***Ceremony* & Debility**

The disability rights movement first gained global attention in the 1960s, despite activism in this field already existing for decades, and primarily focused on gaining basic access and accomodation for people with physical disabilities. The third wave of the disability studies movement is occuring right now, turning our attention to the effects of oppressive forces of colonialism, capitalism and war that can be integrated in our theoretical understanding of what constitutes disability. This third wave framework argues that the previous ideals fail to address many disabilities that are left unrecognized and are, in reality, caused by these systems of oppression and violence. This new framework turns its lens onto the term "debility" as a more inclusive contrast to the previous definitions of disability, defined as disabling conditions caused by external factors of systemic oppression (Chiayulien). Leslie Marmon Silko, author of *Ceremony*, addresses these systemically oppressive forces through her protagonist Tayo, an Indigenous WWII veteran who suffers from a mysterious illness after his return from the war. Tayo's physical and mental debilitation, and his deep belonging to the Indigenous community that is under systemic oppression due to settler-colonialism, put Silko's work in the crosshairs of this intersectional third wave study of disability. Silko's portrayal of a Native veteran left to struggle with the effects of war reveals that many disabilities caused by capitalism, colonialism, and war are less likely to receive entitlement and are thus left unrecognized. Readers are therefore able to have a greater understanding of the debilitating effects of war and colonialism on Native communities, and a greater understanding of debility as a whole.

Silko addresses the endemic conditions of illness and death on the reservation within the opening lines, a poem on the first page: "I will tell you something about stories / [he said] / They aren't just entertainment / Don't be fooled / They are all we have, you see / all we have to fight

off / illness and death" (Silko 2). This opening poem already addresses the presence of debility, in the sense that the debilitating endemic of "illness and death"neglected by the U.S. government, who itself caused the heightened factors of debilitation. Without adequate US governmental support, Native communities have only their own customs ("stories") to cope with this debilitation. Their self-reliance not only addresses the importance of community in Native culture, but also marks the lack of resources and aid from those that have caused this endemic of illness and death–the line "they are all we have" emphasizes the lack of any other resource for help. If we look at "illness and death" as indicative of the endemic conditions on Native reservations caused by colonialism, capitalism and war, this poem addresses debility directly–disability and death caused by oppressive forces without entitlement to care. The importance and emphasis of storytelling is revealed as a communal form of healing to deal with these oppressive and endemic conditions. Keeping previous generations and customs alive through storytelling, as well as the didactic element of many Native American folktales helping to educate the youth, provides a positive and healing of the debilitating factors of oppression that are not being reconciled or repaired.

Further, WWII as subject matter for this novel provides another perspective on debility. World War II is the deadliest conflict in history, and its destruction cannot be measured by statistics alone. However, 298,000 people from the U.S. alone died during the war, and 671,301 were wounded (Britannica). Even still, these staggering statistics do not account for the debilitating effects of trauma, land destruction, military occupation and more that was caused by this war. Therefore, not only was this a mass disabling event, but a mass debilitating one, as much of the destruction and disability it caused was not addressed or compensated for. Within the context of the novel, Tayo is one of the few who returns from the war unscathed from

physical wounds. Under earlier disability framework, he would be categorized as able bodied and therefore, non-disabled. However, with third wave framework understanding of debility, we understand how he suffers greatly due to conditions outside his control, such as the death of two of his family members (Josiah and Rocky), the drought conditions on his family's ranch, as well as the physical and mental symptoms of trauma that followed him back from war. All of these debilitating factors place Tayo at the intersection of the three oppressive forces that are said to cause disability: colonialism, capitalism and war (Chiayulien). At this intersection we find poverty, trauma, illness and death, ignored and unentitled, and caused by the mentalities and organizations upholding the U.S. power structure.

Through her protagonist's identity as a Native WWII veteran, Silko contrasts the endemic state of "illness and death" on the reservation with the 'mass-disabling' (and debilitating) event of WWII. Stationed to fight in the Philippines, Silko's protagonist not only watches countless lives be taken by his fellow soldiers, but also watches his brother die in combat. This traumatizing experience causes Tayo to develop debilitating physical and mental symptoms such as hallucinations, flashbacks and chronic vomiting. However, only his physical symptoms are treated by the veteran's hospital, creating a dichotomy between mental symptoms in this time period fitting under "debility" whereas physical symptoms or injuries from war are treated as disability, and even honored–many of Tayo's fellow soldiers receive Purple Hearts after they were injured in combat. Silko repeatedly addresses the mentality that unseen conditions are ignored, or the concept of an "invisible" disability, such as the PTSD that Tayo likely suffers from. In one of Tayo's flashbacks to his time fighting in the Philippines, he remembers having a vision of his Uncle Josiah's face on one of the enemy soldiers that had been executed by Tayo and his unit. Not only is this an example of hallucination, an early sign of what is likely a mental

illness that Tayo suffers from, but it also suggests a cause-and-effect between the traumatic event of having to participate in a firing squad to developing this symptom (BMC Psychiatry). However, his experiences are treated with haste and unease, and pushed away by those who witness it: “The sergeant had called for a medic and somebody rolled up Tayo’s sleeve; they told him to sleep, and the next day they all acted as though nothing had happened. They called it battle fatigue, and they said hallucinations were common with malarial fever” (Silko 8). Tayo’s fellow soldiers witness the beginning of his trauma induced mental and physical illness that he struggles with for the rest of the novel, and yet, “acted as though nothing had happened.” He never receives a diagnosis or is entitled to therapy or medication that could help his condition once he returns. He is left on his own to grapple with these debilitating effects of flashbacks, depression, survivor's guilt, and chronic vomiting. He struggles to maintain his family’s ranch alone, these debilitating conditions (mental and physical) only exacerbating this worse. This facet of the text touches on the stigma surrounding trauma and mental illness. In this time period, and even into the modern day, it is stigmatized to address these kinds of symptoms that could be reflective of a mental illness (Corrigan & Watson). The way it has been dealt with is to act as if it is not there, as if it is invisible. The presence of this social phenomenon in the novel opens discussion for the stigma surrounding mental conditions of disability that are known as “invisible disabilities,” specifically in terms of trauma induced mental illnesses such as PTSD. One could argue that capitalism, one of the main causes distinguishing what is defined as debility versus disability, is what causes mental illness to be stigmatized (Grinker). Mental illness causes a difficulty to function under the systems in place, and does not (in most cases) lead to higher levels of productivity or labor. In fact, mental illnesses can do the complete opposite, and bring productivity to a halt. In this sense, those with mental illnesses are not only stigmatized by, but

suffer to survive financially under this system of capitalism, especially without entitlement to care. This layer of capitalism creating a pervading stigma against those with mental illness, and debilitating them in similar processes, illuminates another intersection of debility within this novel between capitalism and colonialism oppressing an individual such as Tayo.

Ceremony's place on a Laguna Pueblo reservation in the mid-20th century United States examines how the endemic of "illness and death" on Native American reservations are a result of disabling conditions of settler-colonialism and war that can be categorized under the framework of "debility" in the sense that they are not given the same entitlement by the U.S. government because it predominantly affects people of color, and further, marks how "invisible" disabilities such as mental illness are similarly given little entitlement to care. There is an invisibility of Native American issues due to settler colonialism and government oppression. The "invisibility" of mental illness due to stigma is what marks it separately as a debility from a disability, as well as stigma causing a lesser entitlement to care for the mentally ill (Thornicroft). With all this in mind, Tayo's identity as a Native American veteran suffering from trauma induced mental illness puts him at the crosshairs of many debilitating factors, but what marks them all alike is their invisibility. This invisibility is significant because it lies at the intersections of debility–meaning disabilities caused by war, capitalism, and colonialism. What this invisibility that Tayo fights reveals, and just one of the many lessons he carries, is that there is a stigma around challenging the norms of colonialism, capitalism, and war, especially when the challenger has proof of the dark underbelly of these ideals and practices upholding a powerful nation. In addressing these topics in her novel, Silko has challenged this stigma herself, and created a destigmatizing portrayal of Native life and mental illness that illuminates the concept of debility in all three contexts of colonialism, capitalism, and war.

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