

BICULTURALISM: A SEARCH FOR SELF THROUGH LIFE EXPERIENCES AND
THE INTERACTION OF THE PEOPLE THAT HELP INFLUENCE IT

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Bicultural theories can help us understand people who experience bicultural or multicultural situations. This is important because a shared cultural understanding will allow us to be more comfortable in our own culture and to adapt to the expectations of others. This process is experienced as a personal journey to recover and stabilize with one's own identity. Consequently, some kind of resolution is the outcome. This essay will analyze literature that is written by two culturally diverse authors, Leslie Marmon Silko and Maxine Hong Kingston to learn of the social and cultural consequences of bicultural experience. The protagonists must first understand their own cultural heritage in order to attain ethnic identity. Their conflicts become the basis for selfhood. I will explain how these authors use myths, talk stories, landscape and family to theorize and articulate multicultural identity.

Introduction

Living between two cultures becomes a serious challenge to people who are positioned in a place in society where they don't fit in. and they are not comfortable. Unfortunately, this silences their voices and the traditions that are passed down through generations in oral tradition and myths. A culture is sustained through oral history and its heritage. Understanding traditional myths and stories makes life valuable. Thus, storytellers and authors are powerhouses because they are able to uncover the histories in which individuals can construct cultural identity and which form the basis for selfhood.

When individuals become bicultural they can learn to adapt to and cope with their environment and to the larger society in which they live. Yet, as they strive to maintain their own ethnic identity in an effort to keep their traditions and cultural beliefs as a legacy to pass on from one generation to another, they must negotiate new and ever changing values and beliefs and traditions. Theories of acculturation can help explain the dynamics of bicultural identity. In addition, Leslie Marmon Silko and Maxine Hong Kingston are writers who through their literature, show how transform traditional myths, stories and ethnic traditions provide their protagonist assistance accept their biculturalism. This essay explains several points: bicultural theory and the psychological effect of acquisition of culture; an evaluation of Native American and Chinese culture through the lens of literature; and an evaluation of bicultural authors' mediation of the dominant culture in relations to their own experience.

Part One: Academic Theories

Leading theorists such as Berry and Padilla have defined biculturalism and multiculturalism as demographic characteristics, the experiences of individuals who may be immigrants, refugees, sojourners, indigenous people, ethnic minorities, those in interethnic relationships, and mixed-ethnic individuals (Berry2003; Padilla 1994).

As of yet, however, there is no single definition of bicultural adaptation. For the most part, people who are bicultural tend to self label themselves. If we were to ask them to identify the culture they belong to, they might explain they belong to two cultures. This means if they are Chinese American, their response will be “I am American and I am Chinese”, or if Native American, “I am a Native American and an American”. The best way to describe this response is cultural dualism. Bicultural individuals can be further described as those who must continue their self development in both cultures. By doing this they accept the values and beliefs of both cultures. Furthermore, biculturalism can be defined as the behaviors exhibited by people that are normative for each group. As a result, the behaviors must be adaptive. This ability to switch between cultural schemas, norms, and behaviors is characterized as an adaptive response to cultural cues (Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martinez, 2000). However, there is no single definition of culture on which all scholars can agree (Segal 1986). Attempts to create a satisfactory definition of culture often omit a salient aspect of it, or generalize beyond any real meaning (Lafromboise, Coleman and Gerton 1993). For this essay, I will use the novels of two authors to further describe biculturalism and its experiences. The human behaviors displayed by the characters in these novels may help us to better understand the theoretical approach to biculturalism.

According to cultural theorists, environmental cues may consist of a myriad of elements. Each element expresses a change in social interactions. Responses are continuous and allow the individual to use different clues to become culturally competent. Theorists believe that there are several attributes that individuals must have in order to be competent and to make use of new cues. Further, individuals must have basic attributes individuals must have in order to be competent in their original culture. The individual must have a strong personal connection internally be able to identify himself within his own culture. Once this connection is made he or she must recognize the practices of the new culture. The outcome is that he or she becomes sensitive to the process, and becomes able to speak the language of both cultures. This allows an individual to communicate and have a voice. Therefore, whatever behavior is required of him/her; he/she can now adhere and/ or resist the rules and regulations of each group.

Individuals who are bicultural will experience psychological impact and their own mixed heritage. (Park 1978). In order to understand this process of change individuals go through as a result of these conditions of biculturalism and their effects on individuals, we must evaluate acquisition of culture adaption models. These models describe the interaction between the culture of origin and the majority society. The transitions to behavior to adapt usually results in acquiring knowledge of the dominant cultures' rules and traditions. More importantly, an individual may be able to perform in an environment where the rules are already in place, but still have some difficulty negotiating the structure of the new environment. Similarly, the stratification of the culture may limit some individuals from achieving social and political roles. So the more levels in which one is competent, the better off individuals are (Ogbu, 1979).

Empirical models of second culture acquisition specify the specific elements of change that occur in the transitional, or liminal, bicultural experiences. These are assimilation, acculturation, alternation, multiculturalism, and fusion (LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton

1993). The models provide some of assumptions and hypotheses about the psychological impact of biculturalism.

Assimilation models describe the state of a person who intertwines two cultures, however the dominant culture is assumed as stronger. An example that best describes this situation is when a person becomes a legal citizen of the United States. In order for them to retain a citizenship they must follow the guidelines of the United States. As a result, the culture of identity of the person may become lost. In addition, the person will suffer from alienation and isolation because there is a desire to be accepted by the dominant culture, but an inability to do so. The new culture of identity of the person is a sacrifice and robs the person of true identity as he will give up part of the self. Moreover, there is a risk of being rejected by the dominant culture, as well as by the original culture of origin. (LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton 1993). Ultimately, there is a chance of a change of behavior that will take place during the assimilation process. We might note that the assimilation model implies that bicultural individuals often need to recover elements of their own culture in order to assimilate. In Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, the narrator Maxine, experiences struggle and conflict as part of her family's attempt to assimilate to American culture. In Silko's *Ceremony*, Tayo must first reestablish his own heritage, before confronting his rejection by white society.

The Acculturation model has three elements that are similar to the assimilation mode; acquisition of the majority group's culture, emphasis on unidirectional relationships, and hierarchical relationships between the two cultures. When the individual becomes competent actively in the majority or dominant culture his status doesn't change in the minority culture. This means he will always be identified with his own culture of origin. In addition, this model implies that the individual will favor his or her own minority culture. For example, a person who is Native American will focus primarily on Native American culture while also acknowledging the dominant culture's influence. It is very unlikely the individual will favor American traditions,

beliefs, and values. When considering this model there are measures of acculturation: language familiarity, cultural heritage, ethnic pride and identity, interethnic interaction, and interethnic distance (LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton 1993). These dimensions constitute a framework to read into the conflicts portrayed in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, and the unchanging negative status of Native Americans. In addition, in *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston makes clear that China represents both non-acceptance of women, but also a tradition of language and identity.

Another model, alternation, provides the understanding of an individual's ability to learn and to alternate between two different cultures. Partly, this is possible because an individual learns two different languages when alternating his or her behaviors. Alternation can occur as a result of a situation or a problem in an individual's life that arises during a particular time. If a person experiences a situation reflective of alternation it doesn't mean that there is a compromise of culture, rather, it is an alternation of behavior for and adjustment to appropriate specific situations. Both Kingston and Silko illustrate these crises through an internal voicing of myths and talk stories. Alternation has its strong points. It focuses on the cognitive and affective process. These are essential elements that allow an individual to withstand acculturative stress. In addition, this stress is very negative both in the lives and roles of the individual. It forces the individual to recognize and figure out the route in which he or she must choose to interact with the second culture as (LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton 1993). The narratives in the novels by Leslie Silko and Maxine Kingston could be interpreted as a form of alternation, although the process must be seen as highly conflicted.

In order to understand the relationship between two or more cultures, we must also examine the multicultural model. This model measures the usefulness of how cultures maintain their unique identities from one culture and join forces to allow entry into another culture. Being multicultural is the sharing between the two cultures. The multicultural model provides a way for

people to maintain and develop their own group identities, share in the group setting and learn to accept and tolerate members of the external group. Consequently, members of both groups are encouraged to maintain a positive identity within their group and recognize and accept the values of another culture group (LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton 1993). In Tayo's and Maxine's quest for an integrated self, they must first take advantage and gain strength from the uniqueness of their traditions; the reader is left to question if after this process a stable multicultural identity will be possible.

Finally, the fusion model suggests that cultures who share together all their resources will form a new culture. Their resources can consist of economic, political, or geographic space. Therefore, the new culture has the resources to become common. The significance of this model is that each culture brings the central core of its weakness and strengths which take on a new form. When a new interaction of cultures takes place, each culture shares its resources and is considered to be on equal footing. A key factor in the fusion model is that there is no necessary assumption of cultural superiority. A clear picture of fusion is not completely theorized due to the scarce amount of successful culture fusion. In many cases fusion never takes place or once fused the individual from the minority group takes on a psychological reality that is indistinguishable from a member of the majority group (LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton 1993). We might look to music or fiction as possible paths toward fusion.

When considering the success or failure of assimilation, acculturation, and alternation, or fusion, we must keep in mind how each individual experiences these contingent processes. Each person may have a unique situation; therefore, assumptions can only be made depending on the model that represents the situation. As readers of the novels of ethnic or minority literatures we should agree that that a second culture acquisition will only represent one explanation for one person's experience. One vital attribution of these models suggests that individuals who are able to sustain active and effective relationships between both cultures do so because they can think in

either culture; consequently, that individual will have less difficulty. Moreover, competency will be acquired and maintained by the individual who becomes aware of his/her thinking (LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton 1993).

The purpose of evaluating these models is to suggest that the bicultural authors in which I will discuss in this essay portray some of the transitions representing one of, or several, of these models. The impact of biculturalism is a process that Silko and Kingston examine to explain how when dual cultures are blended and dual identities are formed, individuals have the potential to see themselves in a reintegrated perspective.

One theorist explains that positive relationships are the rationale for adaption and adjustment between two cultures, (Martinez and Morris 2002). More recently, psychologists have shown that individuals can possess dual cultural identities and engage in active cultural frame switching in which they move between different cultural meaning systems in response to favorable situation cues. This means there are signs, symbols and gestures in their environment that signal a change for the bicultural person so that he can adapt to new situations. The outcome of the change thus becomes healing and transformative. Cultural meaning systems affect individuals' abilities to make decisions about themselves. They gain the ability to interpret more effectively in situations that are rooted in their dual cultural environments. Readers of Silko and Kingston can gain new and fresh perspectives about the details of the ethnic meaning systems of the protagonists.

Part Two: The Bicultural novels of Leslie Marmon Silko and Maxine Hong Kingston

When people are born they don't have any knowledge of the culture in which they are born into, and do not possess the skills to be able to participate in society. Social rules are learned through the use of language, especially by talking and listening to other members who are members of their first cultural group. We learn by watching and imitating various behaviors in our society. Culture is not biologically learned or inherited; no person is born who innately possesses a particular culture. There are people who grow up in the same nation, and can be of another culture or ethnicity. These individuals slowly develop a shared or bicultural world. The author of *Ceremony*, Leslie Marmon Silko, and the author *The Woman Warrior*, Maxine Hong-Kingston, are bicultural in this sense.

Many people believe that their culture has the most significance for the, personal, experiential, psychological or emotional development. This attitude can be very harmful, and carried to the extreme. Extreme forms of this type of thinking cause prejudice, automatic rejection, and inhibit the ideas normally assured by social acceptance, such as mutual trust and respect, and a sense of shared values. For this reason, it is important not to judge other cultures by one set of standards or from too personal a point of view. Each and every culture deserves respect even though the values of each are not common to both the dominant and minority groups. In fact, what can be observed from looking at data derived from acculturation, assimilation, multiculturalism and fusion models demonstrates the complexity of the relationship. When looking at the Native Indian culture of Leslie Marmon-Silko or the Chinese culture of Maxine Hong Kingston, we have to open our minds to the perspectives of these writers who construct their own personal cultural experience through imaginative fictional forms. Their ideas help us to understand the experiences of multiculturalism.

In a place such as Old Laguna, Leslie Marmon Silko's birthplace, storytelling is a natural event that takes place in each house. These houses each have a story to tell. The appearances of the houses, crumbling adobe shells, and the mesa, cerro, arroyo and spring in the surrounding countryside are the place of events to be remembered are waiting to become a reality in the culture of the Laguna people. When Silko was a child she learned to attach herself through memory and imagination to this geographic space. She liked herself and her village and the land around it. Many of the stories she grew up listening to were from Keresan oral tradition, the story of her father's people, and part of the stories included the history of the people (Barnet and James 15).

Much of Leslie Marmon Silko's traditions stems from the Keresan culture. Laguna is a town with a very rich history. The Keres tribe was located in Acoma and Laguna. They inhabited the land and have done so since at least 1075 AD. The Native Americans came there for farming purposes, and to hunt deer and antelope. This was very beneficial for the Indians as it provided a resource for food and clothing, and an economy centered on cultivation of seeds and dry farming. This was a unique way of life for this matrilineal culture. In the labor division the men farmed and performed the ceremonial dances; the woman made baskets, pottery, and built the houses. Government was by consensus. The Keres didn't fight or go to war; they avoided this type of conflict. This is contrary to the position of the character, Tayo, who goes to war and fights for the United States' government. When the people of this culture traded, it was usually with other Plains tribes who were located to the north and to the empires of the south. They were joined by residents of Zia, Zuni, and other neighboring pueblos which enabled them to establish a stable settlement. The lake in the landscape became a rich resource for the community. It was formed by a dam, and later became the San Jose River (Barnett and James 22). Silko reveals how Silko employs the storytelling and spiritual heritage of the Laguna pueblo to reframe the history of the European conquest of America as an opposition predicated on

irreconcilable notions of land use and land tenure and as a struggle between different cultural orientations toward the natural world rather than as an irresolvable racial hostility. In Silko's novel, the Indians nonexploitative, reciprocal relationship is confronted by the whites' domination of the Native Americans (Chavin 12).

Leslie Marmon Silko's novel *Ceremony* focuses on a young American Indian who struggles to realign himself with traditional Indian culture and reservation life after having been torn away by WWII. Tayo, the main character in Silko's *Ceremony* is a half-Laguna, half-Anglo protagonist, who returns to his New Mexico reservation just after World War II. In *Ceremony*, the struggle of the Native American to free himself from the domination of white values takes place within this Laguna natural environment.

Silko is bicultural, and her culture consists of Laguna Pueblo, Mexican, and White German ancestry. Silko grew up at the Pueblo of Laguna, located in west central New Mexico, and in 1977 she published her first novel, *Ceremony*, which explains how Tayo must rely on vital storytelling of myths are the Pueblo culture. Furthermore, it explains how White culture has made many attempts to destroy these stories. Whites have also tried to destroy the Indian ceremonies. By recovering these stories, Silko focuses on the preservation of oral tradition, and portrays how Tayo dramatizes how Native American regain dignity through the ceremonies of Laguna Pueblo Indians.

Silko's early life was met with turmoil, frustration and disappointment. Consequently, she reveals how living in Laguna society as a mixed blood was not easy. Her mother worked as well as her father. In order for Silko's mother to work, she had to leave the other siblings in the care of the village. Silko's father worked at the store which

was owned by the family. This gave the impression that the family was placed them in a higher social economic status than other families that lived in the same town. Some people in the town envied her family for having a business. In fact, their resentment caused her a lot of pain. It meant being different from, and not fully accepted by either the full blooded Native Americans or white people. Silko, despite her pain, was finally able to overcome the lack of acceptance and identify with the Laguna culture. She didn't pretend to claim her identity only consisted of one culture, she accepted by acquisition awareness of the equivocal status of mixed-bloods in Laguna society, considered herself Laguna, and a mixed breed person who openly proclaims, "I am of mixed-breed ancestry, but what I know is Laguna"(Velie 106).

As a child Silko became familiar with the cultural folklore from her great-grandmother, Aunt Susie, and Grandma Stagner. They all taught her about Pueblo traditions and stories of the Laguna and Keres people through a tradition passed down from one generation to the next. Lilly, Silko's great grandmother, and her Aunt Susie stood out as higher powers or figures whose great words of wisdom made traditional myths come alive. It is these women who had a tremendous effect on Silko's upbringing, "passing down an entire culture by word of mouth" (Velie 106).

In *Ceremony*, Tayo, is severely psychologically traumatized after service in WWII as a result of an unstable childhood, much like Silko's own. He must recover himself by finding a link to Native Indian culture. His recovery is long and difficult. He suffers from nightmares and flashbacks to the traumatic events that occurred in his life. As a result, Tayo feels alienated since he has few connections to the land or his people. He eventually returns to the reservation where his aunt and grandmother try to heal him,

but he is not helped. He visits, Ku'ooosh, a medicine man to help heal him. He feels uncomfortable with the medicine man and returns home. Tayo now realizes he must also eliminate his old friends because they have accepted "white" ways and are a bad influence on his life. So he travels to the mountains in attempt to find peace. He bonds spiritually with a woman who has sex with him and teaches him about the Native traditions he has lost. It was while here in the mountain that Tayo's healing ceremony takes place. In the beginning of the novel Silko introduces a poem to signify the power of the Native cultures and traditions. Another poem is strategically placed at the conclusion of the novel with a final ritual which proclaims good over evil. These poems remind us that cultural victories are temporary, but significant to Tayo who is able to recover his heritage by recovering it through his cultural practices and beliefs. Specifically, he becomes connected to his Native land and to a self which allows his mind, body, and soul to heal. This type of recovery is the means of return to tradition as a significant way to achieve selfhood and identity for a multicultural person who experiences trauma when they transfer into another culture and because of the conflict between each.

Like other Native American novelists, Silko contrasts the Euro-American and Native American attitudes toward nature and also demonstrates the alienation of the Indians themselves from their environmental heritage. Oppression of nature, Silko suggests, goes hand in hand with oppression according to race, gender, or class. Despite its similarities with other American Indian literature, Silko's novel is unique in that it draws heavily on Laguna Pueblo myth and lore and thus has significance separate from Western tradition, and also from other Native American traditions.

When Silko uses nature in her novel it helps establish a bridge and connection of Tayo and the land Silko uses nature to define the Native American self and to show how these landscapes are symbolically linked to Native American existence. Schweniger claims, "In her novel, language and nature are inextricably connected. The obligation of being human is to see the human connection to nature and to speak it, to tell the earth's story. These connections between nature, language, and human responsibility in regard to both underlie Silko's philosophy and inform her multiculturalism. In the language of Thomas Lyon's taxonomy of nature writing, Silko provides natural history information; she describes a personal response to nature, primarily through her character Tayo and she elaborates a philosophical interpretation of nature". (Paula Gunn Allan 120). Thus, through his relationship with nature, and his connection with place, Tayo gains health and understanding. (Paula Gunn Allan 122). Finally, he is rejuvenated by a Native American ceremony from his departure from the land and from tradition. As a result he is able to restore his cultural heritage and thus face life. He begins to understand the importance of his race. When he can accept responsibility for the land and regain the certainty of his people's place in history, he can journey toward multiculturalism.

Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* is significant because it dramatizes the failure of Native Americans to acculturate to white American culture. In *Ceremony*, Silko portrays the endangered state of the Laguna reservation following World War II. She uses the neglected and blighted state of the land and the appearance of the Native American to give a sense of the destruction that has taken place in Laguna Pueblo by the neglect of culture. The land has been damaged by runoff from the uranium mines on the nearby Cebolleta land grant, and a generation of young Pueblo men, Tayo being one of them, has

been destroyed by the war. These young men originally enlisted in the army because they sought an escape from their feelings of inferiority. They were enticed to participate in the war, and hoped that they would feel as though they would have a better life because of the poverty and poisoning that surrounded their reservation life. After all, the army promised them the opportunity to see the world and to be accepted into mainstream America. The characters of Tayo, Rocky, and Emo, three typical young Pueblo, believe they have finally found access to the white world when the army recruiter tells them, "Anyone can fight for America, even you boys." (Silko 25). The arm recruiter words were a manipulation tactic. These men were only recruited because they needed large number of men for man power in order to win the War. In Silko's point of view, the lacuna Pueblo shared many of the cultural anxieties of the white world.

Rather than giving the men a new life which is something they were hoping for, World War II destroyed them. Rocky is killed fighting the Japanese, Emo becomes an alcoholic, and Tayo returns to his reservation with a severe case of post-traumatic stress disorder that white medicine has been unable to cure. In his search for healing, Tayo first turns to drinking with Emo and the other Indian veterans. But becoming part of a pattern of drinking and violence among Indian veterans (Silko 26) only makes Tayo sink further into his sickness, drinking excessively out of control in order to numb his pain, The Indian veterans could not grasp that their problems stemmed from within themselves and their disconnect from their land. They stories about the witchery of the modern world, which has tricked them into believing it is good, just as the Ck' o' yo magician tricked the Pueblos into believing his magic was enough to sustain life. Ultimately, for the mend of

the Pueblo, a life of despair, loneliness, and poverty replace any hope of fusion, connection to white society, or self esteem.

Maxine Hong Kingston was the third child to be born in her family. Her name at birth was Maxine Ting Ting Hong. The name Maxine originated from a blonde gambler who was very lucky. “Ting Ting” originated from a Chinese poem. Maxine was born on October 27, 1940 in Stockton, California. That year was considered to be the year of the Dragon. Her parents were Chinese immigrants Ying Lan Chew and Tom Hong. They had six children, and Maxine was the first of the six to be born in America. The sources of Kingston’s writings evolve from her parents and the ghosts of her ancestors (Contemporary Authors).

From the mid-nineteenth century to World War II, Chinese ethnicity was shaped by the American government’s policies of containment and exclusion that the various Asian national groups encountered on their arrival in the United States. Economic competition and racist ideologies triggered the hostility of the white working class, particularly on the West Coast, leading to the passage of exclusionary immigration laws that were enacted first against the Chinese (From Exclusion to Empowerment). Upon Kingston’s family arrival to America, the Lan’s were limited in education, employment, and land ownership. Therefore, Kingston’s Asian family was excluded through discrimination. Assimilation or acculturation were prevented or stifled, due to both prejudice and lack of knowledge of American norms.

Kingston’s father came to America as an educated man. In China he was a teacher and scholar, but when came to America, he wasn’t able to obtain a job as an

educator. He made a living in this country washing windows. Later, he was able to partly own a laundry business in New York. Unfortunately, he lost his share of the business, and relocated back to Stockton, California in 1940. His wife was able to join him there. He was deported at least three times, and was arrested several times for running gambling houses before World War II. After the war he successfully opened his own laundry business, and was able to provide a good life for his Chinese family (Huntley 136). Some Chinese Americans were able to buy apartment buildings, and other properties. As a result, this created an ethnic social environment for some Chinese (Contemporary Chinese America).

Maxine Hong -Kingston's mother shared memories about the life in China. She was able to break free of the bonds that positioned her in a role as a traditional Chinese woman. While in China, Kingston's mother, Brave Orchid in the novel, became a respected doctor, fighting the "ghosts" in her life and others' lives. When she came to America she could not work as a doctor, she had to work as a laundry woman, cannery worker, maid, tomato picker, and mother. She told her children stories at bed time. These stories consisted of tales of ghosts, another name for Americans, her family history, and Chinese myths and legends. By doing this, she was able to provide her children with their connection to Chinese tradition and to stimulate their minds. The children were reminded of the Chinese hatred toward women. Moreover, the children were told about the women who overcame the oppression of their culture. These women became free in a society where men dominated the tradition and culture. This feminist viewpoint enabled Maxine Hong Kingston to write about heroic women who attain cultural recognition.

Traditions of Chinese culture are the subjects that impacted Kingston, the writer's beliefs. This is evidenced by "ghosts" she mentions in the novel. Rand explains, "The ghost is a figure that returns to haunt or bargain with those who survive, and is a natural bridge between the world of the living and the dead" (Ayn Rand 45). The memories of the stories remain vital and are the central core for preserving Chinese tradition. These memories are what Kingston experienced in her young childhood and as a teenager, and become significant in the narrative structure of *The Woman Warrior*.

This autobiography is composed of tales and memories of the pain of growing up within two conflicting cultures. Specifically, Chinese women are silent, both in China and the United States. The stories included in *The Woman Warrior* are constructed from those Kingston's mother related to her as "lessons to grow up on (Cutting the Tongue).

The novel consists of five short narrative stories that describe the experiences of Chinese women, including the narrator Maxine. The stories illustrate how the lives of families are shaped through both traditional, society and immigration, and reclaim the history and oral traditions of Maxine's, the protagonist's, family and culture. At the beginning of this autobiography her mother tells her a story and asks that she is never to repeat it. The details are related about her aunt who has no name. Kingston was not aware of the source of information that her mother was about tell her, however, she sensed that it was very culturally important because her mother suggested to her that she was never to repeat the information that she was about to learn about her aunt. The story is about an aunt who had become pregnant after her husband left to go America. One of the reasons that the aunt married, like most Chinese women during that time, was to make sure that whenever their husband came back from the war, he would still be

married. Once at home, they would resume their roles in society (Untold Stories Old and New). However, the aunt committed adultery, and the family was ashamed. This behavior by the aunt caused a disorder in the Chinese society. Once the appearance of the pregnancy was noted by the community, the people in the village became irate. They raided the family house, breaking and destroying their possessions. Symbolically, the aunt had broken and destroyed their society and social order. The same night, the aunt gave birth to her baby in a pigsty. This was a horrible environment for both the aunt and baby, and represented her shame. In the end, the aunt drowns herself and the baby in the family well (Kingston 22).

In 1976, Kingston published her first book, *The Woman Warrior*. The theme of *The Woman Warrior* is that a blending of two cultures is possible and is developed in the book through Kingston's evolving relationship with her mother. Brave Orchid, the Chinese name of Kingston's mother, drives Kingston to distraction with her non-Western thinking and her overbearing treatment of her family. However, Kingston goes through a process in which she moves from a total repudiation of her mother to an ultimate reconciliation with her, a reconciliation that allows Kingston to blend her own Western thinking with her rich Chinese heritage. This blending enhances her writing and proves that a person can richly exist within the framework of two cultures. One of the distinctive accomplishments of *The Woman Warrior* is that it crosses boundaries between genre, dictions, styles, and between fact and fiction, as it crosses the boundaries between cultures, both Chinese and American, particularly in language and content. The combination of Chinese myth, family history, and American identity establish *The Woman Warrior* as a multicultural novel.

One of the central issues in *The Woman Warrior* is the culturally embedded patriarchal assumptions that define Maxine, the autobiographical author, and the women in her family. In China a woman must be very obedient; she must obey her father and brothers while she is unmarried. In addition, she must obey her husband after marriage, and finally to obey her sons when she is widowed. The virtues demand chastity and obedience, reticence, a pleasing manner, and the perfection of domestic skills. Women were taught to be silent and if a child was born a female, she is considered to be less valued than a male child. *The Woman Warrior* sets out to challenge these assumptions (Henley 109).

The cultural translation of Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* into American English did not linguistically limit her imaginative story. According to Kingston, translation consists of sympatric and violent, exploitive and restorative moves. Driven by multiple and complex demands of relevance, she wavers between fitting the past to present. The dangers of domestication, American Orientalism, and the disfiguration of both Chinese and American norms shape the narrative. (Its Translated Well). Thus, one can culturally transform the bicultural experiences of people through fiction.

Literary Genre in the Multicultural Novel

One way authors can recover for themselves healing and self identity from a traumatic incident is to restore their cultural traditions through as oral traditions, and the myths and stories that are passed down and through one generation to another. This method of using language suggests to us as readers the power in storytelling and myths. Ultimately, oral traditions and myths echo the voices of people who cannot speak for

themselves. Moreover, the language used to tell stories can be the battleground for change, healing, and self discovery in helping a repressed culture adapt, adjust, and coexist with the dominant society.

Many of the oral traditions Silko writes about in her novel help shape the narrative journey *Ceremony*, and are one part of the multicultural literary genre. The story's theme builds the relationship between the individual, Tayo, and his Native American community. Silko reestablishes her connection to her people and her land, just Tayo must do so. From the very onset of the novel she positions herself and her protagonist right beside Keresan oral tradition. She claims the tradition by claiming to be one of a very long line of storyteller. Their role is to preserve and pass along the traditional story and that set in motion by modern conflicts. One extremely powerful storyteller, Tsitsnako, Thought Woman, (also called Spider Grandmother, who in many Laguna and Acoma stories figures as the original life force or Creatrix); represents the life of the people, and life for the people (Porter and Romner 248-249). Silko's *Ceremony* depicts the wounds of the war and Tayo's isolation. "Tayo cannot be healed until he embraces his heritage and reconnects cultural norm" (Paula Allen 120). Tayo is reminded by Thought Woman that he must remember his people's story and renew his connection with the land. Thus, he must attach himself to the gods of the land. In one instance, he is reminded by T'she, the mountain spirit who shows him a cliff face painting of A'moo 'ooh that no one has come to paint it since the war. These memories of meaningful events become part of our minds; therefore, become part of a shared story. Leslie Marmon Silko reminds us that if we don't share a story of history, then the history of the story which forms both traditions will be forgotten. During a personal interview,

Silko states “When I wrote *Ceremony* I realized that this old story is still very relevant now, even though these old stories take place in the past they have meaning now” (An Interview With Leslie Marmon Silko). Thus, in Silko’s view, multicultural literature must accurately represent ethnicity and history.

The closing of *Ceremony* leads to Tayo finding a resolution to help him return back to his Native culture, connect with the community and begin self identification. In the novel he begins to embrace the land and becomes part of it. All of the cultural demons that were chasing him no longer exist and he makes peace with himself. This refreshes his mind, body .and soul and he is able to become whole and free. Tayo witnesses his community destroyed and there is no question why is community is struggling for survival. The story’s narrator follows his descent. When he finds strength to let go of his personal barriers, he begins to see the future. Ultimately, he and the reader can create a path for the future. The web continues so the story continues. His grandmother, Spider, the life giver continues to live inside his and the reader’s mind. She reminds us that witchery has a way of coming back to haunt itself, “it has stiffened with the effects of its own witchery. It is dead now” (Silko 261). Through his personal journey and participation in a ceremony Tayo defeats a negative space in himself and is brought back to a new life.

In *Ceremony*, Silko’s narrative structure focuses on the myths of the Pueblos. These myths are part of a purification narrative system that is part of Native Indian culture. Treuer claims, “The use of myths has become the defining attributes of the Native American genre” David Treuer 40). There are a number of Pueblo myths, though there are some that are “new” and invented by Silko that lead to Tayo’s recovery. Some

of them are short, others are quite long. The most important and longest myth included in the text is a drought myth (131). The movement of this story is based on a myth in which an ancient man or spirit enters a town and entices the villages with offers things that allow them to neglect their community duties. Then the people are punished because of the negative behavior. In order for the villager to heal their world, they must fly and go underground. When they reach the underworld they must ask their mother for what to do. Next, they have to purify their town, and then they find a buzzard who tells them they need tobacco. They return to the underworld to receive the tobacco and must then later have to give it to the old buzzard. Finally, the town is purified by the old buzzard. At the end of this myth, the sky mother sends the rainclouds. As described in the myth, a hummingbird and a fly represent the characters of the village. This myth parallels Tayo's quest and thus created a metaphor for healing as part of a multicultural narrative (133)

In some cultures silence is part of a normal society and its stories. The people in this type of society have no power to claim and transform change. The multicultural model challenges these silences. There are several difference types of silence. In a brighter light, silence is linked to ecstasy, bliss, communion, rest sympathy, identification, reflection, meditation as well as secrets (Entering the Silence). Maxine Hong-Kingston recognizes the negative effects of silence. The beginning of Kingston's autobiography in *The Woman Warrior* her mother tells her a story and asks that she is never to repeat the story. The details are related itself are a sign of a silence. The aunt caused a disorder in the Chinese society that demanded a silence. The people of the village raided the family house, breaking and destroying their possessions, symbolically, silencing the act and protecting the social order. In the end, the aunt drowns herself and the baby in the family well thus enacting tragic silence. (Kingston 5).

Kingston is unable to ask questions about the traumatic event that happened to her aunt. Her curiosity about her aunt's and baby's death continued to linger in her mind. "My aunt haunts me—her ghost dawn to me because, after fifty years of neglect, I devote pages of paper to her, though not origami into houses and clothes" (16). She wants to know the motivating factor that drove her aunt to commit suicide. Kingston knew that Chinese women were accustomed to taking orders; this was a tradition in Chinese culture. She questioned the possibility that maybe her aunt was raped by one of the village men who later joined the raid in their home. More importantly, she imagines the pain and isolation that her aunt must have had. According to Bolaki, "In Maxine's case, trust is betrayed not by the discovery that there is nothing there, but because the mother has spoken and will add nothing more to the story" (It is Translated Well) finally, she realized that her family withheld the secret about her aunt because they were ashamed of her. She may be the only one who is able to tell the story of her dead aunt and baby. Since she knows the information about her aunt and baby, she feels troubled by it, so she must tell the story (Kingston 16).

The enactment of voice in the multicultural novel breaks cultural silencing. Finding a voice was very important for Maxine, especially, the child Maxine. She is in a continual conflict in deciding what she can legitimately say to her parents. The claims of Chinese and American cultures have made the silence inside her a contested site, and like the girl she torments later in the novel. Maxine cannot say who she is, or choose to speak in either culture. She seeks a way out of the confusion of her silence by trying to make someone else—a kind of double, or shadow—resolve the dilemma for her and then writing about the conflict. The scene in *The Woman Warrior* that it takes depicts Maxine

tormenting a Chinese classmate is a way of showing the value in breaking the silence and using language (*Entering the Silence*). Adapting to her multicultural identity is further complicated Maxine's inability to speak English until she started school. As a result of Kingston's not being able to speak English and covering her school paintings with black paint, she fails kindergarten. Ironically, she attacks another Chinese girl for her refusal to speak. This incident caused Kingston to spend 18 months in bed. As time passed, Kingston gradually confronted her mother about the Chinese heritage of silence. It took strength to confront her mother because both hated the Chinese heritage. However, in doing so, Kingston is able to find the foundation for writing, and to translate the oral tradition of her community. According to Barker-Nunn, "As Kingston and Chernin tell their mothers' tales, and in the fact of telling transform and make them their own, we will vividly the daughters often anguished attempt to come to terms with the mixed lessons of her mother's past, and of her own". (*Telling the Mother's Story*).

We can recognize that an important element in the multicultural literary genre is it allows the author to help speak for certain for elements of their culture. For Maxine, the character, it is the fantasy of Fu Mu Lan, Kingston's mother used to tell her stories about warrior women who could battle a whole army and save their families. Maxine fantasizes she is a warrior, Fa Mu Lan, a little girl who strays away from home while following a bird, and ends up in the mountains. At the top of the mountain there is an old couple who let her live with them. While living with the old couple, they teach her how to be a warrior, and she studies the martial arts, magic, and meditation. The old man uses magic to show the enemies that she may encounter one day. She can see the images of her life through the magic drinking gourd. "The whole world live inside the gourd"

(Kingston 23). The training that Fa Mu Lan received continued for some years. She eventually returns home and informs her father that she will replace him in the war that he was drafted into. She leaves her parents after they carve the words on her back that tell of the wrongs that have been done to them. Fa Mu Lan wins the battle, joins her husband to have a baby, and goes back to her family. In addition, while continuing to have her fantasy, Kingston, as Fa Mu Lan, kills the emperor who has been oppressing them, and appoints a peasant in the emperor's place (25). Through this chapter in *The Woman Warrior*, Maxine is able to find someone who she can identify herself with who speaks her language. The end result, the author is able to seek to resolve the individual conflicts in her life. This heroic journey becomes one aspect of the multicultural literary genre.

Storytelling is the vessel in which the narrative is built in both *The Woman Warrior* and *Ceremony*. These books are uniquely put together. The sections are made up from family stories, traditional tales, and reminiscences. The narratives that develop in the novels represent different times, and traditional heritage. The chronological orders of the narratives allow the protagonist to grow through different stages. These stories are told through flashback and retrieved memories and recollections. Employing myth and talk-story as a narratives strategy, creates an imaginative multicultural world.

Authors who have bicultural identities look into the mirror of their lives, and through their personal experience, they transform the reality of it by writing novels. In addition, the people who surround them help influence their identities, and as a result, these multicultural authors can deal with realistic problems and situations when trying to understand their personal identity in a bicultural society. The characters in the novels of

bicultural authors are believable, and demonstrate a clear sense of purpose. Their actions become appropriate for the success of their stories. This allows readers to extract a meaning and in turn to reach out to them. More importantly, the reader is able to identify the stratification of the bicultural authors' environments, and attempts to bridge it.

Words are intensely powerful, and bicultural authors use words that are appropriate for creation of multicultural identity. For example, In *Ceremony*, Silko uses poetry in the novel which is a useful technique to make the novel both realistic and personal. While realism prevails in bicultural authors' writings, the novels can still be considered with sensitivity. In essence, these authors are consciously aware of their writing, as they write from both an objective point of view, and create imaginative episodes as in *The Woman Warrior*.

There are important lessons that are learned by reading the novels of multicultural authors. Readers learn values such as being accountable for one's actions, accepting the cultural difference of other people, and compassion. These novels do not dictate specific moral and ethical beliefs onto the readers. Rather, readers are challenged to learn a life lesson and the importance of respect for other cultures. The outcome is that readers will be able to draw their own conclusion once they complete the novel and as they consider the moral and personal perspectives of these authors.

When authors are bicultural they provide a measurement of culture. Through the authors' personal experiences we are able to learn the strengths of a culture or tradition, especially their survival techniques, coping techniques, and their ability or lack to adapt to their new environment. In essence, adapting to another culture rather than the culture

of origin is often met with a challenge and dealt with on an individual personal basis.

The following excerpt gives an example of a bicultural author's experience of living in America, while at the same time, trying to adapt to her new environment:

“I don't know where I come from. When people ask me, I have to stop and wonder what it is they really want to know about me. Do they want to know where I was born, where I grew up, where I have lived as an adult, where I live now? It troubles me to be so scattered, so fragmented, and so far removed from a center. I am all and I am nothing at the same time. Once, a long time ago, when I believed that answers were as easy as smile, someone told me that home is where the heart is. In this way, the split between me who lived in that apartment and the me who had to learn how to survive outside it was immediate. I had to be. Initially, I suppose that I viewed that split simply as an external divide, straight, and pronounce. On the threshold of our front door, marking the point of separation between two distinct realities. On one side was America or the other was Ghana. And I didn't know how to bring them together, how to make one make sense to, let alone, in the other” (O'Hearn 99.-104).

This bicultural writer from Ghana emotions were triggered by her trying to find a comfortable place to feel safe.

Although the bicultural authors I have talked about have a need to first separate from the majority culture or the dominant culture, so that they can identify themselves as individuals. The novelists of bicultural writings need practice in their cultural beliefs in

order to discover ways to adapt. In the midst of the transformation of multicultural and bicultural people into acquiring a new culture some may feel pain while others may not feel any emotion. The acquisition of a new culture may be extremely stressful and a shock to them. Others simply may pretend that they are fine in the transition. Nevertheless, difficult times may arise, and create an unwanted crisis. For example, Silko's *Ceremony* dramatizes rebellion towards the failures Native Indian culture to achieve acceptance by white American society. Thus, she is wounded just as Tayo. *Ceremony* represents the struggle of Native Americans as a consequence of their encounters with white Americans.

Comparatively, Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* establishes a cultural dialogue between her family, heritage, and tradition, and American culture. Multicultural novels construct ways to their readers enhance equal communication between two cultures, and provide a better understanding of the non-dominator culture that are suggestive of the psychological theory models which explains the adaption process which an individual must experience. Knowing the history of the non-dominant culture contributes to better understanding. Leslie Marmon Silko had to claim her native Indian heritage even though she had to expose her attitude towards the Whites who mistreated the Native Indians after WWII. She provided a fictional and a cure for her people so that they would always remember the land, other Native Americans, and their community. In order to communicate, Kingston had to free herself of isolation due to only speaking Chinese which she learned from her parents who were Chinese immigrants. Her talk stories claim her place in literature, and equally position her in American culture because she can speak both languages, Chinese and English.

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