

Tradition and modernity in silko's ceremony and naylor's mama day: an ecocritical approach

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ABSTRACT

Ecocriticism is defined as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment”. This study uses ecocriticism approach aiming to answer questions: 1) How is human and nature relationship represented in Silko's Ceremony and Gloria Naylor's Mama Day?; and 2) How does the relationship reveal conflict between tradition and modernity? There are underlined points need to emphasize from both novels of Silko's Ceremony and Gloria Naylor's Mama Day through ecocriticism approach. The first is humans' attitudes toward nature can be either nurturing or destructing. The second is the conflict between tradition and modernity which is underlying this study parted into two, mainly the differences of tradition and modernity and the clashes between both cultures which involve humans and their attitudes toward nature. Tradition and modernity – as cultures here are seen as result of human and nature co-existence. The last point is the impacts of tradition and modernity. The notable impacts from cultures as the effect of human and nature correlation are ambivalence and conformity.



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1. INTRODUCTION

People live within different cultures and inhabitant that lie on the extent of how the way they speak, dress, and behave. Ecocriticism is considered as one of significant approaches to critical analysis of literature throughout the world because of its emphasis on the relationship between literature and the environment. It also suggests that the awareness of environmental perspective in contemporary literary works and “being unaware to the outside world” is the key (Glotfelty, 1996).

The quality of the human shows the power and the influence going through times. Theorists then divide the superior one as people with their beliefs on customs and the inferior one as people with their beliefs on modernity. It is true that such classical problem would result characters ambiguity in the context of ideology and identity. The ideology of liberty or freedom is seen as the important aspect in humanity that the human needs. People are required to consider thoughts upon customs which restrict most of people. Moreover, the conservatives live within customs which are perplexing as they are held over the years as human nature since they live within their environment. Human, land, and the way they live are the focus of this study.

The ecocritical definition encompasses people's insights toward nature and culture circumstances, preserves them, opposes destroyers, and establishes concrete actions to save them from obsolescence. On the other hand, the human domination should be relinquished. Ecocriticism aims egocentered to be changed to an ecocentered perspective that anthropocentric is the arrogance and has the dominant attitude toward physical environment (Lynn White in Glotfelty, 1996). Issues such as the deteriorated condition of river due to construction of dams and the sewage system of

industrial wastages, the 'otherness' of animals, birds, fishes and trees and their easy exploitation, the wiping out of sparrow, vulture from biodiversity due to excessive scientific manifestations, the predicament of zoo animals, the abolition of forest for the steel and mining factories and the uselessness of nuclear testing, or most of the environmental delapidations are the result of Euro-American ideology of 'development' project which is a disguised form of neo-colonialism and imperialism.

This study focuses on analyzing both novels written by Silko entitled *Ceremony* and another by Gloria Naylor entitled *Mama Day* through the issue of ambivalence experienced by George and Tayo. This study uses both novels since the writers, were bestselling author of fictions. Through the novels, both writers explore many differences between human and the way they live, customs and modernity, and frequently center the hardships of impoverishing people during times of social upheaval.

This study compares both novels of Silko's *Ceremony* and Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*. There will be three main things analyzed, which are human and nature relationship, the conflict between tradition and modernity, and the emerging confusion or ambivalence resulted by the crashes of tradition and modernity. The human and nature relationship will be divided into good and bad relationship, either human being nurturing or destructing towards nature. This aspect is analyzed through theme, setting, and dialogues of the characters in the novels. As for the conflict between tradition and modernity is analyzed through the way the characters in the novels live, which are in the old-time or modern ways. These two main problems then result confusion which can lead to conformity; the characters may decide the way they treat the nature based on either tradition or modernity.

Those are conflicts faced by both George and Tayo regarding customs and modernity. Myth or society's beliefs or exploitation upon nature may be the main conflict underlined differently in the novels, that it can be concluded from the analysis. The conclusion for comparing both novels is provided in Chapter V. The conflict arising in each novel, through theme, setting, and the characters' dialogues is analyzed in Chapter IV. In Jones's view, conflict in a story gets the readers involved emotionally in the plot. The concept of conflict then is used to examine both characters' ambivalence because of the existence of the women and their surrounding's forces upon their characters. In one way, George is the modernist and Tayo is the one who dreams to be a modernist. They are modern since they adopt the culture. Both characters then face confusion upon the modernity of within the idea of freedom to free themselves from customs that weakens most of people.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research is included as qualitative which the study designed to describe the observed phenomenon with words rather than number while relying interpretation using theories and considering context. Qualitative research explains social phenomena to understand the world through social behavior, social opinions and attitudes, the impacts of the phenomena, and factors and practices in the certain phenomena happen (Hancock, et al., 2009).

This study concerns on certain narration or dialogue exists in the novels, Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* and Silko's *Ceremony*. Not all of the narrations or dialogues used as data. Only those related to nature, tradition, and modernity are used as sample. Since this study uses small samples, only the narration and dialogues uttered by the main males and females characters on each novel are used. Each character is described based on any action or thoughts through narration and dialogue in the novel. As stated before, both novels used in this study are different. Such different setting will be put directly in the analysis separated from this part. Even though both Gloria Naylor's "*Mama Day*" and Silko's "*Ceremony*" are considered different, but part of nature appearing along with tradition or modernity is the same in pattern.

Data collection technique used to conduct the implementation of the data analysis which consist of In-depth Reading and Quality Selection. Such deep reading could help the researcher to make notes. It can prevent the risk of missing important or needed information (Wray, Trott, Bloomer, Reay, & Butler, 1998) since the data used are in form of written dialogues and narrations require to be reviewed. Selecting the data is one of the most important rules in getting the analysis

and hypothesis is proven (Wray, Trott, Bloomer, Reay, & Butler, 1998). The researcher is the one doing the whole quality control over the data which will be analyzed.

The instrument of the study are the Researcher and Quotation, Content analysis was used in this study. The qualitative research relies on the researcher as the only instrument in collecting and analyzing data (Creswell, 2003). Therefore, this study used the researcher and other instruments, yet mostly using the knowledge of the researcher. The quotation is based on the written texts (directly quoted from the novel), no less or no more (with no edition). All notable narrations and dialogues which are related to nature, tradition, and modernity by the ecocriticism approach are selected. They are then collected to be the data (Locke, 2004).

This technique applied either transcription or quotation in a study. The purpose of this technique is to get classification, summarization, and tabulation. The deeper transcribing or quoting activity is included in this technique (Hancock, An Introduction to Qualitative Research, 1998).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Comparing of Human-Nature Relationship Reflected in Silko's Ceremony and Naylor's Mama Day

Both Silko's Ceremony and Naylor's Mama Day can be said having the same theme. The novels mainly discuss about humans and their cultures which affecting the natural existence. The said cultures are related to tradition and modernity which included the Whites and the islanders or the natives. Ceremony involves white Mexicans and Indians, and Mama Day involves the conventional and the modern Indians.

Both novels of Silko's Ceremony and Naylor's Mama Day may have different plots but they have the similar setting. The setting here means the lands where the stories take place. Ceremony caused a critical attention in 1977 which tells a halfbreed war Veteran's struggle for sanity after returning home from World War II. The Veteran, Tayo, has difficulties adjusting to civilian life on a New Mexico Indian reservation. He is haunted by his violent actions during the war and by the memory of his brother's death in the same conflict. Deranged and withdrawn, Tayo initially wastes away on the reservation while his fellow Indian Veterans drink excessively and rail against racism (Kumar, 2015).

The cliffs across the little wash, the junipers growing among the big boulders, and the hazy pink sky were bright colors of a dream, and the longer Tayo stared at them, the more he knew he was going to be sick (p. 26).

In the novel, nature has significant meaning to the people, to the tribe who live in. Every single aspect of nature affects the way they think. If the atmosphere is bright, then it contains hope and dream. Meanwhile, when the atmosphere is dark, the people get down and everything turns gloomy. Such atmosphere affects the character's thought, including Tayo. Based on the quote above, to Tayo, he can no longer relate to such phenomenon. If he is sick, then nothing of his sickness is related to the nature. Still, here the nature tells hope means Tayo needs to hang in there in wish of health.

.... the people always told the kids not to kill frogs, because the frogs would get angry and send so much rain there would be floods.... "Look at these frogs,".... "Do you think they could do anything? Where are all the floods? We dissect them in this class every year.".... it was all superstition, believing that the rain had stopped coming because he had cursed it (p. 181).

The quote above shows a modern way of thinking that superstition does not exist. People in the tribe believe that the frogs could make floods coming when they are killed. But there is nothing happen when they are dissected for experimental purpose, no floods coming. It can be a symbol that killing people in the ceremony within witchery is okay and it is not wrong at all. Such action

will not get the murderers in sin. So being modern can also mean doing everything in order to get all the advantages to live a life as instant ways to live and knowledge are needed.

And we wasn't even Americans when we got it – was slaves. And the laws about slaves not owning nothing in Georgia and South Carolina don't apply, 'cause the land wasn't then – and isn't now – in either of them places (p. 5).

“Mama Day” is set in Willow Springs, a place of folks whose identity is Black. Based on the setting, it becomes a land where all the Blacks survive and live their life according to custom or tradition. They respect John Paul, the slave who sacrificed his death for saving the land. He is the one who gave them freedom so that they could be at ease. None of them wants to be slaves anymore. To them, no one can also treat them as slave. It is true that they are no longer slaves, but here, what they really forget is the essence of freedom. That what they do with nature, to hold the custom and believe to the myth is what restrict them for freedom seems unreal. They still limit themselves but gladly doing it as they do it together and not individually forced. What they ensure is that they are not slaves and that they have land and nature to live in and to live with.

because even a wounded deer that got up and ran again left great clots of lung blood.... That way the hunter knew it would die (p. 33).

Although it is not hunting, here the deer is slaughtered. Human makes use of everything exists in the nature, including slaughtering the deer. To make sure the deer is hunted well, human keeps shooting it even when it runs away. Blood means its death that then human can keep it home to consume. Such action can be said cruel, but that is what it is. The novel shows human character through the way they act upon nature which includes animals.

...the voice suddenly broke into a language he could not understand; and it was then that all the voices were drowned by the music— loud, loud music from a big juke box, its flashing red and blue lights pulling the darkness closer (p. 5).

The quote indicates on how characters in the novels are familiar with modernity. It can be seen from the existence and the growth of technology. Based on the quote, it is said that the soldiers familiarize themselves with music that played through big juke box. It can also be said that humans start to get used to instant and modern way of life. As the quote is part of narration, it then functions as introduction to modernity.

By the time they got down to the Montano, the sheep were scattered all over the hills. At the camp they found the sheep dog killed thirty head of sheep. “It was too bad about the dog and those sheep,” Tayo said (p. 21).

Based on the quote above, it can be said that humans not only take advantage of the nature but also being destructive. They let the dog and thirty sheep killed. This cannot be said nurturing. Humans sometimes are the one to blame if the nature gets dry and die. Such action can be done continuously or else the nature cannot keep growing and there will be no more of it that human can benefit of.

The black that can soak up all the light in the universe, can even swallow the sun. Them silly children didn't know that it's the white in us that reflects all these shades of brown running around Willow Springs. But pure black woulda sucked it all in – and it's only an ancient mother of pure black that one day spits out this kinda gold (p. 48).

The quote above then shows how should a Black value his or herself. It is said that as Black, a person must seem strong and pretty undefeated. That nothing can matter much because to Blacks – the folks in the novel, they have value and they hold also run it for periods of time. They are free being who own the land and that their customs remain strong. No one could see or make them as slaves just what happened in the past. They do not belong to anyone. That is why it is said that being pure Black and direct is “kinda gold”. They treasure their own community and that everyone should respect it.

liberal – maybe.... Salary competitive: that could mean anything, depending upon whether they were competing with Burger King or IBM (p. 19).

Contrasting the two previous quotes, the quote above describes New York and kinds of life people live in. It is said that life in New York seems liberal or full of freedom. People are more focused on working and earning money. Here, it can be said that modern people spend their life in investing to material things and value it more than belief. The quote might as well indicate that custom is what modern people mostly do not care of. What matters most to modern people is that they can live a good life, being busy and happy at the same time.

The Conflict between Tradition and Modernity Emerged by the Human-Nature Relationship Reflected in Silko’s Ceremony and Naylor’s Mama Day

The novel shows how human also uses part of nature to make others believe in witchery. Old medication is shown and traditional medicine is introduced. In the novel, Old man Ku’oosh is one of medicine men who is well known of the way he treats and heal people. The use of Indian tea indicates how the power of magic which is related to nature affects the characters in the novel. Being scared and devoted may be the goal of such use of nature, to make use of others in the tribe and to have power and respect. Here, Tayo is asked to surrender and just conform to the old-time way of life. Yet, he is hesitating. He is observing and learning everything matching it to his logic in order to be careful protecting himself and what he wants to believe, modernity.

They came at Gallup Ceremonial time to clean up before the tourists came to town. They talked about sanitation and safety.... could fill the arroyos with flood water and wash the shelters away (p. 100).

Other than doing things directly related to nature, getting the ceremony done is also part of human – nature relationship in the novel. Ceremony is done to show that it is sacred so that people need to obey and join in. Here, ceremony is conducted so that the nature will not be angry and cause trouble to humans. As in the novel, it is told that even the people do not really know what they do, they know nothing related to science of the nature and its cause – effect. After all, human and nature relationship causes tradition such as ceremony rooted in the society. And this kind of tradition is done continuously.

“And there ain’t no reason for me not to conceive after them cysts clear up, because my womb is sound as a drum. And when I told him about them teas, he said I had you to thank for that.” (p. 87)

The dialogue above comes from Bernice. It is told that she is pregnant but she does not have any knowledge on why she has not got any signs of a baby living. At the very moment, Mama Day appears to help her and that she finds herself grateful after being treated. It is told that she only gets sick of nausea rather than being pregnant and that the cause of health is the tea given by Mama Day the time she got treated. Again, it can be concluded that Mama Day is someone the folks can trust and that the bond between Black women is told strong among those who live in Willow Springs.

The five-year-old moves quiet-like away from the darkened room.... The wavery shadows of the horsehair divan and the marblefireplace against the hardwood floors are a betrayal: Peace was not supposed to die in their home (p. 36).

The quote may mention a lot about nature. But those are symbols which depict that Willow Springs should remain as a land in which everyone finds comfortable to live with. In the land that the folks call as home, they want to live in peace and no one tries to bother them in such a conquering manner. They want to live in nature and hold onto what they want to believe.

“Leave ‘em here, Lord,”.... “I ain’t got nothing but these poor black hands to guide my people, but I can lead on with light.” (p. 110)

The quote above supports the previous one. Mama Day wishes that she could still have the trust of the folks upon her method in treating patients. She may not be a doctor with intelligence, but at least she is someone who knows how to value life. Of course she values the whole of the myth and customs she used to conform and follow. It can also be concluded that the Day’s family is depicted as respectable.

In population eventually produce the wealth needed to pay for environmental improvements. The key positive claim put forward by cornucopians is that human welfare, as measured by statistics such as life expectancy or local pollution, has demonstrably increased along with population, economic growth and technological progress (Garrard, 2004).

He did not realize that until he left the hospital, because white smoke had no consciousness of itself. ...it was sucked away by the words of doctors who tried to talk to the invisible scattered smoke. ...He walked down floors that smelled of old wax and disinfectant.... (p. 13).

The white man, Floyd Lee, called it a wolf-proof fence; but he had poisoned and shot all the wolves in the hills, and the people knew what fence was for.... to make the land his (p. 174).

The quote above makes it clear that the characters in the novel are indeed destructive towards nature. Poisoning and shooting the animals, specifically wolves are included as the thing they have done. But here, the point is narrated that the one doing it is a white person. This part of culture which is accusing white has been there since the beginning. People in Laguna always believe that being white is wrong even though they live their life in such modern way. They also believe that all the destructive actions come from the whites that in fact, even the tribe do such destructive actions towards nature. It comes all by habit that they do not even understand that being nurturing is the key. The tribe also believes that the whites are the threat to them as they could make the land theirs. So all the technologies, either to hunt or to shoot the animals are for luring the tribe to confront modernity while the white conquering their land.

He wanted to follow them as they haunted the mountain lion, to shoot them and their howling dogs with their own guns. The destroyers had sent them to ruin this world, and day by day they were doing it (p. 189).

Here, humans are seen as destroyers. Some people in Laguna believe that modernity could make them easier to hunt the animals down, to make benefit of nature. But then the destroyers, which is lead by the whites, only show such way of life to get some people there helping them creating a mess on the land. They are about to own the land and exploit it to the fullest. In the novel, Tayo’s character is described as nurturing but in some ways is also confronting – in the end

of the story, that he is part of ceremony – of killing someone in the tribe – the destructive actions as it is one of ways of being modern.

They will carry objects which can shoot death faster than the eye can see. They will kill the things they fear all the animals the people will starve. They will poison the water... Entire village will be wiped out They will slaughter the whole tribes (pp. 125-126).

As in the quote above, it is told that humans can even poison each other. Here, as for the tribe, not knowing on how and why are their loss. But again, tradition bonds them to conform and just devote themselves. Everyone believes that nothing bad will happen if they are silent and obey those with power. No knowledge could help or enlighten them. This way then it is said the whole town needs to be purified. People need to know what actually happens and fulfill themselves with a “know-how” so that they are not clueless and see through the troubles those with power can cause.

Next to putting folks on hold, she loves telling ‘em that the doctor is out, the doctor is busy, the doctor can be reached only at such-and-such a time of day if it’s an emergency. Guess it makes her feel powerful, knowing that what she does or doesn’t do is only important to folks when they in need of help (pp. 76-77).

The quote above depicts Mama Day’s side of story. It is true that Mama Day is the only one in the land who could treat anyone as patient and help them to heal, but in the modern era, the folks can no longer only count on her. They can rely on doctors for curing their diseases. It can be said that there is a sign that she is upset upon knowing the fact, that is why she loves knowing and telling that the doctor is out or cannot be reached in time-being. Here, it can also be concluded that all she wants is everyone’s trust on her. She wants to be the only one who could help the folks in need and that she will feel even more powerful. Mama Day herself is recognized as someone who helps holding or running the tradition and telling the myth and makes everyone believe it as a truth as she was never a slave during her whole life. She wants to always be reached out first during emergency and that no doctors could make her credibility faded away.

being we was brought here as slaves, we had no choice but to look upside-down. And then being that we was isolated off here on this island, everybody else in the country went on learning good English and calling things what they really was – in the dictionary and all that – we kept on calling things ass-backwards (p. 8).

The conflict between tradition and modernity has started since a character begins to question why a culture exists. On the quote above, it seems that Cocoa’s character questions whether she fits the modernity she lives in or otherwise. She realizes the fact that she was at first coming from a lineage of John Paul who was a slave. But then she herself gets in a city in which the people back then made her into one. She even learns speaking good English and any language modern people in New York do. But again, she looks upon herself and reconsider the goal she wants. All of these times, Black women have lived knowing their value and respect other. So then she wants to be recognized and respected as well. Here then it is clear that Cocoa conforming into the myth and the custom or tradition Willow Springs has made her into.

And there you were, offering me your projections about the future of my city. Your opinions of our political system were only a bit less horrifying than your attitude on race relations (p. 62).

The quote above makes it clear Cocoa's intention that she is not against where she belongs. It could be that she is modern but that does not mean that a complete change will make her no longer believe how custom shapes her. To her, the present may be she is when she is modern, in the future, she will get back without anyone projecting upon her decision, not even George, her husband. Cocoa thinks that people could judge the customs or traditions sound so ancient to anyone modern in New York. But at least, none of her people are racist just like them. Here, respect is an underlined attitude regarding race and discrimination.

*The old man's clothes were dirty and old, probably collected like his calendars.
The leftover things the whites didn't want.... What kind of healing power was in this? (p. 117)*

Here, Tayo's doubt upon the existing custom is shown. He starts to think not to believe Betonie as he belittles the whites yet wearing the leftover things they throw away. A medicine man should live within integrity in which people could trust. So to him, believing that Betonie has superstition or power to make a change is questionable. If Betonie mocks on the way the whites live, he is supposed to act as if he does not care at all about what they wear or even take them when thrown. Tayo's doubt then grows bit by bit. Even though his confusion is still in bare minimum, but it is developed. This then shows that he is a wannabe modernist of all characters in the novel, including Rocky or Auntie Josiah who could accept an open-minded thought.

Postcolonial-ecocriticism research which theoretical framework used to analyse and understand the colonial activities that are now being undertaken by capitalists, neocolonizers to fuel their profit driven ventures damaging and destroying the environment. It is said so as Silko and Naylor depict the the anthropocentric view of life that stipulates that everything centres around human beings viewing nature as a capitalistic commodity, the foundation of our life with early education in schools begins with the idea that 'man is the best creation of nature' and that 'nature's sole purpose is to serve mankind'. This statement can be proven by the existence of George and Tayo who live their lives learning modernity so that their acts toward nature are different from the society as they cope with everything happens in the surrounding using the notion of tradition.

Here, postcolonial-ecocriticism theory questions such view of life, related to tradition and modernity along with the impacts to the nature. The views then incorporates the postcolonial as well as ecocritical perspective in order to study the exploitation of environment caused by colonial activities, that in both novels, Ceremony and Mama Day can be seen through the working class or labor phenomenon – as well as the ways that the subalterns are affected by it. Such theory questions the denial of access to resources to the indigenous people in their own land expressing concern about their vanishing knowledge highlighting the sustainability of their lifestyle and cultural practices.

There are characters in the novels, both Ceremony and Mama Day who are the preserver of nature, both in traditional or modern ways. In the traditional way, the characters in the novel consider the nature a superior entity that must not be made angry to avoid any repercussions. Nature comes alive and has been frequently personified, a sage living in isolation talks with the surroundings. Here, the nature is always absolute, and unconfined. Because of being confined to the land the society occupies, the Indigenous people are dependent on the forest for resources for their survival, they forage the forest for food and medicine considering the jungle as the gift of God. However, to modern societies in the novels, the nature is treated both in good and bad ways. Some people value nature and think that nature should be treated well as it is the source of life. As to others, moreover to the non-islanders, the nature exists only for them to exploit.

4. CONCLUSION

The ambivalent identity of ambivalence is a complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between a culture and another. It is portrayed in Silko's Ceremony and Gloria Naylor's Mama Day novels through the main men characters, George and Tayo. Both novels explore the differences between human and the way they live, customs and modernity, and

frequently center the hardships of impoverishing people during times of social upheaval. Both novels describe the characters of Black people who survive through U.S. modernity even in the 1940s in Laguna, where mining as an exploitation of nature started to happen.

Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* is set in the 1980s in Willow Springs, a land where people gathered and lived together by doing their customs. George and Tayo, two modernists, face difficulty in dealing with their "in-between" situation. Through the nature, they find that the existing customs and tradition are not incompatible for modern people like them to live with. However, their ambivalence leads to their sacrificing their own freedom, leading to a murder. In *Ceremony*, modernity leads human to exploit and take others for granted in the way it could benefit certain community, while in *Mama Day*, mode

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