, unthinkable. The structure of most Native American stories similarly follows a pattern from instability to stability. Often at the beginning of a story, a situation befalls wherein the harmony and the equilibrium of things is shattered or shaken and the rest of the story or myth recounts the determinations to reestablish this harmony.

Louise Erdrich's recurrent theme concerns the underlying complexities of individual and cultural identity and cultural survival, while at the same time explaining the importance of

community by emphasizing the connections between people and geographical locations. The spiritual worlds of her characters in her novels blend Ojibwen and Catholic cosmologies. In her novel, *The Beet Queen* (2006) for example, Erdrich invites readers to see through the perspectives of characters exhibiting more “Native American” than Western consciousness, and to think about Eurocentric interests and values that dominate the lives of people who do not embrace them.

In *Love Medicine* (1984) and its sequels for example, readers learn usually for the first time from an Ojibwen perspective, the regional history of the Turtle Mountain Ojibwe of North Dakota, a people many times betrayed in their reluctant, but forced dealings with the Euro-Americans, an event that affects both their collective and individual identities dramatically. Erdrich in this text interrogates from the indigenous point of view how Roman Catholicism, since its arrival in the nineteenth century, has transformed Native American culture. She uses the text to question the lasting effects of the spiritual as well as the material colonization of the Native Americans. The dramatic effects of religious conversions have been captured in a series of episodes through the voices of the people whom the Protestant and Catholic missionaries set out to “save” but who did not consider themselves “lost”. From Erdrich’s prose, we learn of the synthesis of material and spiritual realms that is implied in tribal languages. Prayers and rituals, stories and songs continue to be the path through which communities return to their fundamental relationships that establish their tribal identity. As such, writers who hardly contribute in the life of a tribal community have also discovered a new strength in old traditions. Whether the stories are culturally corrective trickster tales or emergence or historical narratives, Native American genres show the people in quest of a harmonious interaction with the earth.

Joy Harjo also assigns a central role to the mythic embodiment and memory of the Native American world. Her collection of poems titles, *In Mad Love and War* broadly works around the theme of integration. “Grace”, the opening poem, leans towards toward a ‘promise of balance’ in order to fully achieve a new vision of the self and the world.

The haunting voices of the starved and mutilated broke fences, crashed our thermostat dreams, and we couldn’t stand it one more time... Like Coyote, like Rabbit, we could not contain our terror and clowned our way through a season of false midnights. We had to swallow that town with laughter, so it would go down easy as honey. And one morning as the sun struggled to break ice, and our dreams had found us with coffee and pancakes in a truck stop along Highway 80, we found grace. (Harjo 1)

With the power of the word, Harjo deconstructs and reconstructs a new image of the self, a union between the concretely real world and the mythic space. Her collection indicates the continuation of the journey from fragmentation to completeness. Her poems draw on a wealth of experiences, comprising those connecting to tribal tradition and sacredness of the land. In “Javelina” myth can allude itself into squalid and humdrum everyday life, and in such a case, ‘The mythic world will enter with the subtlety of a snake the color of / earth changing skin’. (Porter, Joy, and Roemer 290) The event of the birth of her daughter is experienced as the moment of a present life in the mythic spiral of time: ‘I had to participate in the dreaming of you into memory...’ (290)

The plot of *House Made of Dawn* by Momaday similarly mimics Navajo chant ways or healing ceremonials in its general movement from discord to harmony or following a conception of disease, from the damaging fragmentation of Abel’s sense of self to its positive reassemblage as well as in many specific details. In two separate interviews, Momaday explained the genesis

of his first novel to Laura Coltelli and Kay Bonetti. Momaday told Coltelli that Abel, the central character,

represents a great many people of his generation, the Indian who returns from the war, the Second World War...He represents such a dislocation of the psyche of our time. Almost no Indian of my generation or of Abel's generation escaped that dislocation, that sense of having to deal immediately, not only with the traditional world, but with the other world which was placed over the traditional world so abruptly and with great violence. (Allen 162)

Through Abel, Momaday recounted the experience of a number of men that he knew who had been disoriented in a way that Abel is. In his interview with Bonetti, he talked of how these sad men would murder themselves and on other occasions drank themselves to death. He reported the terrible things that befall them and how they died violent deaths. *House Made of Dawn* interestingly is Momaday's attempt to not only define the causes of this behavior but to imagine what it would take to heal from such estrangement or illness. He succeeded in providing not only a context for formidable suffering but to offer avenues for healing such suffering. Abel who after returning from World War II suffered a psychological inability to connect with his environment eventually achieves insight through the power of imagination and ritual language: 'restore my voice for me' is the injunction of the Night Chant (Momaday 194). Eventually Abel is able to locate himself once again at the center. He remembers, through his grandfather's voice, that he knew/ knows 'the long journey of the sun on the black mesa, how it rode in the season and the years, and they must live according to the sun appearing, for only then could they reckon where they were, in time' (Momaday 177). Thus, when Abel assumes his grandfather's place as a dawn runner, he is both chasing away evil, and running toward re-creation.

The aforementioned Native American writers and their respective works clearly mirror the uniqueness of Native American spirituality and situate Native American identity in the interrelatedness of all things. Likewise, we learn through their work that Native Americans have a broad metaphysical understanding sprung from dreams and visions and articulated in myths and songs. They have a profound spiritual engagement with their natural environment as a result of which we can safely proclaim that Native American identity is deeply grounded in oral tradition.

Ines Hernandez-Avila, a Native American scholar and professor concerned with preserving the intellectual sovereignty of Native people writes that “many Native American people who have been cut off from their traditions are hungry to recapture their ways, or at the very least, have a sense of what they have lost” (Hernández-Ávila 334). In her essay, “Mediations of the Spirit: Native American Religious Traditions and the Ethics of Representation,” she quotes Grampa Raymond: ‘The ceremonies, the language, the songs, the dances are not lost. We are lost; they are where they have always been, just waiting to be [re]called’ (334).

Native American spirituality continues to preserve its unique ethnic history till today through countless of religious and political suppressions it has persevered. Having specific languages, lands, rituals, and myths and the community of tribes as its foundation, Native American “religion” is truly diverse and consequently offers no easy explanation or summary. Contemporary scholars and writers revisit this history that offers the essential elements in framing Native American identity however clouded and muddled the path may be.

Unraveling the clandestine and mysterious history of Native American spirituality requires consistent effort as misunderstandings and misrepresentations often materialize due to

idiosyncratic prejudices. Further, Native American communities still battle numerous political, social and economic mayhems which subsequently resulted in severe internal struggles not only inside their community but also within one's self. As such Native American spirituality continually evolves and changes under the weight of contemporary American society.

Furthermore, from the methodical reflection hitherto, it is evident that the beliefs and practices of Native Americans form a significant part of their very existence and survival, making it more difficult for them to consider their spirituality, ceremonies, and rituals simply as "religion" that is understood from the Western perspective. From Momaday's Abel, whose fragmented self is healed through Navajo chant ways and healing ceremonies to Louise Erdrich whose characters embody Native American consciousness in their search for the "whole", to Leslie Marmon Silko who embodies the role of a "clever trickster" as a writer herself, and Joy Harjo who uses imagery from her Native American roots to challenge real life atrocities, we learn that the achievement of a "wholeness" of being in the Native American sense comes from an understanding and connection to their beliefs and practices. Healing chants and ceremonies, songs and stories underline restoration of wholeness. Native American oral tradition is about the values and consequences of human decisions, the quality of life and relationship, the manner in which life, nature and time is respected and enhanced. And at the heart of it is the community of relationships that withstand and endure all its splintering, conflicts and denials. Through it all, it searches for a meaningful world of spirituality and innate commitment. The Native American tribes according to Paula Gunn Allen,

seek, through song, ceremony, legend, sacred stories (myths), and tales to embody, articulate, and share reality, to bring the isolated private self into harmony and balance with this reality, to verbalize the sense of the majesty and the reverent mystery of all

things, and to actualize, in language, those truths of being and experience that give to humanity its greatest significance and dignity... (Allen 8)

Craig S. Womack, a contemporary Native American critic who has attempted to formulate a tribal-centric reading of Native American literature has made an effort to construct a meaningful way of encouraging tribal people to talk about their own literature. Being fully aware of the wealth of Native wisdom, he wanted to incorporate Native perspectives in his approaches to Native literature. He genuinely coveted that tribes and tribal members should have an increasing role in evaluating tribal literatures. Through his criticism he ventures for a proof that there is such a thing as Native perspective and he wants to testify that a search for it will be a meaningful endeavor. His suggestion is therefore based on the conception that,

Native American epistemologies and worldviews might be used for the purposes of reading Native texts in culturally appropriate ways... by centering reading in tribal experience and lifeways a theoretical gloss is achieved that is organic to Native writing. (Kelsey 8-9)

Progressively Native American writers have emerged as 'active agents' and 'innovators of new ways' today with themes increasingly involving issues of kinship and relatedness that are rooted in 'tribal experience and lifeways'. What also emerge are increasingly involved set of writers or speakers trying to comprehend the needs and interests of their community. The issue of personal identity is signified as complicated and is therefore rooted in communal relationships such that, in the Native setting, community has greater precedence than the authorial voice assumed by an autonomous Native/ non- Native scholar. The needs of this set of writers who are devoted to subverting the personal for the sake of the larger community surpass the boundary of the intellectual, and continually involve the emotional and existential in the need to respond to

the larger disconcerting world. Native identities, and commonly shared life ways that are not simply or accurately subsumed into "western" analytic categories. These themes involve something more than scholarly understanding, aesthetic or artistic indebtedness, or an interest for exotic cultural activities. An appreciation of the inherent worth of Native spiritual beliefs and practices are in fact necessary in order to study and understand Native American identity. Representation needs to authentically engage Native communal values and thinking,

...every story, every song, every ceremony tells the Native American that he is part of a living whole, and that all parts of that whole are related to one another by virtue of their participation in the whole of being. (Allen 8)

NOTES

¹ Wovoka, also called Jack Wilson, who was born in Walker River Indian Reservation, was a renowned Native American religious leader who started the second messianic Ghost Dance cult, which spread rapidly through reservation communities about 1890. Wovoka's father, Tavibo, was also a Paiute shaman and local leader. In 1889 Wovoka started the Ghost Dance cult when he prophesied that in two years the ancestors of his people would rise from the dead, buffalo would once again fill the plains, and the white colonizers would vanish. He also claimed that by dancing the Ghost Dance continuously, the dream would become a reality. Worshipped as the new Messiah, Wovoka's teaching was followed by the Sioux, many of whom were revolutionary and saw the movement as a promise of ultimate revenge against American usurpers. The religious frenzy engendered by Ghost Dancing frightened American and immigrant settlers, for the fear that Native leaders like Sitting Bull would try to exploit the movement to engineer an uprising.

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Native American narrative, an art inherent to their culture, is privileged by many writers.

In the words of Craig Womack,

Tribal literatures are the tree, the oldest literatures in the Americas, the most American of American literatures. We are the canon... Without Native American literature, there is no American canon... Let Americanists struggle for their place in the canon. (Womack 6-7)

Indigenous writers become storytellers and whether they write in a foreign or native tongue, they transmit ancient mythologies, worldviews, culture, migratory, and settlement histories employing different narrative forms and techniques that best emphasize the authenticity of their experience. Because of these diverse forms and a worldview that requires a comprehensive study, Penelope Myrtle Kelsey has devised certain means to read native texts in a culturally appropriate way, to achieve an exploration of the delineations, and key cultural concepts that has hitherto remained obscure. She affirms,

...by centering readings in tribal experience and lifeways a theoretical gloss is achieved that is organic to Native writing: Native writers continually invoke these epistemes with a host of strategies, and that knowledge base is therefore organic to these indigenous texts. (Kelsey 8-9)

We live in a complex world today where conversations and business communications take place fundamentally through the virtual world. Communities and societies of people with similar history, interests, culture, values, and ethics in this globalized world have largely been replaced by individuals immersed in their own complex makeup all fighting to be heard, yet having no time to listen. Technology has reduced humans to impassive beings. The world has become smaller; recent developments in connectivity have made it possible to travel the globe

within closed doors. Man being the subject of his own study becomes a narcissist and to a large extent has lost interest in fulfilling the demands of the society or community of the real world as long as he has the means to live by his own standards. People in general no longer have time to trace their genealogy because they are too busy building a future in virtual spaces, in virtual environments with virtual people and would expend and consume large sums of money to upgrade them. More people today have become socially awkward, self-imposing social isolation to replace their unhappy social reality with a more satisfying and happy virtual one they have designed for themselves.

The growing egotistic desire of man undeniably brings back the history of the West wanting to trade and consume more, claiming territories and riches that belong to others. Since then histories have been interrupted, cultures been replaced, values been bartered, names been substituted, and people been dislocated from their own lands. It is disheartening to say the least, to see all these reflected in the writings of the first Europeans who had the power and privilege of using the pen to manipulate the minds of future generations. The rigid dichotomy that is still maintained between things related to the East and West undeniably mirror the conviction of the West being the ultimate power and the standard with which everything else needs to be measured. The general attitude of the West towards all things related to East, or anything outside the boundary of its safe haven reflects the European awareness of being in a privileged position to perceive the world's racial and cultural diversity.

The fifteenth century that ushered the new age of discovery for the Europeans broadened the Western consciousness not just in terms of knowledge about other territories and populations that exist in “other” parts of the world but more importantly regarding reflections on religion,

human society, culture, and civilization which were mostly formulated from the testimonies of travelers. Expansion and conquest was accompanied by colonization and trade that resulted in supremacy, exercising of power, domination, cohabitation, and polygonal transcultural relationships. The West immediately began the endeavour to explain and interpret what they viewed as “alien” or “other” societies, cultures, and religious practices.

The early American writings from the European explorers are primarily in the form of narratives and letters. These letters and accounts often romanticized the experiences of the travellers as their travels and discoveries were submitted to the monarch as a report. What is therefore intriguing is how narrative of indigenous populations was being suppressed by the more powerful narratives of the European colonizers for centuries. These narratives that were often authoritative and influential seemed to have prejudiced the rationale of man that a challenge against this notion has not been made until recently by writers who have to fight to make their voice heard.

‘So natural is the impulse to narrate,’ says Hayden White in his article, “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality”, that, ‘far from being one code among many that a culture may utilize for endowing experience with meaning, narrative is a metacode, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted’ (White 5-27). However, the claim of the first conquerors or travellers to have “discovered” or “found” new worlds is contentious for the reason that their narratives entails passivity and submissiveness on the part of indigenous populations. These accounts were often lop-sided or asymmetrical because it denied any history or ethnic existence before the European

arrival. Today scholars and critics alike are responding to the complexities of narrative, juggling the meaning and function, contesting the validity of man as a narrator, questioning and studying its impact and influence, and more importantly analyzing its inherent relation with history, science and other fields of study.

Prior to the arrival of the Europeans, it was believed that there was no written literature among the different tribal cultures of North America resulting in a diverse oral literature. This diversity becomes the source of different stories and narratives ranging from stories of the Navajos whose legends and myths are surrounded by highly mystical creatures like skinwalkers and coyotes to the stories of Ojibwa, northern lakeside dwellers known for their birch bark canoes, birch bark scrolls, and the wealth of their Midewiwin Society respected for being keepers of numerous accounts of events, oral history, songs, maps, memories, stories, and mathematics. Likewise, other tribes maintained their own distinctiveness, each having their own concepts of religions-worshipping gods, animals, plants, or sacred persons. Tribal elders relate these powerful tales to the younger generations simply by means of vivid narratives to share their history, customs, rituals, and legends. Storytelling was thus simultaneously a means of entertainment as well as a source of preserving history and culture.

In fact, extensive Native American writing started in the nineteenth century as Native Americans themselves felt obligated to rewrite history and question the accounts already made by the Europeans with reference to their history, culture and identity. It encompasses the orally transmitted myths, legends, tales, and lyrics of Native American cultures. Reviving a history and culture that has been misrepresented and subdued by other powerful nations, Native American

writings emerge despite having to thrive in a hostile and challenging environment. Voices that had been suppressed and stifled for centuries took to writing and creating literature hoping to educate non-natives about Native American religions, culture, history and beliefs, and most importantly to exercise their rights as self-governing human beings.

Native American literature rooted in the Native soil give birth to authentic Native American experiences further comprising of travel accounts, protest literature, autobiographies, sermons, and tribal histories that help in a better communication of Native American experiences in the midst of dislocation, suppression, death, false treaties, alcoholism, and rejection by the mainstream American society. As much as the dominant White culture attempted to erase all cultures that existed before the coming of Christopher Columbus to the extent of a few writers pronouncing the end of Native Americans in America and reducing them to the term, “disappearing Indians,” Native cultures and literature continue flourish among the bristly environment of contemporary cultures, ethics, and literature.

Storytelling was one common feature that was shared by numerous Native American tribes before there was any form of writing system. Literature was shared by way of the voice accompanied by performance. Stories, songs, and poems grew out of myths that have been created and recreated by thousands of members of societies down through many generations. These stories were collectively owned by the society, marked by anonymous authorship, and the absence of a solitary author. It was a verbal art that breached speech, chant, and song.

There was a dynamic relationship between conservation (preserving the basic elements of a story) on the one hand and innovation or improvisation (the enhancement brought to a given work by generations of story teller performers) on the other. Indeed it was innovation that made the role of the individual very highly regarded. Performers used inflection, variation of story elements, gesture, silences, and so forth to make old stories new. (Wolff np)

Novelist and scholar Louis Owens remarks that there is a learning curve when approaching Native American literature, as the art of storytelling, tribal, historical, or ceremonial knowledge is necessary to fully understand the nuances of this particular genre. Additionally, Native American literature is complicated in its own contexts, as there is a tension between expression of Native American by non-Natives and the history of representational encounters by Native American themselves within public consciousness. Owens explains,

For American Indians, the problem of identity comprehends centuries of colonial and postcolonial displacement, often brutally enforced peripherality, cultural denigration – including especially as harsh privileging of English of tribal languages – and systematic oppression by the monocentric “westerling” impulse in America. (Owens 4)

The first Native American works written in European languages were transcribed speeches and treaties with European colonists that date to the 1600s and 1700s. A Timucua chief, in 1539, upon his encounter of Juan Ponce de Leon, a man who “discovered” Florida uttered these words:

Others of your accursed race have, in years past, poisoned our peaceful shores. They have taught me what you are. What is your employment? To wander about like vagabonds from land to land, to rob the poor, to betray the confiding, to murder in cold blood the defenseless. No! with such a people I want no peace- no friendship. War, never-ending war, exterminating war, is all the boon I ask. (Blaisdell 3)

Another account of betrayal can be seen from the narrative of a Native American Chief in the event of Buffalo Creek Council where Red Jacket responded to the request of a land speculator named Mr. Richardson:

Brother!- The White people buy and sell false rights to our lands, and your employers have, you say paid a great price for their rights... The loss of it will not hurt them, but our lands are of great value to us, and we wish you to go back to your employers, and tell them and the Yorkers that they have no right to buy and sell false rights to our lands. (47)

The history of broken treaties becomes an indispensable framework and context for reading Native American literature today as Native Americans continue to view this as an evidence of U.S. hypocrisy and racism. During the American Revolution in 1778, what was known to be the first treaty was signed between the U.S. Government and the Delaware. The Delaware signed eighteen treaties that essentially took their land and relocated tribal members from the Eastern seaboard to Canada and Oklahoma. Likewise several different tribes signed treaties which resulted in a tragic loss of their native lands. Another representative of such malfeasance in U.S. history was the infamous Trail of Tears, the forced relocation during the

1830s. Estimates based on tribal and military records suggest that approximately 100,000 indigenous people were forced from their homes during that period, which is sometimes known as the Removal Era, and that some 15,000 died during the journey west. The term “Trail of Tears” invokes the collective suffering those people experienced. The atrocities of nineteenth century U.S. history inform native thought of the past and present. Such atrocities represent important historical touchstones, and many are reconstructed in fiction and poetry by Native writers.

Lucy Tapahonso, is a Navajo poet who was herself reared in Navajo reservation. She takes elements of landscape, history, and humour and reflects how her identity as a Native American shapes and influences her works. In her poem “In 1864”, she recounts Navajo removal, also called the Long Walk, an event central to Dine history. Tapahonso prefaces her poem, “In 1864” with a factual account of the event,

In 1864, 8,354 Navajos were forced to walk from Dinetah to Bosque Redondo in southern New Mexico, a distance of three hundred miles. They were held for four years until the U.S Government declared the assimilation attempt a failure. More than 2,500 died of smallpox and other illnesses, depression, severe weather conditions, and starvation. The survivors returned to Dinetah in June of 1868. (Tapahonso np)

Tapahonso’s poems not only document the atrocity and memorialize the dead, but it also asserts the timeless beauty of the Dine and their continuing cultural traditions. A heart wrenching story of “The Long Walk” that killed thousands of innocent Navajos who were forced to leave

their home, is powerfully expressed through her narrative. Keeping the tradition of storytelling intact, she expresses how, for the Native Americans these stories remind them of their roots, and the strength of the forefathers to resist and survive such atrocities. She writes in her poem:

After we stopped for a Coke and chips, the storytelling resumed,

My aunt always started the story saying, ‘You are here because of what happened to your great-grandmother long ago’. (Tapahonso np)

Tapahonso’s poems serve as a fine example of how Native American heritage and history shapes the narrative technique of contemporary writers who incorporates the art of storytelling in poetry. This offers a prospect for history and ancient beliefs to be preserved, while educating and reminding others of the very seeds of America's first people and providing insight into their history and rich heritage. Through her poems, she recalls how it was their grandparents who have prayed and grieved for them, thus teaching them the value of community, of living, and surviving together through the old stories the holy people had given them.

Like Tapahonso, many Native writers construct narratives that not only portray the brutal reality of American history but also highlight the strength and resilience of tribal peoples past and present. Native American oral literature includes many literary forms, and of these forms, songs and stories remain popular and are given reverence. Oral literature continues to be at the center of Native American life and culture playing a crucial role in defining what it means to be a member of a given tribe and how a person relates to the tribe’s past, present, and future. Although the details of stories found in different tribes may differ, the tales often have similar

themes. One common theme is the creation of the world and another is the theme of a people's origins and migrations.

Native Americans have a sense of distinct narrative time. Based on this belief, a series of principal figures like mediators exist who are endowed with extraordinary gifts to incarnate supernatural power and values in the present moment, thus communicating prototypical realities to each succeeding world. In this perspective, the sequence of narrative forms reconstructs a native consciousness of the narrated past. According to Native American mythologies, the past begins in the Origin Period. At the point of emergence or contact, mediational figures like the Seneca Woman Who Fell from the Sky, the Navajo Changing Woman or the Maidu Earth Initiate appears. The incarnation of these figures instigates the birthing of spiritual power into the present, earth surface, world, and whose body upon decease sometime becomes the first plants and animals (Wiget 3-5). In the Transformation Period, we see a progression regarding the creation where in some cases a responsibility is given to a single figure whose character incarnates the polar values of Culture Hero and Trickster.

William Fenon, a prominent Iroquoianist adopted an approach for interpreting the Iroquois Earth-Diver story. According to him, myth affirms that culture is an affair of the mind. 'The Earth is our mother, living and continually generating life. Life is regular, cyclical, patterned by twos and fours, and these metaphysical patterns are models for ethical ones'. (Wiget 9) Accounts of migrations and ancestors abound, as do vision or healing songs and tricksters' tales. Among many descriptions of the trickster, the most concise and at the same time the most complete one might be the one by Paul Radin who advanced a Jungian interpretation of the Trickster as an image of man's psychic evolution:

... from an undefined being to one with the physiognomy of man, from being a physically underdeveloped and prey to his instincts, to an individual who is at least conscious of what he does and attempts to become socialized. (Radin 136)

Native American literature abounds in trickster stories or short narratives that use animal characters. Tricksters are often seen embodying human features to deliver folk wisdom and to help us question and comprehend human nature and human behaviour having different ways to portray human strengths and weaknesses. In the Native American oral tradition, the unrefined but sacred Trickster assumes many forms. He can be Old-Man Coyote in the far east, Raven in the Northwest and Arctic, Hare in the East Wolverine in the North Woods and Spider or Old man in the Plains, to mention just a few of his manifestations. Sometimes the trickster appears as human, sometimes as animal. The "trickster" plays tricks and is the victim of tricks. The trickery of such stories extends as well to symbolic play regarding cultural forms, rules, and worldview.

Alice Beaulieu, my grandmother, told me that my father was a tribal trickster with words and memories; a compassionate trickster who did not heed the sinister stories about stolen souls and evil gambler... Naanabozho was the first tribal trickster on the earth. He was comic, a part of the natural world, a spiritual balance in a comic drama; and so he must continue in his stories. (Vizenor 69)

These mythic figures often play an important role in building and transforming a culture. They act as a network of pathways between the individual and the community, nature and culture, landscape and narrative art, and thereby accomplishing the purpose of enlightening. This is why these characters have a high chance of appearing in cases when the values of a culture are threatened in some way, as is the case with Native American culture in Erdrich's novels.

Gerald Vizenor understands trickster as a sign in a language game, a comic holotrope. This means that Vizenor conceives of trickster as a product of language, who must be seen in a linguistic context (131). If this theory is applied to Louise Erdrich's novels, it becomes apparent that she, as the author, becomes the trickster in telling her story. She creates several different perspectives; seven narrators in *Love Medicine* and two in *Tracks*, as each chapter is narrated by a different character, mostly from a first-person perspective, although some chapters in *Love Medicine* are also told from the limited third-person perspective. To accentuate the blurred lines between genders, races, and cultures, Erdrich uses not only the character of the trickster, but she herself, as well as her whole narrative, takes the role of the trickster. In this viewpoint, the author, narrator, characters, and the audience together becomes the comic holotropes in trickster narratives. The comic holotrope is a consonance of narrative voices in discourse (131).

From oral narratives that recount personal experiences to the diversity of contemporary literary techniques, Native writers remain rooted through the narrative structures they employ, allowing narrative to reflect their sense of place and identity. Leslie Marmon Silko draws on tribal stories, from chant-ways to Navajo paintings and myths, local traditions of gossip and storytelling, her narrative structure, religious, and cultural worldview is often indiscernible to people outside the Native American community, or more specifically from the traditional White critical perspective. Silko is a mixed blood writer and for this reason critics often classify her narratives as mixed blood narratives that draw inspiration from modernist texts at the same time always keeping her Native identity intact.

Tayo, the protagonist in Silko's *Ceremony* is a mixed blood who undertakes a challenging journey of self-realization. Being alienated from his own culture, and constantly shifting between borders, Tayo longs for a personal identity. For the Native Americans, maintaining a pure lineage is honorable as they consider it a means of preserving culture. As a Native American, Tayo is marginalized by the hegemonic White, and as a Mexican, more so by the Native Americans. It requires courage and strength for Tayo to encounter this challenging journey and emerge as a strong individual in order to revitalize his Native American roots.

The terms fullblood, mixedblood, traditional, and progressive are often used as absolute terms, in that fullbloods are seen as being traditional and mixedbloods are viewed as assimilated and acculturated. Such absolutes are rarely accurate. (Justice XV)

Silko in this novel takes a non-sequential approach to both time and events weaving together two main narratives- Tayo's story after his return from World War Two with a series of traditional Laguna Native American chants emphasizing how two separate narrative strands assist to balance one another. Following her own pattern, Silko subverts the rigid structure of the linear narrative, for instance Aristotle's definition of a plot that follows a rigid form of beginning, middle, and an end. Silko jumps around through time and narrative voice, following a non-rigid narrative structure and using flashbacks that narrate Tayo's war experiences and events that happened before the war.

Jaishree Odin states, 'Silko . . . uses fragmentation and discontinuity in her texts to get the reader intimately involved in the reading of the text, the reader creates her own narrative as

she traces her path through the fragmented textual landscape which seems to spill in multiple directions' (Odin 3). Silko intentionally uses cultural distinct forms of narrative interweaving portions of Laguna Pueblo Chants and stories to construct Tayo's story to parallel it. Through this distinct narrative structure, Silko made it a point that the author's narrative does not subvert the narrative of Tayo, nor the traditional or ancient narrative structure of his community. The rediscovery of the self for Tayo comes when he was able to see the significance of the past, how the worlds of stories, of Pueblo mythology, rituals, and ceremonies provide meaning to his present. In this way, one learns to view oneself and one's tradition so as to approach both rightly. For Native Americans, the gift of all creatures to share and participate in the process of ongoing creation makes all things sacred and whole. Old stories push new stories forward and as such myths and rituals evolve to meet the circumstances of the present. Consequently familiar and non-familiar literary forms and narrative techniques are intertwined, requiring readers to have awareness and understanding about Native American culture, geography, and history to wholly comprehend tribal and mixed blood cultural and political concerns.

An important theme in Native American literature today is the issue of Native American identity—what it means to be Native American. Like the character Tayo in Silko's novel, *Winter in the Blood* (1974) by James Welch deals with a man's developing understanding of who he is. Welch's main character achieves self-realization by piecing together his complex family history. Like many other characters in contemporary Native American fiction, Welch's hero suffers problems that have affected many Native American people, such as alcoholism and alienation.

As a means of perpetuation of the different nuances of oral narratives, contemporary Native American writers have employed different narrative techniques to bring the oral experience alive, to make their work meaningful and relevant among the Native American community and larger. The term “technique” has been said to be one of the basic requisites of a literary writing. It aids a writer in interpreting and transforming reality. As such readers of Native American literature through these different narrative techniques specific to Native American authors are able to discover and travel among other selves, other nature, other identities and experience the multiplicity of human adventures. Narrative techniques provide profounder meaning and significance for the reader and help the reader fancy or visualize situations. A story develops with a unique pattern that acquires rhythm with words. The writer’s ideas are meaningfully conveyed to the reader if he/she is able to use the right technique. Different Native American writers use different techniques depending on how they choose to tell their story. Experience, discovery, use of language all come together to bring forth the work of art.

An extensive study of Mayan bookmarking and epistemic record for example, helps in a better and more fruitful understanding of Leslie Marmon Silko’s novel, *Almanac of the Dead* (1991) by situating *Almanac* within that tribal literary inheritance. A criticism of Silko’s novel therefore requires a tribally grounded criticism in order to bring to the surface the true meaning inherited in the novel. In defining and studying Native American literature, Kelsey affirms the importance of practicing tribal theory so that the tribal foundation of the text will emerge and motivate our theoretical praxis. In *Tribal Theory in Native American Literature* (2008), she addresses how one can use tribal knowledges as theoretical framework for reading and

understanding Native American texts. In her consideration of Marie McLaughlin's *Myths and Legends of the Sioux* (1916), a collection of Dakota legends that McLaughlin illustrates with a series of pictographic drawings by Devils Lake and Standing Rock Sioux artists, she argues that by considering the role of pictography among the Dakota and the cultural values that its practice embodies, pictography may be used as a theoretical frame for understanding McLaughlin's writings. The inclusion of pictographic illustrations in McLaughlin's writings challenges her reader's understanding of Native people. Kelsey's argument can be approved from the analysis that these pictographic drawings are the equivalent of Dakota writing and for that reason they should be understood as an assertion of Dakota equality and civilization. In this manner, McLaughlin can be honoured as a preserver of Dakota culture as she fulfils the role of women as culture bearers and the primary figures for imparting Dakota values by defending Dakota knowledges and the lifeways they inform. The pictographs that are included such as "The Pet Donkey," "The White Buffalo Woman," "The Mysterious Butte", and so on are all significant because of their centrality to the Dakota culture and their concerns with identity, nation and the importance of seeking one's own values and not of an external order. They are defined as, 'stories from the elders that teach about the past and often involve things of a mysterious nature, not easily explainable' (Kelsey 33). Expressing her own feelings about the importance and significance of pictographs, Kelsey maintains that the critical pictographic records can function as a theoretical framework to unpack the Dakota worldview that McLaughlin affirms in these stories. 'Pictographs record and express Dakota knowledges, history and literature...form the underlayer that culture rests upon' (28).

Like McLaughlin, Charles Eastman's text *Indian Boyhood* (2008), uses an educational dialogue about the "language of feathers." Just as pictographs serve as an expression of Dakota

experiences, culture and literature, the significance of feathers is affirmed in studying the Dakota cultural identity. 'Feathers represented a material cultural expression of autobiography for Dakota men as they communicated nonverbally a man's history and accomplishments as a warrior'. (53) Eastman uses Native knowledges as a methodology for defending the interests of the Native people. He has tribal-centered agendas in terms of asserting indigenous equality and Dakota nationhood in the face of assimilation. Without overtly arguing for Native American superiority, Eastman uses the autobiographical genre which includes a range of tribal genres along with anthropological discourse using the ethnographic mode. In his use of indigenous knowledge, he attempts to affirm that the Native American way was better and that this kind of narrative helps him refigure Dakota culture and experience. While many critics fail to see the significance of these narratives, these forms of narration establish continuity between a writer's childhood cultural identity and the identity the writer cultivates through narrative. Many Native American writers have thus emphasized on how these tribal-centric narratives help them accomplish a defeat of the stereotypes of Native American life ways through a reflection of the complexity of their cultural position.

In her analysis of the multiple representations of Native American identity taken from colonial Euro-American narratives, Mary A. McCay declares the significant alterations and misinterpretations that govern these narratives thereby concluding that Euro-American cultural narratives are 'hierarchical and monolithic' often excluding multicultural dimensions. She reveals that Erdrich's patterns and narratives on the contrary look for the possibility of the acceptance of all cultures. In McCay's view, Native American writers like Erdrich, N. Scott Momaday or Leslie Marmon Silko deploy Native American myths and points of view in order to

re-constitute and revitalize Native American cultural traditions and identity-formations, suppressed by, or eliminated from, the Euro-American-centered narratives of North American history (Balogh 152-153).

Analyzing the aforementioned Roland Barthes' definition of narrative, a quandary however arises with respect to Native American writers, vis-à-vis their conceptualization of narrative. Barthes recognizes the infinite diversity of forms when it comes to narrative. He thus formulizes that,

Narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives, enjoyment of which is very often shared by men with different, even opposing, cultural backgrounds. Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself (Abbot 2).

Unlike Barthes' generalization regarding the concept of narrative, however, an extensive study of Native American oral narratives shows that narrative was not just a form of art with respect to utterance or word; it was intricately linked to performance. Native American narratives thus perform the significant function of communication not just through words but through performing arts such as dancing, chanting, and storytelling. Native American scholars and writers today discuss the importance of performance aesthetics and their connection to history, culture, and politics.

The narrative technique or structure of Louise Erdrich for instance has generated the interest of non-Native American readers and critics and often trouble them because of the tribal influence upon her writings as well as her core themes. Through her narrative, she establishes the durable indigenous presence of a tribal culture that endures through “survivance” (Vizenor 1). Erdrich’s novels *The Beet Queen*, *Tracks*, *The Bingo Place* and *Love Medicine* all embrace the history of the same kinship. Erdrich in her novels successfully employs and recovers the narrative forms of the Native American oral tradition collectively with significant elements of Native American culture. Barbara L. Pittman and Catherine Rainwater who provided a critical study of Erdrich’s fiction discusses the difficulty of reading Native American works like those of Erdrich’s denoting that it is a, ‘challenge for Euro-American readers because it mediates between literary patterns familiar from the Euro-American literary tradition and unfamiliar structures characteristic of Native American narratives. The mixing of different traditions produces alternative cultural meanings’ (Rainwater 405). In Pittman’s view, Erdrich in doing this, intends ‘to record the persistence of the Native American community and its resistance to appropriation by the monolithic discourses of the dominant culture’ (Pittman 777). Like Pittman, Rainwater accentuates Erdrich’s cultural hybridity and contends that ‘Erdrich’s concern with liminality and marginality pervades all levels of her texts’, (407) further arguing that the reader must respond to this conflict of cultural codes since it is a challenge to our efforts to establish a clear, epistemologically constant, and reliable interpretative framework.

Erdrich creates the native world inside of her stories in such a way as to invite any reader to understand the Ojibwe culture she is showing. Each chapter in *Love Medicine* (1984) has a strong sense of closure and also maintains its own self-contained plot and each representing their

own separate cosmos (Stookey 19). Another distinctive narrative style that Erdrich employs is the subversion of the linear fashion in traditional fiction. She establishes her own system, destabilizing the hegemonic European discourse, interweaving diverse stories together for the plot and characters to progress, once again establishing the importance of communality where diversity contributes to wholeness of being. Within Elizabeth Gargano's article, "Oral Narrative and Ojibwe Story Cycles in Louise Erdrich's *The Birchbark House* and the *Game of Silence*", she points out that Erdrich's works serve to connect to an Ojibwe audience because the cultural relevance of her novels reflect the native experience back at them (Gargano 27). As a mixed blood, this aspect of her identity is reflected through encounter of binaries in her novels. Erdrich's heritage manifests in her works through the constant agitation of Ojibwe characters and the white characters and more importantly through the battle between Christianity and Ojibwe tradition and culture.

The superficiality of the general comprehension of the Native Americans shaped the ways Native Americans have been represented in movies and books. Hollywood movies till date have infamously popularized the image of a romanticized warrior chief, adorned in costumes and armed with weapons rather looking savage and brutal.¹ Another popular image is the Native American as the orator and the treaty maker of history texts, the subject of the case study or documentary, the creator of pottery displayed in museums. These fabricated images are somewhat always exotic, sometimes fearsome, and greatly fragmentary. They are misrepresentations that have severely distorted the formation of young Native Americans' identity. Native American writers and film makers began to respond to these images by putting

whites in their lenses, restructuring the established narratives and representing their own lives and images.

Sherman Alexie, a Native American writer and film maker for instance decenters mainstream culture by privileging Native oral tradition correcting stereotypes about Native people and their culture inspired by the authenticity of his experiences. Privileging the spoken word over the written, he is aware of the importance of tradition. He therefore uses orality as a tool to critique dominant discourse, which heavily relies on the written word. He patterns his characters as good storytellers, to 'intervene... in and rewrite... the narratives of conquest by inserting Native American voices into the storytelling' (Cox 225). Alexie wrote and coproduced a film entitled *Smoke Signals* (1998) where the main characters, Victor Joseph and Thomas Builds-the-Fire, take a trip from the Spokane Reservation to Phoenix, Arizona to recover the ashes of Victor's father, who has died in an accidental fire. When Victor at one point asked Thomas to look like a mean, stoic warrior... 'to look like you just got back from killing buffalo' (232), Thomas protests, 'But our tribe never hunted buffalo. We were fishermen' (32). Through this conversation between two characters Alexie mocks the unrealistic and romanticized images of Native Americans as savage warriors, in the meantime stating how these images influence the self-representation and identity construction of individual Native Americans (233).

Contemporary Native American writers therefore are left with the task of restructuring and correcting the false comprehensions of white ideals and stereotypes. Because a majority of the early life stories of Native people were solicited, collected, edited, and translated by Euro-American traders, missionaries, military officials, and travelers later followed by ethnologists

and anthropologists, a significant collection of Native American self-narrations are collaboratively authored (Porter and Roemer 133). This has led scholars to conclude that one of the most dominant features of this period is characterized by ‘bicultural composite composition’, a collaboration of the narrator and recorder/editor (Krupat 5).

Factual experiences are molded by time within the framework of the present, bridging the gap between the old and the new, and effectively expressing the lives of people and world-view that would rather be inaccessible. As a genre, the autobiography or personal narrative is shaped by narrative events providing a means of approaching both the oral and the written process of creation and transmission in Native American literature. It is a reaction and product of the imagination or an act of remembering. Because these narratives incorporate other literary forms such as songs, tales, origin stories, and dream visions, Native American autobiography serves both as personal and cultural narrative providing an opportunity to study forms, functions, stylistic devices, and techniques characteristic of Native American literature. These life writings have a significant feature of recognizable Native voice in the work as they center on personal experiences but at the same time participate in family history and in the events of the tribe. As the Native American identity is shaped by the larger community and the interaction and understanding of all things living, autobiographies also adopt the trait of being retrospective rather than introspective. These personal memories of the narrators remain clearly within the framework and perspective of tribal history and culture. Personal narrations although often isolated from the community or society in the White ideal, Native American autobiography are rather focused on the characterization and the relationship of protagonist to community and the land.

H. David Brumble III delineates six fairly distinct kinds of preliterate autobiographical narratives- narratives that do not conform to Euro-American notions about autobiography that emphasize autonomous individuality and writing. (Porter and Roemer 127) These preliterate autobiographical forms include coup tales, informal autobiographical tales, self-examinations, self-vindications, educational narratives, and stories of quests for visions and power. The earliest written autobiography is still thought to be the 1768 execution sermon of Samson Occum (Mohegan) later published in 1982. William Apess's (Pequot) *Son of the Forest* (1829) is hailed as the second Native American autobiography. Both Methodist ministers, Apess and Copway used narrative structures adapted from Christian conversion narratives and focused on spiritual confessions and testimonials (133). Native American autobiographies have a special feature of an interweaving of myth, history and contemporary incidents as well as an interweaving of personal experience with tribal history and culture. The self-narrations emphasize a communal and relational self, and they may be spoken, performed, painted, or crafted, rather than written.

Contemporary Native American autobiography evolved with a key focus of defining Native American identity and self-identification. Reformulating indigenous cultures and languages alongside deconstructing the subject and the complexities of contemporary Native identities, these autobiographies narrate histories and personal stories that have been suppressed, at the same time aiming to reveal key changes in practices of self-narration that reflect historical transitions. From dreams fashioned in pictographs, to performances, symbols, crafts, and paintings, contemporary Native autobiographers interweave their personal stories with cultural myths and histories, emphasizing a specific subjectivity and the continuation of oral traditions. Autobiographies bear witness not only to a history of genocide, but to survival and the continuance and the possibility of healing from the wounds of history. Anita Endrezze's

autobiography *Throwing Fire at the Sun, Water at the Moon* (2000) use numerous narrative techniques and forms unique to Native American tradition- combining first-person narratives, poetry, letters, short fiction, historical retellings, myths, and paintings. In the service of self-narration, she retells not only family history but the history of her people, the Yaqui tribe. Endrezze recounts Yaqui creation myths, illuminating parallels and differences between Christian and Yaqui narratives. This distinction gathers significance as she explores Spanish and Mexican attempts to subvert and annihilate Yaqui culture through religious and political pressure. The characteristic feature of Native American autobiography has always been an interweaving of personal stories with cultural myths and histories accentuating an unambiguous subjectivity and the survival of oral cultures.

An evolution of styles and forms in writing is seen during the nineteenth century Native American literature that bears witness to the transition between an oral tradition and the emergence of contemporary fiction in the 1960s. Literature becomes increasingly text-based, and composed in English, a change resulted by missionary schools that taught Native Americans to embrace and integrate in the white society. Native American authors being exposed to other cultures and systems outside their own began employing Euro-American literary genres like autobiography and the novel, often uniting them with traditional narratives like the trickster tale or creation myth to create hybrid forms. Although the early texts exhibit the struggle of Native American authors to find a voice within American culture, they prefigure features of later Native American literature such as the negation of stereotypical depictions of Native Americans all too common in American literature. The novel has become a popular Native American literary genre with the turn of the nineteenth century, along with poetry, short story, and autobiography. Today

many Native Americans write for the benefit of Native American audiences, taking up the task of investigating Native American history, sociology, ethnography, culture, medicine, education, law, and literary criticism, among other fields. They have also expanded their purpose in writing, seeking to educate not just themselves but the larger world about Native Americans.

As has been discussed, the purposes that Native American novels aim to achieve are numerous. For instance, *The Ghost Singer (1994)* by Anna Lee Walters, among other Native American novels conveys narratives of repatriation. Adapting concept of traditional notion of spirituality and Native worldview, the novel argues that open conflict and destructive forces remain vigorously at work when human remains are not brought to a meaningful home. Likewise, Louis Owens' novel, *The Sharpest Sight (1992)* addresses the implication of repatriating a brother's bones. This journey or quest requires the brother to come to terms with his own cross-blood culture, tracing his history and accepting his community and drawing strength from tribal knowledge. The quest, if under any circumstances becomes unsuccessful, will result in an alienation of the brother's spirit from his family. The bones in Native American perspective meaningfully become a marker of self, family and community relations.

Repatriation of tribal artefacts and human remains becomes an important theme distinctive of Native American or Tribal literatures. In this way, a body of contemporary fiction speaks to the processes of "inter-cultural definition and negotiation" that are central to the many issues currently being worked out among museums, university holdings, and tribal and federal governments (Ira Jacknis np).

Similarly, Louise Erdrich's 2005 novel *The Painted Drum* centers its plot structure in repatriation issues and the meanings of artefacts. The novel's subject matter explores how repatriation of a tribe's drum symbolic of the tribe's culture and religion resulted in restoring order within families and the Ojibwe community. In a letter, Bernard Shaawano, (who was later revealed as the grandson of the drum's maker), wrote to Faye and Elsie, a daughter and mother descended from Ojibwe tribe, Erdrich clearly presents the significance and the sentiment that Native Americans have over artefacts that have tribal values. Faye who discovered a huge Native American drum in a client's attic was determined to return the drum to its creator sensing that a tragic story must have prompted its sale to a white trader. *The Painted Drum* is part of a body of current Native American fiction offering plot structures and oral histories in relation to the context of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). Native American human remains or Native American cultural items which include funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony obtained without right of possession is in violation of the NAGPRA Act and is treated as a criminal offense. Thus, it is important to understand Native American fiction as participating in a major intercultural dialogue. In *The Painted Drum*, Shaawano offers an explanation of the reverence the tribe has towards the drum that has been returned. Communicating through a letter in a few but meaningful words he wrote,

Selling that drum was one of the things my father most regretted having done in his life. When he spoke about it, he would hang his head and stare at the floor for a long time...With the drum back, there is a good feeling here. People have come together

around it. I am surprised. That young girl Shawnee has moved back with her mother to a house built on the site of the old one. (Erdrich 269)

Narratives with artefacts and bones in their plots show us how to revisit and reread Native American cultural and spiritual outlook and see human remains and cultural artefacts not as the end, the death, of tribal identities and ways of life, but as unending manifestations in a profoundly altered view of the relationship of past and present.

Tribal literatures (including oral traditions of stories, legends and myths) are unique and culturally specific. Although translation offers a scope for the non-Natives to experience and share the Native consciousness, the wealth in meaning and the significance of these stories and legends will not be transferred through translation. The language of the tribe, especially during story-telling, not only inspires behavior, but also reflects and mirrors a customary response and attitude.

The languages of the Native Americans include more than fifty language families and hundreds of distinct languages. 'With our language is our culture', states Stacey Burns, an Ongabe Tukadu (Salter Eater) Paiute and member of the Antelope Valley Paiute Tribe from Coleville, California. She delineates the significance of language emphasizing how language is intertwined with the teaching of native medicines, morals, respect levels and values. She states that the tribal government has been participating in language preservation for the past fifteen years, which has helped tribal members strengthen their identity and culture as native people. Language distinctively carries the history of a tribe, thus maintaining close ties to tribal culture.

‘What you hear from the old people is that it’s communication with the Holy people’, Burns said, further affirming it as an intrinsic part of their identity (Spoonhunter np).

Uses of Native language repetitions and images of cultural significance can be understood to a certain extent, but the nuances of language seldom survive translation. The pleasure of literature, especially poetry, depends on certain unstated signals which allow the poet and the listener to participate in a shared world of imagination. Some Native Americans were particularly skilled in creating very short songs which held a great deal of meaning for those who shared the native's world of experience.² The indigeneity of Native culture is reflected through the process of retaining certain expressions and words that is rather kept untranslated so that they could fully and authentically express the indigenous worldview.

NOTES

¹ The remake of “The Lone Ranger,” released in 2013 refurbish concerns about whether the media promotes stereotypical images of Native Americans. Native men in Hollywood film and television have for a long time been stereotyped as warriors with few words possessing magical powers, who are thirsty for the White man’s blood. This image often extends the notion that Natives are barbaric and uncivilised. On the other hand, women are depicted as exotic, mysterious, and beautiful women who are sexually available to the white men. Films like “The Last of the Mohicans”, “Magical Negro”, “Pocahontas”, and “Stagecoach” collectively contribute to the stereotypical images of Native Americans in Hollywood that continue to influence public perception about this racial group.

² As my eyes

Search the prairie,

I feel the summer in the spring.

Whenever I pause

The noise

Of the village.

“Dream Song”, translated by Frances Densmore in *American Indian and their Music*.

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To limit Native Americans only as victims of the onslaught of the colonizers would be to limit our understanding of the richness and variety of Native American culture. The Native Americans claim to be the first settlers in the land they inhabit, as a result of which they claim a right to their land. They had formed a close relationship with the land long before their first contact with Western Europeans. Much like the Aborigines of Australia, and the Maoris of New Zealand, they can certainly be regarded as native in contrast to the settlers who came after them. They are historically and culturally distinct from other populations that are politically dominant inhabiting a wide variety of landscapes. They valued their own collective memories of the past and spoke languages often incomprehensible not just to the Europeans but to their own Native American neighbors.

Christopher Columbus failed to comprehend the different, sophisticated ways of understanding human existence he encountered as well as the languages and dialects that articulated them when he first arrived in the continent. Just as he ignored indigenous sovereignty of expression, he ignored the sovereignty of indigenous rights to indigenous lands. He came upon a continent that was home to over two thousand cultures with their own significantly different ways of functioning. So he applied a doctrine formalized by non-Native Americans in the eleventh century known as “discovery” largely so as to avoid discovery amongst European nations over claim to Native American lands (Poter, Joy, and Kenneth 45).

The Europeans manipulated their way to claiming Native American lands by emphasizing on certain aspects of Native American deficiency related to European standards. According to these standards Native Americans were deemed unfit to occupy their own lands because they could not meet the idea of a Christian “civilized” criterion. The Native economy of occupying lands seasonally was also used by the Europeans as an opportunity to occupy and use

these lands for “higher” use. The policy of European and Euro-American governments since first contact has not only been guided by mistaken notions of racial superiority and divine rights to domination, but also largely by the needs of a capitalist mode of production. It is the forced, rapid reshaping of indigenous existence during this process of colonial-capitalist expansion and consolidation which is the most important aspect of the colonial experience for Indigenous peoples themselves – every aspect of their lives was reshaped in the interests of capitalism and to ensure the opportunity and profit potential of the white population recently settled in their homelands. Wotherspoon and Satzewich, considering the implications of Indigenous peoples’ situation between capitalism and the land, explain that ‘people’s lives were destroyed both inwardly and outwardly, in concert with idleness from lack of economic opportunity and the absence from any meaningful place in mainstream society’ (Wotherspoon and Satzewich 157).

From the English perspective of land ownership, Native American lands were vacant and thus lacked land development; it was not tilled and fenced and lacked permanent structures. As a result of this they deemed Native American lands could be occupied without any concern for the Native American concept of land or land ownership. In listing the legal fictions that form the basis of American law regarding Native Americans, attorney Walter Echo-Hawk, in his book *In the Courts of the Conqueror: The 10 Worst Indian Law Cases Ever Decided* (2010) includes these:

Native land is wasteland or a savage wilderness that no one owns, uses, or wants and is available for the taking by colonists—therefore any aboriginal interests in the land are extinguished as soon as British subjects settle in the area. Native peoples have no concept of property, do not claim any property rights, or are incapable of owning land. Christians

have a right to take land from non-Christians because heathens lack property rights.
(Hawk 73)

There is a supposition that the European use of the land had a higher value than Native use. Anthropologist Samuel Wilson, in his book *The Emperor's Giraffe and Other Stories of Cultures in Contact* (2000), reports: "The idea that Europeans might put the land to higher use required downplaying how the native people were using it." ("Who Owns the Land?" np) Europeans therefore had to build stereotypes of the Native Americans condemning them as nomadic hunters ill-equipped and lacking the basic knowledge to improve the land.

The extensive effort to transform Native American lands into non-Native American property and cultures, and expression into forms, that met the needs of non-Native Americans, thus begun with Columbus's invasion in 1492. From the beginning, colonizing countries viewed themselves as superior to the Native Americans in all aspects; they perceived them not on their own terms but as counter images of aspects or antithesis to themselves. Native Americans were judged from a European standard and approved as moral if they were not rebellious while that part of their identity seen as being warlike were considered bad. Europeans saw themselves as real, civilized, and dynamic, having the privilege of writing history while the people they colonized were relegated to being outside of history.

Many Native American authors have celebrated land as a place that gives identity to an individual as well as to a community. A meticulous study of Native American literature upholds the credence that the life of the land and human life are inseparable. For the Native Americans, land is more than a place they inhabit; their belief essentially held that the land was a gift from the Creator, to be used in common by all of the society for survival and sustenance. In many

native societies, no single individual owned the land and no legal institution existed to exclude certain classes of persons from the land. They seemed to uphold the Unitarian concept which for the white man was difficult to understand because they viewed land from a utilitarian perspective; land was treated as a place to be explored and exploited. This is a manifestation of the conflict between the unitarian and the utilitarian concept of land.¹ Land, which is a living identity for the Native Americans, is for the Westerners a property to be owned.

Acknowledging the insufficiency of western terms to describe the Native American's cognizance of the environment and its constituent parts, Native American author Leslie Marmon Silko has outlined the term "landscape" as it is interpreted by her Pueblo tribe: this term, as it has entered into the English language, is misleading. 'A portion of territory the eye can comprehend in a single view' does not correctly describe the relationship between the human being and his or her surroundings. This assumes the viewer is somehow outside or separate, from the territory he or she surveys. Viewers are as much a part of the landscape as the boulders they stand on. (Silko 27) For the Native Americans, nature and ecology represent and include what are often the most important elements of an aboriginal lifestyle. Fundamentally, the earth is the creator, a spiritual being containing a multitude of natural deities. In this way the land is the source of all sustenance — a powerful source of stories and tribal history, and also a definer of identity, both tribal and individual, whilst also providing physical sustenance. For Leslie Silko's tribe, the person represents a constituent part of the natural world. And her description goes further, with the individual being interpreted as equal to the landscape and the natural world.

Land is a place that gives identity to an individual as well as to a community for the Native Americans. Native Americans developed an intimate connection with their land which for the white man was difficult to understand because they viewed land from a utilitarian

perspective, land was treated as a place to be explored and exploited. For the Native Americans land is more than a place they inhabit, their belief essentially held that the land was a gift from the creator, to be used in common by all of the society for survival and sustenance. In many native societies, no single individual owned the land and no legal institution existed to exclude certain classes of persons from the land. Land ownership, then, was a fluid concept, especially among the nomadic tribes who moved from area to area with the seasons of the year.

With the egoistic need to transfer as much wealth as possible, the European settlers practiced wholesale extraction of resources, to provide themselves with the custom they had been accustomed in Europe. The Natives on the other hand lived off the land as their needs were relatively simple by European standards of their time. They became fully dependent on the resources provided by the land as the land could sustain their small population. This is a manifestation of the conflict between the unitarian and the utilitarian concept of land. While the Native Americans consider land as a part of their lives, the colonizers see it as a property to be owned. The value of land was judged from its utility. The tribals unavoidably continue to become victims of the alienation of land as the utilitarian concept of land becomes the more dominant concept.

The relationship between Native Americans and their land can be discussed through a study of a number of their myths. The Emergence Myth Complex traces the origin of man through the womb of the mother Earth, and when his life was done he would again return within her. Land for the Native Americans is sacred because their religion does not centre on a temple or a church or a particular shrine. They do not have separate denominations for worship. The whole earth for them is sacred and holy, animated by spirits. For them the whole earth is a temple where they worship God. They perform a number of ceremonies in connection to the land

that they employed. According to Native American myths, the earth is a mother from which human beings came forth. Most of the tribes have myths which say that they were born out of the earth. The alienation of tribal land is an almost universal phenomenon. Enormous problems of alienation of tribal land and conflicts over the land have developed in so many countries. This is fundamentally the different concepts of land between tribals and the non-tribals. The shift of ownership from community to government ownership in the case of the Native Americans reduced them to the status of slaves. Native Americans become marginalized labourers on their own land, serving the invaders who confiscated their land by force or fraud. Thus, the struggle of Native Americans is primarily a struggle for land rights.

An understanding of traditional land system is necessary to rediscover the traditional concept of land. This helps to see the impact of privatization of land upon the people and then utilize that concept towards the purpose of liberating people from alienation of land. Despite the differences in the detailed land system of different tribes, the fundamental principal is communal ownership. The chief of the clan or the village might be the theoretical owner of the land. Some plots or fields might be owned individually but practical ownership of the land is by the community.

In the absence of any alternative means of livelihood, the tribal people depended directly on the products of land and developed a deep sense of attachment to it. Land for them is a motherland, which feeds them and keeps them alive. They see all things as having life and power in themselves. The Native Americans believe that disharmony and imbalance in the created order brings disorder and threatens the well-being of all. Land is not merely a space but a place that gives identity to the community. "Space" means an arena of freedom, without coercion or accountability, free of pressure and void of authority, freedom from constraint and absence of

responsibility. "Place" by contrast connotes home and is bound up with a sense of belonging, a story which conveys an identity, a basis for participating in history. Since the community owns the land, individual identity is subordinated to community identity. However, as is evident, a change of land system shattered the tribal sense of belonging and eventually created an identity crisis. Alienation of tribal land means alienation of tribal culture, personhood, and sense of place.

For the Native Americans, land is a living entity endowed with spirits. From this concept of land, they are often known by outsiders as animists. From the tribal perspective, this attitude is recognition of the value, power, and validity of the land. Land for them is sacred, a temple in which they worship God, their ancestors, and spirits. They owe their myths and songs to the mysteries of their land. Struggle for land rights in the context of the Native Americans also means the tribal rights to land as well as the intrinsic rights of the land and all its creatures. In the western context human rights is understood in terms of individual freedom- freedom for speech, franchise, and so on. In the tribal situation, protection from the alienation of land, 'land right' is a concrete term, more conceivable than 'human right.' A human right in the tribal sense means the responsibility of human beings to contribute to the common good. Thus, the Native Americans' struggle for land rights is a struggle for community right for land. It is also a condemnation of an exploitative utilitarian approach to land which alienated them from their land. It is further an affirmation that land is the gift of god to all.

Hence, the first interaction with outsiders resulted in discrimination, exploitation, and alienation. They have been alienated from their land and culture. Their right of land and freedom to live according to their will was not recognized by the invaders. It is evident from the living condition and the increasing atrocities against them that the policy of suppression continues. The assimilation of the Native Americans in America is cultural, religious, and physical.

Social and cultural changes were deemed as a prerequisite to conversion and involved a wholesale restructuring of social institutions... In turn, this strategy isolated the new converts from their old communities and from the English, with whom they were not allowed to mingle. (“Missionary Conquest” 22)

The process of modernization can thus be considered as simultaneous to detribalization. In Native American spirituality, the earth as creator and actual physical sustenance are closely related, and all are of equal importance. Such integration is explicit in Alfonso Ortiz and Richard Erdoes’ collection of Native American stories, *American Indian Myths and Legends* (1985). Ortiz and Erdoes map out and explain the stories via a tangible link between natural phenomena and the events in Native American cultural past and tribal formation. Such an explanation is evident in the creation story of “How the Sioux came to be.” In this story, the ancestors of the Sioux nation try to escape the great flood that was started by Unktehi, a water monster by climbing a nearby hill. However, as the teller, Chief Lane Deer, explains,

The water swept over the hill. Waves tumbled the rocks and pinnacles, smashing them down on the people. Everyone was killed, and all the blood jelled, making one big pool. The blood turned to pipestone and created the pipestone quarry, the grave of those ancient ones. That’s why the pipe, made of red rock, is so sacred to us. Its red bowl is the flesh and blood of our ancestors, its stem is the backbone of those people long dead, the smoke rising from it is their breath. I tell you, that pipe, that chanunpa, comes alive when used in ceremony. You can feel power flowing from it. (Ortiz 94)

In this story the distinct geographical feature of the land is associated with the Sioux ancestors and the pipe becomes a symbol of the people long dead. Consequently, the land itself becomes

an ancestor by association, revered by the Sioux for its sacredness and profoundly believed to contain great wisdom and power.

From the earliest prayers and songs, the land has always occupied a central place in the hearts of the Native Americans as a source of life and healing. The relationship or the bond they had with the land they occupied strongly defined who they are as a community and individual and as such a separation from their land signifies a fragmented being, one who is separated from the divine. An example of this may be found in a translated traditional Midewiwin (Anishinabe Medicine Society) death song, which reads,

You are a spirit,

I am making you a spirit.

In the place where I sit,

I am making you a spirit. (Zolbrod 90)

Here, the speaker identifies himself with the land, which becomes a fundamental part in the course of communication with the spirit world.

Religion as we generally understand is concomitant with a temple or a church or even a particular shrine. However, for the Native Americans, religion cannot be enfolded within a temple or a church. Religion for them is much more extensive as compared to other religions practiced around the world. Land for them is sacred because their religion does not centre on a temple or a church. The whole earth for them is sacred and holy, animated by spirits. They owe their myths and songs to the mysteries of their land. For them the whole earth is a temple where they worship god, their ancestors and spirits. Land therefore is intricately linked to the Native

American identity. In the tribal traditional tenure of land, land usually belongs to the community. Thus, the right of land is acquired only by becoming the member of a community.

The importance of land in determining the identity of the Native Americans bring forth other themes which are also among the most predominant in Native American literature, that of community and a sense of family. For example, in Richard Wagamese's novel, *Keeper'n Me* (1994), a Native protagonist finds strength and security by returning to his community after a life in the non-Native world. Garnet Raven, the young Anishnabe protagonist, was only three years old when he was taken from his home on an Ojibway Indian reserve and placed in a series of foster homes. His journey entails his desperate struggle in search of an identity from being Mexican to African. It was his return to The White Dog Reserve after twenty years that taught him that his identity is inseparable from his own Anishnabe traditions and culture. He eventually came to an understanding at the end that "land is a feeling." His return to the community designates a movement toward spiritual enlightenment which brought back knowledge of who he is, and his role in the Anishnabe community as a storyteller. Likewise, Abel in Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, was completely alienated and unable to express himself in the white man's world. He could not pray when he first returned to his native society. His healing starts when he finally finds the right pace as a "dawn runner" and starts singing the ritual song silently. *Ceremony* by Silko also focuses on a young Native American who struggles to realign himself with traditional culture and reservation life after having been torn away. Tayo's transformation began gradually with the help of Betonie, an old medicine man, who guided him in finding a helpmeet in a sort of an Indian earth-goddess figure. Tayo steadily proceeds through the series of mystical ceremonies and rituals that will make him whole again. His search for an identity is thus

marked by both spiritual and physical voyage into the mystical spiritual world of his own culture.

The shattering experiences of the first settlers in the United States help us conclude that Native American literature is a symbol of a response to an experience that literally overturned the life and milieu of the Native Americans themselves. And the manner in which the community functions or the shared experiences shape the literature they produce- which moves beyond individual experience and response into the realm of the collective or mutual psyche of the people. An individual interprets his or her experiences into the context of communal or shared experience and this is passed on through successive generations. Native American writers therefore cannot be studied separately from the communities they come from. Theirs is a voice that represents and speaks for the larger community. They voice out not just their individual perspectives but the collective experience of the people or the community they belong to. This is no doubt a very different frame of reference to that of non-Native writers, who traditionally place great emphasis on individuality and hence personal isolation.

The estrangement of Native Americans from their original land has engendered enormous problems of alienation from tribal land and conflicts over the land have developed in the history of the Native Americans till today. The Reservations that the Native Americans were forced on to were poor lands that could barely produce crops. On top of this, they were surrounded by various imperialist interests that expected them to transform culturally from being hunters to farmers. With the Native Americans being subdued and retained under their control, the rhetoric of the United States emphasized on their complete assimilation to the American way of life attacking Native American tribalism and values as “savage.”

The treaties signed between the Native Americans and the United States have an unpleasant history because they were repeatedly broken or renegotiated to meet the petition for new land for non-Indian settlement. The year 1830 saw the passing of the Indian Removal Bill by Congress which legitimized the annexation of the Native lands east of the Mississippi and the banishment of Indians living there. President Jackson very skillfully gave this plan a humanitarian and charitable gloss. However, this did not hide the deep desire for him and his supporters to accomplish what was thought of as a manifest destiny to expand to the Pacific. The condescending and authoritarian treatment inflicted on the Natives eventually seemed to reduce them to America's infamous myth of "disappearing Indians".

The General Allotment or Dawes Act of 1887 primarily aims to assimilate Native Americans into the mainstream American society by breaking up tribal ownership of land in common and fostering the concept of individualism. The Act rendered many Native Americans landless and integrated around two-thirds of the Native American land base into non- Native American ownership. Forced onto reservations, subject to repressive bureaucracy, and unable to practice traditional modes of economic, social, and religious life, Native Americans were demoralized. They were forced to depend on government agents for rations and further destabilized from the main support of tribal life. The loss of land resulted in the loss of the ceremonial life and the disorientation of the natives due to the incapacity of the white society to offer an alternative to the traditions which Native Americans reminisced. Based on the principle of empty lands, the European imperial and Euro-American settler governments justified their presence in North America asserting that the land was not populated by humans before their arrival. They then began the process of restructuring the already established religion and tradition of the first settlers.

Due to the unrelenting stresses of colonization, life and culture in reservation could not adequately reproduce a meaningful notion of “community” and is often characterized by a much higher degree of violence, hate, and hostility causing unsettled psychophysical problems of historical trauma and cultural dislocation. This has limited the prospects for a self-sufficient, vigorous and independent life for Native Americans on individual and collective bases. For the Native Americans a true understanding of the self comes with an understanding of the place or the land the person inhabits since they believe that they are blessed abundantly by nature and thus cannot be separated from nature. Nature or Land thus is a symbol of life and identity for the Native Americans and conflict and displacement arises with one’s separation from the land.

Numerous books have been written about the Native Americans concerning the stories of Removal. By 1847, George Copway (Ojibwe) had produced one of the earliest Indian autobiographies and by 1850, *The Traditional History and Characteristic Sketches of the Ojibway Nation*, was published that showed the central importance of place and oral tradition in the Ojibwe. A Cherokee writer John Rollin Ridge’s 1854 western adventure, *The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta, the Celebrated California Bandit* chronicled a piquancy of the oppression and cruelty experienced by the Native Americans. Meanwhile, Euro-western theories repeatedly predicted the disappearance of Native American history and culture. *The Road to Disappearance* by Angie Debo, one of the most notable books on Creek history proposed theories about how Creeks have supposedly disappeared after Oklahoma became a state.

Craig Womack in his book, *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* (1999) counters the predictions regarding the disappearance of Native Americans through his analysis of the number of the Creek nation that has tripled since the first census that was taken after Indian Removal in 1859. He emphasizes how the people have been rooted to their traditions

maintaining most of their ceremonial grounds as well as their language, in the meantime sustaining the notion that these historians writing about the stories of disappearance have been shaped or influenced by the “vanishing American” mentality. He therefore is determined to discuss the many ways in which the Creek government continued even after it was no longer recognized as a state by the United States Government.

Long before the development or popularity of Native American literature or theories, land as a source of identity for the Native Americans has been deeply portrayed by a number of Native American myths. The Emergence Myth Complex for example traces the origin of man through the womb of the mother Earth, and when his life was done he would again return within her. According to Native Americans, emergence is therefore directly linked with the earth. Most emergence myths are records of the tireless search for a suitable homeland. The origin myths of the Southwestern Pueblo describe a journey upward through several levels of the underworld to the present sunlit world. Native American oral traditions including myths are not fragile, in spite of tremendous adversity they grow and continue to grow, reflecting change and diversity within the cultures that produce them and continuously affecting the psyche of the Native American writers and the works they produce even today.

Native American oral tradition reflects that land is considered a living entity, a mother who even in the cruelest of times must be worshipped and honored. Knowledge of Native American worldview and their tribal way of life comprises of a profounder understanding that includes the relationship to the land and environment, to people and other creations and most importantly the Creator. Native American literature therefore involves what may be called an integrated approach to life or a holistic approach which is rather missed by any other Eurocentric theories or approach.

The point that is often neglected, when the discussion of “conquest” is undertaken in American history, is that “conquest” everywhere in the world including America has meant genocide, deicide, and theft of lands. It really has meant the slaughter of millions of Indians in the case of North and South America- a holocaust of enormous impact. “Conquest means the spilling of blood of innocent victims and theft of lands belonging to others. This is sometimes and in some places in the world called “criminal” behavior, but in the case of America’s attempt of ridding the itself of its indigenous population, it is not. (Cooklyn 93)

According to Daniel Heath Justice, these forces, ‘still seek to uproot indigenous peoples from traditional homelands; to contain, transform, displace or otherwise erase ceremonial traditions and languages; to replace the Native presence in the Americas with the ahistorical mythology of Euro-western cultural supremacy’ (Justice 9). *Our Fire Survives the Storm* by Justice defines indigenous nationhood as more of a response to the ‘assimilationist directive of imperialist nation states’. He aims to differentiate between the nationhood that is linked to tribal nations to that which is linked to industrialized nation states.

Other Native American writers and critics like Craig S. Womack, Robert Allen Warrior, and Jace Weaver likewise agree on an understanding of indigenous nationhood that is rooted in the indigenous context; an understanding that arises from the intellectual traditions of indigenous communities or that draws inspiration from the ethic of “communitism” - community and activism. They all agree on a shared sense of nationhood through the multilayered weave of experience, history, and culture. Elizabeth Cooklyn looks beyond the field of literature or texts and traces the origin of what can be termed as “anti-indianism” in the American imagination. It is rather daring of her to determine the terms’ origin in religiosity saying that anti-Indianism,

‘gained momentum as a fundamental element of American Christianity’. She identified what she saw as anti-Indianism in the field of literature and in the process of explaining what anti-Indianism means, she establishes a very firm ground on who the Native Americans are saying, ‘...we are a nation of people’ (Cooklyn Preface xi).

Thus, most contemporary Native American theorists in their study focus on the significance of a scholarship centered in the intellectual traditions of the Indigenous communities. They battle to bring back the tradition that has been neglected or more precisely erased by the larger Euro-western academics. As Mary C. Churchill calls upon a “Cherokee-centric hermeneutic” in interpreting Cherokee literature, a more general understanding of indigenous nationhood can be drawn from a tribal-centric reading of the literature produced by the different Native American nations. Robert Allen Warrior insists that this work not only ‘serve its home community in some way but it also emerge, to varying degrees, from the cultural, intellectual, and spiritual realities and ideals of that community’ (Justice 10).

Likewise, Daniel Heath Justice asserts the prominence of Native people to act as speakers in enlightening the meaning of indigenous nationhood without the help of non-native translation or interpretation. It is one that places indigeness at the centre. According to his study, Cherokees have been communicating and avowing their nationhood through whatever means are available at the time and Justice is endeavouring to assert Cherokee-ness or Cherokee nationhood through Cherokee literature as he believes their literature is deeply rooted in indigeness.

In *Our Fire Survives the Storm* (2006), Justice attempts to clarify terms like “fullblood”, “mixedblood”, “traditional”, and “progressive” that has so often been used as benchmarks to identify the Native Americans. Although there have been various readings or understandings

regarding the degree of blood quantum being used as a measure to identify the authenticity of a person's belonging to a certain tribe or nation, Daniel Heath Justice makes it a point that the degree of blood quantum should not be read as a measure of commitment to Cherokee nationhood or identification as Cherokee. Being a Cherokee, he specifically examines the idea of Cherokeeeness in Cherokee literary tradition and he studies or scrutinizes three primary features of historical and contemporary Cherokee life - nationhood, removal, and regeneration through literary expressions of cultural continuity. According to him, the idea of Cherokeeeness is best reflected in their own literary tradition that helps in the better understanding of Cherokee social tradition. In his attempt to define or identify nationhood, Justice not only looks into his old traditions and history but takes up the current issues, standards, and contemporary culture of his people. He therefore brings in terms like assimilation and acculturation, terms that are so often conflated but clearly distinguished in his study.

Assimilation, according to him, is the 'wholesale rejection of indigenous values and their replacement with Eurowestern values, either through choice, coercion or violence'. Acculturation on the other hand is 'the adaptation of certain Eurowestern ways into a larger Cherokee context, thus changing some cultural expressions while maintaining the centrality of Cherokee identity and values'. Acculturation is more practical and amendable to Cherokee continuity according to him (Justice xvi).

The simple-minded stereotypes regarding the Native Americans in the Western imagination has also been contested by Justice in his study. The Cherokee princess in the western imagination seeks peace between Native Americans and their oppressors, while being the lover of White men, who becomes the repository of white dreams of indigenoussness as she surrenders to the American dreams. A contrast between the Cherokee princess in the Western imagination

to his own great grand-mother reveals how Cherokee identity has often been misunderstood. The artificial image - the tamed and melodramatic princess of the Eurowestern imagination - speaks to the desires of colonialist America and not the realities of either the historical or contemporary Cherokees. He is more interested in telling the history that has been marked by a history of change and trauma but that which undergoes regeneration and growth.

The prominence of Native people to act as speakers in enlightening the meaning of indigenous nationhood without the help of non-native translation or interpretation must be realized and affirmed, so that this may lead to a discourse that places indigeness at the centre. Native American literature thus serves as a means of asserting Native American nationhood. However, given the distinctiveness of the Native American experience and the conception of land, the question of writers that can be included is often debatable. Often the works of writers that are recognized by the expanded Native American community as being Native American either through community enrollment or tribal affiliation, can be embraced as 'the total written output of a people' (Jace Weaver 14).

Native writing and scholarship can be distinguished by the personal, familial and community wide experiential contexts that are so often ignored by the larger Eurowestern scholarship. Native American literature functions as a means of continuity that emerges from lived experiences connected to the soul, not only of an individual but a whole community. One of the most dominating themes that we find in Native American novels is thus a search for identity which is connected to a search of land or home, a search for place, and belonging which an individual had lost after his displacement outside of his native land. Native Americans have endured ceaseless wars and battles with their American counterparts and had been indecently treated with treaties that disfavor and wronged them. From the *Indian Removal Act* of 1830, to *The*

Trail of Tears in 1838 and *The Wounded Knee Massacre* in 1890 to 1969, when all Native Americans were declared citizens of the United States of America, the forces that triggered these events have not vanished till today.

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The distinctive experiences and interpretations of the Native Americans are often blurred and distorted by other theories or conceptualizations and become unfit to express Native American perspective or voice. Situating Native American culture and its distinctiveness vis-à-vis the conceptualization of identity with respect to the distinct orientations of social, political, and cultural experience of Native Americans, tribal-centric theory becomes pertinent in analyzing Native American literature. Although many Eurocentric theories and concepts have worth and significance in examining Native American history and culture, Native American literature has continuously been sidelined and an involuntary acceptance into mainstream culture will only diminish the authenticity of experience and voice that could be heard from the tribal centric point of view.

Native American writers have been cautious in asserting their claim in formulating a tribal-centric approach to Native American literature. They have consequently mentioned that this is not an exclusivist act that seeks an idealized cultural purity. Justice notes that it is rather, 'at its core, a deeply realistic and life affirming act' (Justice 10). Just as people are ever-changing, this theory according to Womack privileges an understanding of a community as being important to a nuanced reading of the text.

Consequently we can argue that generally Native American theorists and writers aiming for a tribal-centric reading of Native American literature laid emphasis on retaining identity, self-government, culture, and stewardship of land. The constant and on-going contestations with the U.S. government and society also constitute the subject matter of Native American studies. Due to its distinctiveness from any other body of literature around the world, it is rather a challenge but at the same time a stimulating struggle for Native American writers to establish a theoretical and methodological focus sufficient to organize an academic discipline. A comprehensive study

of Native American nations or more generally indigenous nations continue to prove that they form discrete political and cultural groups that are informed by creation and cultural teachings that further encourage preservation of sovereignty, community, and the recognition of indigenous goals and values.

Native American writers and theorists who have written and rendered their voices in support of tribal-centric reading have for long resisted the often one-sided histories and ideologies imposed upon them and Native Americans in general. Through their writings, they seek to critique and interrogate those ideologies. Adopting concepts from their own culture, thereby identifying and adapting to it, they further continue to combat the attempts made to erase tribal cultures. For Native American literature, the disciplinary focus cannot center on a critique of the colonial experience but rather on individual and community choices Native Americans make to realize their culture, values, and political and economic interests within the constraints and opportunities presented by changing colonial contexts and, increasingly, contemporary global political, economic, and cultural contexts. The constant need to negotiate within a matrix of institutional powers and multiple ethnicities to be acknowledged and recognized legally and culturally as peoples, has been a daily struggle for the Native American writers.

A Native American writer becomes a symbol of the community he or she belongs to and the recognition that comes along with it not only defines the author individually but affects the whole community and Native American studies as a whole. The author's expression and voice, or more precisely a 'community of voices', struggles and attempts to find expression and recognition in a society and culture that care very little and in fact does not share their worldviews and values. The interests as well as the way in which Native American writers articulate their experiences are as varied as the nation or the communities they come from.

However, as Native Americans, whose values, traditions, history, and culture have been crushed time and again by the dominant society, individual as well as interests of specific tribes are laid aside so that unity can be achieved through a collective voice that addresses the calamitous impact of colonization and in the meantime striving to bring about a positive change for the whole Native American Nation.

A number of critical voices have emerged in Native American literature over the last two decades calling for a set of critical frameworks appropriate to this unique body of texts. Arnold Krupat in, *The Voice in the Margin* (1989) claims, ‘what chiefly marks the Americanist from the Native Americanist critic today is the relation of each to this thing called theory’ (Krupat, 5). In *For Those Who Come After* (2015) he again posits that those who study Native American literatures have thus far tended to avoid critical theory as if it were indeed the French disease, a foreign corruption hostile or irrelevant to their local efforts. Krupat thus argues that such ‘resistance to theory’ inevitably continues to perpetuate us/them universe, keeping two worlds and two worldviews that could and should talk to one another (Pulitano 2).

In the past few years, a number of Native American writers have developed discursive strategies concerning Native American culture and literature, strategies that suggests a theory of reading produced largely from Native American cultural and intellectual traditions. Paula Gunn Allen, Louise Owens, and Gerald Vizenor are among the few authors who argue for a literary criticism that brings to light native ways of articulating the world and that uses indigenous rhetoric along with the instruments of Western literary analysis. According to Krupat, what might be called an “indigenous” criticism for Native American literature still needs to be worked out as it is a complex, hybridized project which, while deeply embedded within the narratives of Native American oral tradition and Native epistemology, unavoidably conducts dialogues with

the larger critical discourse of contemporary theory and extensively disputes the scholarly assumptions of a resistance to theory within Native American studies.

On the other hand, there are theorists having Native American backgrounds who strongly debate on the importance of affirming tribal differences. Instead of generalizing Native writing as a whole, they argue for a separate theory that will feature the uniqueness of Native American literature and use them as tools and weapons in reading and differentiating it from other branches of literature. The rich collection of oral and written literatures that has sprung from the Native American roots have for so long triggered the question of whether the critical frameworks that are developed by non-natives are applicable in reading Native literatures or whether they continue to reinforce the colonialist perspectives. Penelope Myrtle Kelsey's *Tribal Theory in Native American Literature* (2008) takes up the challenge of formulating a separate theory that will feature the uniqueness of Native American Literature. She argues for a reading of Native texts that begins by recognizing their specific tribal referents, traditions, and methodologies. Kelsey defines her purpose in this book as demonstrating how 'Native American epistemologies and worldviews' (Kelsey 8) constitute a legitimate theoretical grounding for reading Native texts in culturally appropriate ways, establishing a 'substantive connection between community perspectives and knowledges and critical practice' (Kelsey 9); and consequently contributing to the freeing of Native texts from their colonization by non-Native readers and critics. Most of the writers Kelsey examines are Dakotas: Marie McLaughlin, Luther Standing Bear, Charles Eastman, Zitkala-Sa, and Ella Deloria. In each case, Kelsey focuses on the writer's use of a textual or thematic element derived from tribal intellectual or social traditions, such as pictographs, definitions of gender roles, and the traditional stories that support these definitions; the significance of the camp historian; and the conventions governing such genres as naming

narratives, education narratives, and honorific speech. Kelsey then concludes her study by looking at two contemporary Dakota writers, Philip Red Eagle and Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, and the contemporary Haudenosaunee poet, Maurice Kenny, to explore the ways in which their writing continues to rely as heavily on tribal coordinates as did the work of the earlier writers. In examining their work, various elements of the texts, including the motives and behaviors of fictional characters, are responsive to deeply embedded tribal ways of knowing and understanding. The introduction of the book has been titled, “Indigenous Knowledge as Tribal Theory” where Kelsey firmly acknowledges the centrality and importance of tribal language in reading tribal texts. She affirms that language lies at the core of the study of all literatures saying, ‘indigenous literatures influence the composition and worldviews of all tribal texts’ (Kelsey 1).

Angela Cavender Wilson, another tribal theorist has also maintained this observation that the stories that are perpetuated within the indigenous languages have their own distinct theories about the past and that language, stories, and epistemology are all connected to who we are and where we will go in the future. An extensive study of tribal languages reveals that within these languages are unique tribal knowledges, epistemology, and philosophy. Therefore, by affirming the importance of tribal languages and the rich tribal tradition they inherited, writers are taking an important step forward in identifying an important tool that could be used in framing a separate Tribal Theory. According to Kelsey, ‘these worldviews and their theoretical bases become vehicles for Indigenous resurgence, resistance and survival; they are tribal theory’ (Kelsey 1).

Womack joins the argument as a tribal theorist and strongly asserts that Native literature cannot be read by applying postmodern literary criticism. According to him, its worth cannot be measured by Western non-native standards. Instead of using post-structural and post-colonial

approaches that do not have their bases in Native culture or experience, Womack claims that the work of the Native critic should be to develop tribal models of criticism. In his book *Red on Red* he argues that Native communities have their own intellectual and cultural traditions that are well-equipped to analyze Native literary production and it is these traditions which should be the eyes through which the texts are read and analyzed. He thus attempts to recover a “pure” and “authentic” form of discourse, one rightly based on Native perspective, therefore taking a “tribal-centric” approach in formulating a Native theory.

Taking a strong position as a “nationalist”, “nativist” and “anti-cosmopolitan”, Elizabeth Cooklyn, a Crow Creek Lakota Sioux writer evaluates Native American literature confronting the politics and policies of genocide that continue to destroy the land, livelihood, and culture of the Native Americans in her book, *Anti-Indianism in Modern America: A Voice from Tatekeya's Earth* (2001). She debates how the discipline of Native American studies have been sidelined by anthropology, sociology, postcolonial, and ethnic studies while asserting the role Native American studies should take in reasserting tribal literature, traditions, and politics. She challenges Native Americans to take a position and voice their own stories as they pursue the expression of tribal consciousness in Native American literature and asserts the importance of a “native consciousness” that is, knowledge of mythologies, mores, and experiences of tribal society among Native American writers which will act to assure a tribal-nation people of tis future.

Loyalty to the community is the highest value in Native American cultures, argues Jace Weaver. In *That the People Might Live: Native American Literature and Native American Community* (1997), he explores a wide range of Native American literature from 1768 to the present, taking this sense of community as both a starting point and a lens. He contends that the

commitment of Native American writers to Native community and its survival makes it deserving of study as a literature separate from the national literature of the United States. He terms this commitment “communitism” which is a fusion of “community” and “activism”. In *Tribal Secrets* (1995), Robert Allen Warrior also emphasizes on the Native concept of land, community, and intellectual sovereignty while also addressing on the memories of tribal survivance and ascertaining the intellectual histories that have been largely unconsidered in other studies of Native Americans. Warrior draws a framework for understanding the contributions of Native American writers and scholars as part of the struggle for tribal sovereignty, and argues that the contemporary reality of Native people can and should be part of a critical understanding of the past, present, and future of Native Americans.

On the other side of the theory debate are those Native American scholars who argue for a literary criticism that uses indigenous rhetoric along with the instruments of Western literary analysis. They attempt to define Native American critical theory which is largely generated from Native epistemology but which also subsumes to the forms and methods of Eurocentric discourse. In an attempt to recreate the dialogic quality of the oral exchange, this reading produces ‘substantially multi-generic, dialogic, and richly hybridized works, texts that shuttle back and forth between worlds and worldviews and “mediate” strategies that challenge Western ways of doing theory’ (Pulitano 7).

In his argument regarding the relation between Native American literature and Western literary theory, Louis Owens claims in *Mixedblood Messages: Literature, Film, Family, Place* (2001),

We do not have the luxury of simply opting out, because whether or not we are heard by Said, Sollors, or others, we already function within the dominant discourse... the very act of appropriating the colonizer's discourse and making it one's own is obviously collaborative and conjunctural. (Owens 52)

Louis Owens compares the situation of the 'migrant, diasporic Native American writer' to the liminal condition of the postcolonial critic such as Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, among others, and indicates ways in which Native American theory and postcolonial strategies speak to one another despite ideological, historical, and geopolitical difference. Likewise, Elvira Pulitano in his book, *Toward a Native American Critical Theory* (2003), claims,

Any attempt to recover a "pure" or "authentic" Native form of discourse, one rigidly based on Native perspective, is simply not possible since Native American narratives are by nature heavily heteroglot and hybridized. (Pulitano 13)

Arnold Krupat's, *The Turn to the Native* (1996) also engages with the critical writings that have grown around Native American literature. Contemplating upon questions of identity, Krupat considers the relationship of Native American culture to postcolonial writing and postmodernism. He develops a cross-cultural practice of what he calls "ethnocriticism" alongside "cosmopolitan comparativism" in reading Native American literature. Thus, combining post-structuralism and oral tradition, he advocates "openness" in reading Native American texts (Krupat 126).

Alongside the proliferation of texts and audiences, political criticism has taken hold within Native American literary studies, re-conceptualizing both the nature and the function of Native American literary text. An extensive study of Native American literature prompts Native American theorists to develop perspectives and extensive endeavours in framing a Native

American literary theory. We therefore see Native American authors engaging in an ongoing quest for community and writing out of a passionate commitment to it.

Some critics see contemporary native writing as nation building “literature of resistance”, some see a “cosmopolitan” capitulation to metropolitan cultural values, some see the creation of a new “American” voice, and some see the literature of a global indigenous sovereignty movement. (Herman np)

Writing from a Dakota-centered point of view, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn presents a detailed analysis of the different ways in which anti-Indianism reflects itself in different aspects of the American life and worldview. Her analysis is rooted and influenced by the prejudiced oppression that often arises and takes shape out of language, knowledge production, and misrepresentations of Native Americans on the part of individuals and institutions. For Cook-Lynn, Native American studies, too, is failing if it is not first and foremost concerned with the history and present state of tribal political welfare. Asserting the importance of maintaining a tribal-centric view in reading Native American literature, Native American theorists like Cook-Lynn and others have strongly criticized the adoption of western literary tradition and ideas while neglecting the different nuances of tribal literature. The appropriation of Western discourse and culture has been condemned as resulting in the formation of Native academic elites thus resulting in Native identity fraud without addressing the real and pressing issues of tribal nationalism.

These writers and theorists who have written and rendered their voices in support of tribal-centric reading have for long resisted the false or one-sided histories and ideologies imposed upon them and Native Americans in general. Through their writings, they seek to critique and interrogate those ideologies. Adopting concepts from their own culture, thereby

identifying and adapting to it, they further continue to combat the attempts made to erase tribal cultures. For Native American literature, the disciplinary focus cannot center on a critique of the colonial experience. Within the constraints and opportunities presented by changing colonial contexts and, increasingly, contemporary global, political, economic, and cultural contexts, it must rather focus on the individual and community choices Native Americans make to realize their culture, values, and political and economic interests. Native Americans constantly have to negotiate within a matrix of institutional powers and multiple ethnicities in order to be recognized, legally and culturally, as peoples, however dicey the definitions of those realities may be.

Native American writers have embraced both the aesthetics and ethics embedded in the ceremonial songs, stories, and prayers, and continue them in contemporary writing. 'It was the love of stories, the old songs, and the long prayers that our forebears memorized and sang back to us over and over again' (Tapahonso 74). The unyielding faith and resilience of Native American tribes against the hostility of the dominating cultures have proved that it perhaps is their way of seeing the world and all things related to it that has sustained them till today. According Heavyrunner and Morris: 'ceremonies and rituals, humor, oral tradition, family, and support networks are essential protective strategies. These are the things that have kept us strong . . . These resources foster our cultural resilience' (Heavyrunner and Morris 8-9). Despite massive change and great loss, these aspects of Native American culture are a part of and contribute to their undying spirit and unyielding faith. Native American literature utilizes information contained within the oral tradition addressing ceremonies and ritual, humor, and family demonstrating cultural resilience and the resilience of those concepts.

Elizabeth Cooklyn places “removal” at the thrust of the Native American - White relations. She condemns the Western tongue out-rightly as clothed in ignorance, racism, and imperialism. She expanded the meaning of the term “anti-Indianism” as a sentiment that results in unnatural death of Natives, disavowing and devaluing Native Americans and by denigrating, demonizing, and insulting being Native American in America. Manipulating historical events and experience to place the blame on Native Americans, “anti-Indianism” according to Cooklyn exploits and distorts Native American cultures and beliefs. She therefore analyses how Native American identity is rooted in cultural practices and beliefs. Taking the victory dance as an example, she explores how this dance can be a means of sharing of history, recreating history, and using memory in the context of modern tribal lives.

As has been previously examined in the preceding chapters, the multiple narrative tradition of Native American literature acknowledges the centrality and importance and relevance of tribal worldview and concepts including storytelling, mythologies, medicine, spirituality, concept of life and death, and tribal language in reading tribal texts. It can be concluded that the composition and worldviews of tribal texts are heavily influenced by oral or indigenous literature. A distinct theory that connects a writer’s experience and identity with the collective identity of the Native community, language, stories, and epistemology becomes necessary to define the past experiences of Native American communities and for its “survance” in the future.

The concept of “survance” is a neologism developed by Gerald Vizenor. Native Americans writers are often placed in a position where they have to redefine their identity and images because of the falsely constructed representations of them by outsiders. Vizenor’s argument rests on the belief that Native American writers must resist these “simulations” created

by the dominant culture. His argument however trusts on semiotics and postmodern theory and at times becomes challenging and problematic when dealing with Native American literature and issues. In adopting the postmodern approach, Vizenor further states that Native Americans should reinvent themselves as “post-Indian warriors,” relying on the very same “simulations” that they resist (Vizenor 23). As such, according to Vizenor, the “post-Indian warrior” must re-imagine and re-invent tradition and history to create a new “post-Indian” reality. In contrast, Native American theorists seek to assert the legitimacy of Native American literature that roots itself in actual indigenous history and culture in the face of colonial discourse. In this manner, an examination of Native American authors and their works requires knowledge of the specific tribal tradition each writer engages with.

In this theoretical debate between Native American writers who advocated the use of tribal theory against those who accepts Eurocentric theories in reading Native American literature, writers like Gerald Vizenor and Arnold Krupat add to the complexity of this debate by neither rejecting tribal theory nor Eurocentric discourse. Although Vizenor succeeds in ‘writing in the oral tradition’, his theoretical essays still rest on Eurowestern theory as their foundation, despite his attempts to indigenize them. Postmodernism has characteristics of cultural pluralism, fragmentation of narrative and, multiple identities, challenging the grand narratives by giving importance to marginalized voices. Arnold Krupat in his criticism of Native American Native intellectualism argues that Native thinkers cannot be considered as “autonomous,” “unique,” “self-sufficient,” or “intellectually sovereign,” as comprehensible apart from Western intellectualism. He shares the opinion of Kwame Anthony Appiah and consistently affirms that Appiah urges Native Americans in the right direction when he says, ‘For us to forget Europe is to suppress the conflicts that have shaped our identities; since it is too late for us to escape each

other. We might instead seek to turn to our advantage the mutual interdependencies history has thrust upon us' (Krupat 21). The "turn" that Krupat has therefore sought following the advice advanced by Appiah is what he has termed as an "ethnocritical perspective." Krupat explains this perspective as one that 'recognizes the differences between Native American and Western conceptions of art, information and culture in general and attempting, next, to find some language that might mediate between the two' (21). Clarifying that this model avoids hierarchical models, he is rather assertive in employing a compromise and strongly criticizes Cook-Lyn's attempt to assert the integrity of Native American studies by its disciplinary separation from multicultural or American studies. In the meantime, Krupat acknowledges the distinctiveness of Native American literature and the risk of placing it among the postcolonial literatures of the world because there is not yet a "post" to the colonial status of Native Americans. At the outset Eurocentric theories like postmodernism and postcolonialism seems to give a chance of new possibilities to Native American voices by rejecting master narratives and giving way to local narratives in admitting the marginalized literatures and issues into the mainstream. However, the definitions that mostly cater other postcolonial countries of the world simply cannot be applied to the Native Americans for the reason that the material condition of the Native societies is not a postcolonial one, and Native societies, still being "colonized", do not participate in the global economy of a world "after the period of colonization." (Krupat 31) The complexity of the Native American experience is reflected through the difficulty of placing it among the descriptions of the global condition faced after the period of colonialism or the literal descriptions of conditions in formerly colonial societies.

Ania Loomba, a renowned postcolonial critic also affirmed in an interview that the term "postcolonial" becomes a bit pointless if it is used as 'an umbrella term to describe all once-

colonized societies as if there is nothing else to those societies, or as if colonialism is simply a bygone thing, or to demarcate the so-called "third-world" from the rest of the world... And often by calling only some parts of the world postcolonial, we obscure the fact that colonialism was a global system' (Loomba np). And considering the ongoing battles that threaten the survival of the Native Americans in the United States, it is rather difficult to admit that there is or has ever been "post" colonialism.

As such, proponents of tribal theory like Craig Womack assert that there is a Native American truth and it is worth looking for. This analysis offers more possibilities than postmodern or postcolonial approaches, especially in terms of quest for sovereignty and refurbishment of Native histories and their validity.

It is way too premature for Native scholars to deconstruct history when we haven't yet constructed it. We need, for example, to recover the nineteenth century, especially in terms of understanding what Native writers were up to during that time and how their struggles have evolved toward what Indian writers can say in print today, as well as foundational principles they provide for an indigenous criticism. (Womack 3)

Womack points out that postmodernism has a 'tendency to decenter everything, including the legitimacy of a Native perspective' (Womack 6). A number of Native American theorists who question the application of Eurocentric theories in reading Native American literature question the deconstruction of Native identity that gets rid of the Native American point of view by appropriating Native narrative to the demands and models of Western literature. The Native perspective and story every so often is pushed out of existence in this approach. Therefore, on the one hand, while theories like post-modernism and post-colonialism destabilize the ideology

of the governing mainstream society by freeing it of the conception of the “other” and familiarizing it into the progressive world of differences, they are often inadequate in pursuing the different purposes that exist in the voice of the Native communities and to serve these communities in various ways in their pursuit of sovereignty. One of the purposes of Native American literature is to re-claim one of the spheres of indigenous art as well as perform a historical function in many cases by portraying the Native perspective.

Native American literature has been highly regarded as having the means of continuity which emerges from lived experiences connected to the soul, not only of an individual but a whole community. It honours the dead and serves as a powerful weapon for the living. It does not sever but maintains a connection between the past and the present. It is the telling of stories through remembrance of times, places, and people, a process termed “continuance” by Daniel Heath Justice who dedicates his book *Our Fire Survives the Storm* to both the spirit and service of continuance.

Native American literature honours spiritual practices since culture is part of what gives people an understanding of their uniqueness, and their difference from other nations of people. It aims at creating a dialogue among tribal people- to encourage tribal people to talk about their own literature rather than dictating terms of such dialogue. Keeping this characteristic in mind, Craig Womack aims to include tribe members in evaluating tribal literatures. His chief concern is an emphasis of how Native literature and criticism- should be grounded in tribally specific concerns and how Native identity can be claimed through different realities- rez, urban, mixed blood, language speakers, non-speakers, gay, straight, and many possibilities. As such there are also a number of legitimate approaches to analyzing Native literary production. *Red on Red* argues that Native-authored written tradition should prove valuable to formulating literary

theory. Womack takes the journey of attempting to find Native literature's place in Native American country rather than Native literature's place in the canon. Thus formulating what he calls, "Red Stick" criticism, he emphasizes how this tribal-centric criticism becomes a key component of the Nation which encompasses the people's idea of themselves, their imaginings of who they are.

Studying texts that paved the way for what Native writers can do today- ancestral voices, the pioneers, life stories before the Renaissance; questioning histories that were actual distortions and lies and in turn, seeking out a Native perspective, prioritizing Native voices, culture, and viewpoints has been the chorus chanted repeatedly by Native American writers seeking tribal-centric reading. This reading is centralized on Aboriginal nationalism or Native consciousness legitimizing tribal experience as an appropriate subject for writing and establishing tribal literature as the 'Canon- the tree, the oldest literatures in America, the most American of American literatures'. It challenges a writer's perspectives that reflect internalization of dominant culture racism while criticizing the applicability of Eurocentric theories to Native scholarship. Thus, seeking out a Native perspective that prioritizes voices that rise out of a historical reality is a worthwhile endeavor for Native American writers. This reading prioritizes Native aesthetics and argues that literary aesthetics should be politicized affirming self-government and self-determination as useful literary concepts. This literary criticism emphasizes Native resistance movements against colonialism, challenges racism, discusses sovereignty, pursue connection between literature and liberation struggles and, finally roots literature in land and culture.

In response to why nationalists urge to exercise such extreme caution with mainstream theories in interpreting Native American literature, Suzanne Lundquist writes that a nationalist

believes that it is time for Native people to exclude any European or Euro-American influence from a developing Native aesthetics. This is a necessary tactic because tribal views of the world are incomparable, worthy of independent investigation, and therefore must, at this point in time, be exclusionist. In other words, Nationalists are tired of, even enraged by, outsiders' incessant need to define Native experience. (Lundquist 291)

Features of "anti-Indianism" are still not diminishing and numerous misrepresentations still exist in art and literature. Herman Melville challenged hate directed to Native Americans of his time in his novel, *The Confidence Man* (1897). Early American poets wrote in support of imperialism. Empire building was the theme behind the works of poets who were then claimed as defender of freedom. Facts were misused, deliberate lies were circulated and this in turn created wrong historical perspectives. As much as Native American literature is an outsider to mainstream American literature, theories and conceptualizations, outside of a Native American experience, will remain strange and unfit in reading and understanding Native American literature. Most of the arguments of race, critical theory, class, ethnicity, nation, postmodernism and post-colonialism make epistemological assumptions unusual to those made in Native American communities and traditions and attend the purposes of theories and issues that are not grounded in Native American cultures and institutions and thus are incapable of expressing a Native American perspective or voice. On the other hand Native American literature or theory is that which situates Native American culture, institutions, and orientations of social, political, and cultural action at the center of analysis. Native American studies as a discipline focusses not solely on colonial history and critique but place Native American individuals and nations at the core of analysis.

Many Native American writers have emphasized on how the academy has “successfully erased” Native American history from the American narrative and history departments. Otherwise a representation of American historical narratives in monographs, exhibitions, documentaries, and movies are those that have been thoroughly sanitized. For this reason, the responsibility to correct a seemingly irreversible erasure through Native American studies has been the endeavor of Native American writers. For Cook-Lynn, the problematic "tribeless" voice of some Native American fiction writers produces a literature that offers emotional satisfaction, but little substantiated tribal knowledges.

Too often, when theorists apply Eurocentric theories and approaches as well as their jargon to read and interpret the Native American experience, they often create boundaries limiting the audience to a rather small number of scholars in the academic field, and cutting off the Native people. A continuity or connection cannot be established as long as the academic study or reading excludes the people or community subjected to the study. Thus, it is apparent that theories like post-modernism and post-colonialism for instance do not address Native people on their own terms and ground. Many Native scholars support a similar argument about the importance of connectedness of literature to communities and their social life. It is one of the pillars of nationalism movement in literary studies supported by Robert Warrior and Simon Ortiz. Writers continue to emphasize the interconnectedness of tribal literature and tribal realities pointing out that ‘whatever one might argue about postmodern representation, there is the legal reality of tribal sovereignty, recognized by the U.S. Constitution and defined over the last 160 years by the Supreme Court and however you look at it, it still affects the lives of tribal nations and individual on an everyday basis and, therefore, has something to do with tribal literatures too’ (Womack 6). Examining the standpoint of these writers, it is practically impossible to

separate society and culture from literature. Literature always comes in context and in the case of Native American literature that context should be tribal and connected to current issues of Native societies.

Addressing the question of whether the critical frameworks that are developed by non-Native scholars are sufficient and applicable in reading Native literatures, this thesis concludes that tribal theory is essential in reading and understanding Native American literature. This conclusion is made through the extensive study of how different Native American texts have seen the requirement of a reading that is based in indigenous perspective. Standing alongside the arguments of Daniel Heath Justice, Elizabeth Cooklyn, Penelope Myrtle Kelsey, Robert Allen Warrior, Craig Womack, and Jace Weaver, this thesis thus argues for the validity of a separate tribal theory that will feature the individuality of Native American literature and use them as tools and weapons in reading and differentiating it from other branches of literature.

To conceptualize, research, and explain patterns of Native American individual and collective community, when challenged with relations with the dominant American state and society, inevitably become the concern and focus of Native American theorists. In this way, Native American studies shows competency in generating a theory that supports and assists the diverse goals and values of Native American nations. What contemporary theories can provide at best is only a partial explanation for the conventional cultural and political organization of indigenous peoples and henceforth to be consumed within a system that does not wholly represent the identity of the Native Americans will not ensure the cultural and political continuity of the tribal identity of the Native Americans.

All the writers examined in this thesis have reflected and reproduced the use of a textual or thematic element derived from tribal intellectual or social traditions, ceremonies and rituals,

definitions of spirituality, and the traditional stories that support these definitions; the concept of land and nationhood, tribal language, and narrative tradition. The works of Native American writers examined rely heavily on tribal coordinates. As Kelsey demonstrated in her analysis of several Native American fictions, various elements of the texts, including the motives and behaviours of fictional characters, are responsive to deeply embedded tribal ways of knowing and understanding.

Thus, Native American literature, while grounded in a traditional spiritually based world-view, is no less a call for liberation, survival and beyond, to affirmation. As the tradition of Native spirituality is inherent in the literature, beginning with European contact, so too is the tradition of addressing historical and secular concerns. Native culture may be appropriated due to the imbalance of power between colonizer and colonized; ironically, it is this very imbalance that makes it impossible for the dominant culture to position itself within the Native world-view. As such the distinctive experiences and interpretations of Native Americans are often blurred and distorted by other theories or conceptualizations and become unfit to express the Native American perspective or voice. Situating Native American culture and its distinctiveness vis-à-vis the conceptualization of identity with respect to the distinct orientations of social, political, and cultural experience of the Native Americans, tribal-centric theory becomes pertinent in analysing Native American literature. Although many Eurocentric theories and concepts have some worth and significance in examining Native American history and culture, Native American literature has continuously been relegated and an involuntary acceptance into mainstream culture may only diminish the authenticity of experience and voice that could be heard from the tribal-centric point of view.

As a witness to how “anti-Indianism” reflects itself in different aspects of the American life and worldview, this thesis emphasizes the importance of asserting and maintaining a tribal-centric view in reading Native American literature. This analysis is rooted and influenced by the prejudiced oppression that often arises and takes shape out of language, knowledge production, and misrepresentations of Native Americans on the part of individuals and institutions. To analyse Native American literature requires an engagement with the history and present state of tribal political welfare.

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APPENDICES

NAME OF CANDIDATE : Lalrinchhani

DEGREE : Ph.D

DEPARTMENT : English

TITLE OF THESIS : A Study of Native American
Literary Theory: Its Poetics and
Politics

DATE OF PAYMENT OF ADMISSION : Dt. 29/07/2011

(Commencement of First Sem)

REGISTRATION NO. & DATE : MZU/Ph.D/466 of 15/05/2012

DUE DATE OF SUBMISSION : Dt. 15/05/2017

EXTENSION (IF ANY) : 2 years 14/05/2019

DATE OF VIVA VOCE : 04/06/2018

DATE OF SUBMISSION : 08/06/2018

Head
Department of English

BIO-DATA

Name : Lalrinchani
Father's name : Lalthangbika
Address : K-10, Salem Veng, Aizawl.
Phone No : 09717339807
Designation : Research Scholar, Department of English, Mizoram University.

Educational Qualifications:

Class	Board/University	Year of Passing	Division/Grade	Percentage
HSLC	MBSE	2003	I	63.6%
HSSLC	MBSE	2005	II	59%
B.A.	Pachhunga University College	2009	I	62.12%
M.A.	University of Hyderabad	2011	I	7.49/10 (CGPA)
NET	UGC	2012	NET	

Ph.D Regn. No and Date: MZU / Ph.D. / 466 of 15.05.2012

Other relevant information:

List of Publications:

Sl. No.	Year	Title of Chapter/ Research paper	Name of book/ journal	Publication details (Place/ Publishers) with ISBN/ISSN
1.	2017	Contesting History: Revisiting Native American Identity Through the Narratives of Momaday and Erdrich	The European Conference of Arts & Humanities 2017 Official Conference Proceedings	Place: London Pub: iafor The International Academic Forum
2.	2015	Why English: A Historical Study from the Mizo Perspective	Becoming Something Else: Society and Change in India's North East, pg. 125-132	Place: London Pub: Cambridge Scholars Publishing ISBN (10): 1-4438-8361-1 ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-8361-0
3.	2015	Cultural Identity and the Problems of Translating Mizo Folksongs	Orality and Folk Literature in the Age of Print Culture: India's Northeast Experience, pg. 152-164	Place: New Delhi Pub: Authors Press ISBN: 978-81-7273-821-1
4.	2014	Weapons of Words on Pages of Pain: Trauma and Language in the Works of Monalisa Changkija	Textualizing Trauma: Narratives from North- East India and Beyond, pg. 155-165	Place: Guwahati Pub: Scientific Book Center ISBN: 978-81-287-0005-7