

# Eco-critical Praxis: Unravelling and Recuperating Eco-trauma in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Gardens in the Dunes*

Shokofeh Zorriyeh Habib <sup>1</sup>

Ph.D. Candidate of English Literature, Faculty of Literature, Humanities and Social  
Sciences, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran.

Leila Baradaran Jamili (Corresponding Author) <sup>2</sup>

Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature,  
Borujerd Branch, Islamic Azad University, Borujerd, Iran.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34785/J014.2023.015>

Article Type: Original Article

Page Numbers: 29-44

Received: 11 November 2022

Accepted: 30 April 2023

## Abstract

This article unravels the concept of eco-trauma in American Indians' lifestyle in *Gardens in the Dunes* (2000), a novel portraying eco-concerns of Leslie Marmon Silko (1948). Silko's novel is preoccupied with ecological concerns of American Indians who depend on nature to continue their existence. Being detached from their ancestral lands, Indians encountered several psychological problems due to their indispensable loyalty to nature. This article focuses on the significance of environment and 'place' according to Lawrence Buell (1939), and traces 'place' as the center of feeling for a person. Cheryll Glotfelty's connection between nature and culture, and Cathy Caruth's perspective on trauma have been utilized to explain Indians' psychological problems due to loss of ancestral lands. Eco-traumatic approach illustrates the interrelation of Native American's identity and culture with their living place. Indeed, Indians return to their land to eliminate their environmental concerns. Their ceaseless effort to reverse eco-trauma by adhering to their ancestral ritual is also examined in this article. Silko re-emphasizes and stipulates that the notion of nature can consolidate Indians' identity; hence, loyalty to natural environment ensures how Native Americans' loss of land and nature opens up the experience of eco-loss or eco-trauma and diminishes Native Americans' culture.

## Keywords

Nature; Culture; Eco-Concerns; American Indians; Land; Eco-Trauma.

## 1. Introduction

This article scrutinizes recuperating eco-trauma in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Gardens in the Dunes* (2000). History of American Indians has unceasingly been related to the place in which they have settled. As far as American Indians' being is concerned, one of their anxieties is nature. Within the framework of ecocriticism, story and destiny of American Indians in this novel can decode the significance of nature in elucidating and retrieving ruined psyche of Native Americans. Indians have to persist in considering nature as a holy being to draw other human's attention to traumatic consequences of environmental crisis.

<sup>1</sup> [shokofeh632002@yahoo.com](mailto:shokofeh632002@yahoo.com)

<sup>2</sup> [lbjamili@yahoo.com](mailto:lbjamili@yahoo.com)

Silko, as a prominent Native American writer, is enthusiastic about nature in her works. By the occurrence of World War II, Indians had participated in the war as they knew the importance of defending their lands. After the war, Indians had to stop their dances and rituals to adapt themselves to work under the title of 'white man'. Even though Natives played a huge role in the war from its beginning to its end, for a long time, racism was an obstacle for them to overcome. Likewise, Indians gave a large amount of their land to be used for military activities; therefore, relocation was another problem that Indians encountered in later years. During the 1950s, resettlement of Indians intensified. Urbanization was not easy for most of them; in fact, they were not socially, psychologically, or economically ready for this change.

Indians focused on their problematic adjustment to new environment, unemployment, and also alcoholism in their writings. In the earlier novels, authors mainly focused on depicting Indians' ethnic experience and the texture of tribal life. Native Americans used literature to demonstrate themselves and to preserve their ancestral lands, territory, sovereignty, and culture. Literary flowering of Native Americans can be traced back to the late twentieth century by the appearance of the Native American Renaissance, among whom Leslie Marmon Silko can be named. As a Native American novelist, she considers herself as a part of sacred nature. Native Americans consider the land as an alive being which is inside themselves, not as an alien.

The whole living organisms in nature are invaluable for Native Americans. They are grateful to have the whole living beings as animals, water, the sun, the moon, the stars, the rain, and also all of the visible and invisible blessings. The reciprocal interrelation between the Native Americans and nature proves the fact that the life of Natives depends on nature; on the other hand, nature cannot continue living without Native Americans. The fact that Silko grew up in her ancestral lands had a remarkable influence on her writing as she chose to write about nature because of her enthusiasm for perpetuating nature to new Indian generations. She considers herself a part of this nature, as part of her identity reflects water, trees, the earth and other living beings. The portrayal of nature is central to Silko's novels, as she meticulously detected annihilated landscapes of her ancestors.

Silko shows her excessive concern for environment and is preoccupied with direct affair with nature, and as an observer of unparalleled beauty of the landscape, significantly, in *Gardens in the Dunes*, has depicted a landscape of Native Americans and their troubles during the years. The story begins in the sand dunes where Indigo is abducted from her place by white soldiers who destroy her home and family. Authorities have banned their rituals and Indigo is obliged to be civilized by adapting herself to a white family with western culture. Indigo, as a Native American, has eco-concern for her ancestral lands and environment. Her new family decide to bring Indigo back to her place again since her identity is rooted in her land and her ancestral culture.

## 2. Literature Review

Although many books, essays, and researches had been written and done on Silko's novels, those studies have not been framed to investigate eco-trauma. Not only have most of them discussed *Ceremony*, but also they have chosen a different lens and approach. Mary Ellen Snodgrass, in *Leslie Marmon Silko: A Literary Companion*, names Silko as “[a]n original voice of the Native American Renaissance” (3). *Gardens in the Dunes* is introduced as one of her celebrated works that can be considered as “assimilation fiction of the American West” (130). Snodgrass believes that Silko, unlike the male dominant wicked characters of her *Almanac of the Dead*, in *Gardens in the Dunes*, portrays the strength of females in dealing with obstacles due to the fact that women believe in the power of nature which cures sickness and hunger (157). Moreover, importance of the land for Native Americans is highlighted by Snodgrass. She believes that Silko depicts the eco-mother “as a living, eternal parent, an entity demanding homage and protection” (105). It could be observed that land impacts the lives of Indian Americans astoundingly.

Brewster E. Fitz, in *Silko: Writing Storyteller and Medicine Woman*, refers to Silko as a Laguna Pueblo author who has raised in Native American culture with sturdy tradition. Fitz has considered Silko's works and emphasized their “postmodern”, “cosmopolitan” vision rather than their “exclusionary, regional, and essentialist” one (4). As Fitz analyzes Silko's major works, he focuses on the language of love in *Gardens in the Dunes* and calls it a novel of “education and adventure” (193). According to Fitz, critics have to reconsider American literature and its role in contemporary literary studies.

Beena Yadav in her dissertation, entitled “The Survival of Native American Identity in the Writings of Leslie Marmon Silko,” investigates the various ways that Native Americans have passed for survival of their identity. According to Yadav, Silko has constructed her works around the concepts of native land and Native American culture while preserving her ancestral culture. Her writing is a tool to protect her Native American identity: “The narrative can be seen as a medium for cultural and social transformation, affirming a Native American identity” (iv). Yadav elucidates Native Americans, women, and nature as oppressed beings as well as human's responses to redefine the human-nature relationship.

Terre Ryan, in “The Nineteenth-Century Garden: Imperialism, Subsistence, and Subversion in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Gardens in the Dunes*,” notes that the effect of imperialism is not restricted to the lands. She remarks that Silko's usage of gardens portrays “imperialism on international, national, local, and domestic levels” (116). Taking the lands of Indians due to imperialism and colonization revealed a new kind of observation of a land. Ryan has considered *Gardens in the Dunes* as “a subtly crafted history of nineteenth-century European and American imperialism,” and as she observes, Silko signifies the way that Whites have used to dominate Native Americans and their landscape. By describing Native American's delight while being in nature, she artfully reiterates their belief in regarding nature and the whole living beings as sacred beings.

Fevziye Gözde Değ, in her MA. thesis “A Dialogic Quest for Identity: Coming to Terms with the Present Through the Past in Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead* and *Gardens in the Dunes*,” claims that by cultural coexistence of Native Americans and Whites, Silko depicts a world different from the Native Americans’ past as they start to doubt their identity by adjusting themselves to new world. Native Americans have not only confirmed the sacredness of nature but also sought their physical and psychological health by nature: “[t]he Native Americans’ acceptance of the earth as a healer reflects their strong tie to nature” (70), while the others have welcomed technology. The environmental issues, ignored by Whites, become primary concerns for Native Americans and their attachment to natural surroundings.

Suzanne Ferguson, in “Europe and the Quest for Home in James Welch’s *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* and Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Gardens in the Dunes*,” deals with physical and spiritual losses of Native Americans. For Ferguson, understanding and forgiving sins of the past is possible according to Welch and Silko. As she maintains, Silko has demonstrated her protagonist, Indigo, as, “one of the last survivors of a fictional Colorado River tribe she calls the Salt Lizards” and by her return to her land, Silko connects Native American’s soul to nature (34). By considering Indigo’s travel to Europe, Ferguson asserts that according to Native Americans, all of the people in the past had honored nature and reflected it in their arts (36). Hence, it is possible to re-make home, and individuals can also overcome their grief by clutching to nature (50).

### **3. Theoretical Framework: Eco-trauma**

This research aims to clarify an interdisciplinary approach which includes ecocriticism and psychology. Trauma is taken from psychology and its interrelation with ecocriticism is identified as eco-trauma. Ecocriticism and trauma, as the main theoretical framework of this research, foster their immense contribution in literature of postmodern world. By investigating ecocriticism and trauma, the influence of these terms on the world after the wars will become clear. Survivorship in this outrageous world depends on the strife of humans to be at peace with the natural environment. Man’s relation with nature should not be considered as frivolous for the sake of persistence of human race in the century of turmoil.

To conceptualize a better compromise, ecocriticism endeavors to sow the seeds of hope in this hopeless world by investigating the reflection of natural world in literary texts of those writers who believe that traumatic reaction of human mind and body to discern the ongoing menace in environment is toxic and it causes great disquietude around the globe. This research is going to elucidate the substantial role of ecocriticism and it will shed more lights on the outstanding relations between ecocriticism and trauma. Moreover, the crucial role of nature and culture in the creation of traumatic end in the environment is going to be scrutinized. Eco-trauma, which is the result of human’s mistreatment with the environment, will put an end to the human being’s life on the earth.

### 3.1. Environmental Concerns from Buell and Glotfelty's Vantage Point

As a forerunner of ecocriticism, Lawrence Buell is interested in environment and literature especially American literature. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (1995) is his book in which he inspects the role of environmental imagination in literature to see the changes occurring in the relations between human and nature under the influence of reflecting ecology in literature, or as he mentions "ecocentric' way of being" in this universe (1). The silenced nature needs a voice to cry its traumatic condition as Buell writes down "[n]ature itself is an oppressed and silent class, in need of spokespersons" (20-21).

An outstanding key term that Buell expands is place and a person's loyalty towards it. Although some people consider that personal commitment to a special place results in better behavior with that place, Buell does not accept it completely and says: "Yet grounding in place patently does not guarantee eco-centrism" (253). What he intends to express is to signify place as a feature in human's nature: "I shall proceed [...] by expanding preconceived understandings of nonhuman environment as a dimension of personal and communal sense of place" (260). Buell desires to raise people's awareness to 'place' by comprehending its limitations and reasons for respecting a 'place' which affects humans and is affected by them too.

Buell, in *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond* (2001), intends to modify the importance of environmental studies in literature by focusing on the effect of physical surrounding and place on identity. He indicates reinhabitation and the function of human being in destroying nature: "Advocates and practitioners of reinhabitation [...] start from the premise that not only has the environment been abused, aspiring reinhabitants have themselves been wounded by displacement and ecological illiteracy so that they must (re)learn what it means to be 'native' to a place" (84). Reinhabitation requires mutual appointment and arrangement with a place's non-human nature and human; moreover, it welcomes the possible changes of identity. Although such a form of reinhabitation requires loyalty to a place, humans are not free in choosing it: "Indeed, toxic discourse claims the opposite: you are more entrapped than you think in a place more dangerous than you think. [...] [L]ives, especially those of nonelites, are inevitably emplaced" (129). Modernization compels humans to dominate the environment in spite of "technological bungling and 'natural' disaster" (130). Notwithstanding the effects of human on the environment, this environment forms and reforms human beings.

Cheryll Glotfelty is an outstanding figure in American ecocriticism and the connection between literature and environment is her intense interest. Not only is the concept of ecocriticism promulgated by Glotfelty, but also an anthology of ecocritical essays are assembled by her. Her works inspire humans to ponder about the planet and

our place in it by having ecological perspective. Her main effort is to present America's rich literary heritage and to provoke and nurture human's love to their place of living. Glotfelty expanded ecocriticism in the current century and presented suffering of nature due to the environmental crisis.

In *The Ecocriticism Reader* Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (1991- ) have collected essays that explore reflection and the influence of human's relationship with the environment in their writings. They believe that human beings are not only the solution of environmental problems but also part of the problem. In the introduction, Glotfelty mentions the undeniable role of culture in ecocriticism. "How then can we contribute to environmental restoration [...]? [Such] environmental problems are largely of our own making, are, in other words, a by-product of culture" (xxi). So, ecocriticism is related to the study of culture and cultural products like art, writings, and scientific theories: "Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture" (xix). Glotfelty indicates the relation between environment and psyche of humans. There is an undeniable interconnection between nature and humans' psychological state; hence, environmental crisis can cause psychological wounds.

Although development of the ecocriticism is traced by Greg Garrard, in *Ecocriticism* (2004), he mentions that "[e]cocriticism is essentially about the demarcation between nature and culture, its construction and reconstruction" (179), and as a result, his views are not discussed in this article as it is scrutinizing the relation of nature and culture. Furthermore, Graham Huggan's views are not also related to this article as he focuses on postcolonial ecocriticism in *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (2010). His views can be used by those researchers who are interested in post-colonial ecocriticism.

### **3.2. Caruthian Trauma**

Cathy Caruth's researches include psychology, memory, language, history and literature. A critical introduction was written to a collection of articles in Caruth's *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995). Moreover, by publishing *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* in 1996, she has admitted herself as one of the pioneer theoreticians in trauma. Caruth's intention is to scrutinize the effects and consequences of traumatic experience on psychoanalytic therapy. The impact of a traumatic experience is conducted to diverse features of culture like literature, pedagogy, film, and "social or political activism" (4). In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Caruth states that a response after a traumatic event is ineludible which may be appeared in "the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event" (4).

When a person is traumatized by any event or even an image, interpretation of the traumatic symptom is impractical due to the fact that the reality is distorted, or the reality is pretended to be ignored unconsciously, or even, in Caruthian terms, it can be repressed although it was wished before (4-5). Moreover, Caruth refers to Freud's opinion on the effect of dream in trauma and its treatment. According to Freud the dreams in traumatic neuroses push the traumatized person back into the traumatized event which panics him/her: "The returning traumatic dream startles Freud because it cannot be understood in terms of any wish or unconscious meaning, but is, purely and inexplicably, the literal return of the event against the will of the one it inhabits" (5).

The term 'trauma theory' was first appeared in Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience*. The origin of the term is traceable to Freud's theories on trauma and memory. In this book, Caruth clarifies trauma as "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed [...] hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (11). According to Caruth, considering trauma just as a consequence of destruction is not acceptable, basically, it is "an enigma of survival" (58). She believes that survival cannot be considered as a familiar experience because trauma can be repeated in dreams (60).

Caruth discusses that traumatic event's survival cannot be considered as fortunate. Repeating the destructive event is out of the traumatized person's control. The traumatized individual's history is not more than just repeating the destruction of the events recurrently. The mind's confrontation with the probability of its end and death is not possible. The psychology of the survivor is a means of approaching experience of trauma. She believes that survivor's life demonstrates the realities' repetition which cannot be grasped by consciousness (62). In "Parting Words: Trauma, Silence, and Survival" (2001), Caruth analyzes Freud's views on the astonishing role of dream in traumatic events. She proposes that Freud's main problem is the relation of nightmares and the life witnessing death. He wants to know the relation of experiencing trauma and experiencing the life itself. Trauma should not be regarded as repetition of a missed event that encounters death, rather it is a missed event that encounters life and survival. Traumatized person repeats unrecognized experiences unconsciously in his/her preserved life (10).

### **3.3. Eco-trauma**

Eco-trauma clarifies the relation between trauma and environment. Anil Narine, in *Eco-Trauma Cinema* (2015), states that eco-trauma encompasses the traumas that humans impose on nature or vice versa, and the harms and traumas inflicted on humans by nature (1). Damages, imposed on nature by humans, can result in ecological grief for humans. On the other hand, humans are not the only reason of psychological injuries. Origin of

the trauma can be nature itself by ruining human's life place or massacring people by natural disasters which can be regarded as the indignation of nature. The wrath of nature is more powerful than the human-made destructions in nature. Experiencing ecological disasters, directly or indirectly, startles and restrains humans and politically and psychologically cripples them.

Narine believes that whatever happens, nature continues to exist magnificently; 'Mother Nature' saves its beauty and power. Although nature's sublimity can awaken human's awareness and admiration towards the environment, it can impede practical and expedient response to environmental crisis. Industrialization, social media and the presented documentaries do not suffice to save the ecology. He maintains that eco-trauma is the outcome of a paradox which portrays current "age of anxiety" (2). Even though people are aware of the threats that awaits ecosystem, the responses are paradoxical. "[H]umans treat ecological harm as a trauma: something acknowledgeable that they work to repress in order to avoid its painful effects" (Narine 2).

According to Narine those people, who have experienced environmental disasters directly, are under the risk of being traumatized: "natural disasters are a common cause of psychological trauma, but only for those victimized first hand. [...] Those injured and faced with deadly circumstances themselves can emerge traumatized" (3). Psychological traumas can be regarded as the outcome of environmental disasters. Victims are not restricted to people who experience natural disasters directly, even witnessing the event indirectly can traumatize them.

As this research is an interdisciplinary one, mostly based on ecocriticism, Buell and Glotfelty's views are used to support the research. Caruth and Narine's discussions are utilized to show the interrelation between trauma and nature. Ecocriticism and trauma studies are joint together to make a unified theory to develop the purpose of this article. *Gardens in the Dunes* is analyzed through the critical perspective of these critics to express Silko's environmental anxieties and her effort to warn people to act eco-friendly to save nature. Silko's art of writing is essential in understanding the various environmental challenges the world is facing today. Native Americans, who are ecologically traumatized in *Gardens in the Dunes*, heal their ecological wounds by returning to their eco-friendly rituals.

### **3.4. Prominence of the Land and Quest for Place in *Gardens in the Dunes***

*Gardens in the Dunes* is an outstanding novel to represent the importance of nature, particularly landscapes, for Indians. Native Americans consider land as their eco-mother, their future, culture, and part of their identity. The prosperity of their culture depends on the land which is part of Indians' traditional territories, actually it goes beyond it. Strongly, their worldview and their beliefs are based on their relations with their

landscape. Buell, in *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond*, signifies that the existence of humanity depends on the environment in which he/she lives: “There never was an is without a where. Both the bad things and the good that happen to human beings and other life-forms self-evidently occur when their bodies are physically located somewhere, in particular locations. Environment is not an ‘other’ to us but ‘part’ of our being” (55). In *Gardens in the Dunes*, Indigo is delighted to be in her own land: “It was clear how much Indigo’s homeland meant to her” (409). Indigo’s laugh, in exultation by returning to her homeland, demonstrates her return to part of her own self.

The portrayal of ecological concerns of the Native Americans is central to Silko. Peyman Amanolahi Baharvand and Bakhtiar Sadjadi assert, in “The Upholders of Anthropocentrism and Biocentrism in Annie Proulx’s *Barkskins*,” that American literature “has recently drawn the attention of ecocritical studies” because they have portrayed “wilderness” that is described as “a vast area where the environment and its flora and fauna have remained untrammelled and intact, immune from the harmful interventions of human beings” (200).

By scrutinizing the relation between the physical environment and the Natives, David Rich Lewis, in “Native Americans and the Environment: A Survey of Twentieth-Century Issues,” maintains that the sacred land is used to explain American Indians. Their world is shaped by their environment and the earth’s rebirth and its productions are annually celebrated by Indians (423). Native Americans’ eco-concerns keep them away from destroying the land. Instead of demolishing, they identify and reshape their land to fulfill their worldly and cultural aims to keep the balance of their sacred lands. In this sense, “[t]hey recognized that they were part of creation and acted accordingly. Land and place were central to survival, to their beliefs, to their very identity. They shaped their environments which, in turns shaped them” (Lewis 439). They care the environment as they care their culture, identity, and tradition.

Native Americans portrayed reinvigorated eco-concern by facing ecological issues. Hence, the purity of the land is of paramount importance to the existence of Indians. By being close to nature, Indians feel secure. In the beginning of the novel Indigo feels pleased to be in nature:

Indigo came up from the pit house into the heat; the ground under her bare feet was still warm, but the rain in the breeze felt cool—so cool—and refreshing on her face. She took a deep breath and ran up the dune, where Sister Salt was naked in the rain. She pulled the ragged sack over her head and felt the train and wind so cool, so fragrant all over her body. (13)

Indigo considers herself a part of nature which can save her. Due to the sacredness of environment, Indians comprehend nature's beauty and holiness. It can be stated that utilization of natural resources is carried out consciously to avoid any harm to the natural surroundings. Indians try to maintain eco-balance among nature and humans; moreover, they have lots of things to share with the other people to teach them how to live "with the land" (Lewis 439). Native Americans' quest for place and their tribal sovereignty can be regarded as the environmental justice because part of Indians' identity is related to the environment in which they live. As it is mentioned by Glotfelty and Fromm, place includes "the frontier, animals, cities, specific geographical regions, rivers, mountains, deserts, Indians, technology, garbage, and the body" (xxiii). Interconnection of Indians with a place consists of the whole living being in that place.

The place, which is called home, can affect one's mentality as well as one's culture. Interconnection of Indians with a place consists of the whole living being in that place. One cannot separate Indians from their home, and studying their lifestyle necessarily involves studying their environment. Indigo's hometown is an ideal safe place for living with her family because gardens that are in the dunes are ideal places for taking refuge; in spite of the fact that, they seem to be arid. Indigo's grandma emphasizes that they should not leave their home: "If anything happens to me, you girls stay here. You belong here" (49). Indigo's residence is part of her identity, it refers to a place where she can see, hear, love, trust and imagine her future. Indigo's feeling of being envired in that place yields to the feeling of security. Erica-Irene A. Daes, in "Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Indigenous Peoples and Minorities: Indigenous Peoples and Their Relationship to Land," claims that "identity, personality and humanity" are fundamentally related to the place of life and they will not end by the death of people (7). In *Gardens in the Dunes*, Silko points out that Indians were forced to leave their homes:

Grandma Fleet did not like the idea of town, but with a baby and a little girl to feed, they hadn't much choice: to stay at the old gardens meant starvation. The others had already gone [...] Other women and children lived there, from places even Grandma Fleet had never heard of; they had been driven off their land by white settlers or pursued by the soldiers and Indian police. Their first years there were very difficult. (18)

Indian women were forced to work for the whites far from their homes. The refugees' number was increasing. Whites ordered Indians to change their place of life to get their lands and to control them easily. They were starving in their own lands because of imperialistic domination of whites over their environment which was their primary source of life. Eco-identity of American Indian and its relation to the self is evidently

portrayed in *Gardens in the Dunes*. Indigo and her family's identity is described by their land and the environment in which they live. Indigo's name is taken from a plant in the land: "she returned with a plant in her hand. [...] 'This is the plant I am named for'" (111). Although she has to live far away from her homeland, her identity and her root is in her land. It means Indians get their spirituality, culture, story, identity and even means of survival from their land.

Loss of land can be regarded as one of the most outstanding losses to the Native Americans over time, by seeing ancestral land cut into pieces, it changed to be more and more difficult for Indians to keep contact with their territories. Throughout history, Indians have adopted their life to nature rather than feeling the necessity to change their environment. The way they interact with the environment is taught in their culture which wants to keep nature safe and healthy by having Indians to live in harmony and balance with nature. Their culture is based on nature that is the source of Indian's life. Eco-culture has obliged them to take care of land, because the whole living organisms are part of nature. The reciprocal relationship between nature and Native's culture is penetrated into every Indian. The way in which American Indians consider and respect nature is unique because their domination over nature is ecological domination that cares nature and is conscious not to destroy the land. Hence, Indians see themselves as apart of nature not as its master.

#### **4. Intergenerational Eco-trauma and its Recovering by Rituals in *Gardens in the Dunes***

Intergenerational eco-trauma affects many Native Americans and this has been grown to be such a challenging state that Indians are still encountering. The intergenerational traumatic state of Indians is inseparable from their identity. Conceptualizing traumatic status of Indians, by the use of intergenerational eco-concern, is vital to realize the impact of ecological isolation of Indians from their lands while viewing their anxiety for the ancestor's lands. Angela Connolly, in "Healing the Wounds of our Fathers: Intergenerational Trauma, Memory, Symbolization and Narrative," mentions that "inability to dream, hallucinations in sleep and nightmares" can be considered as signs of intergenerational trauma (613). In *Gardens in the Dunes*, Indigo and her sister continually dream about their lost lands and their separated family:

At the school they had tied her in her bed to stop her from sleeping on the floor, and that night Indigo had screamed until she was soaked with sweat. Indigo dreamed the red garden and the white garden were growing in the dunes and Mama and Grandma Fleet and Sister Salt were all there with her. They were all so happy with her because she brought back so many interesting seeds. (109)

It is as though Indigo and her sister are obliged to dream the nightmares of their ancestors; and indeed, as Connolly mentions, even if the parents remember the less, the experiences transmit to the children, and they experience difficulties so severely (613-614). Indigo and Sister Salt, as the victims of trauma, comprehend the reality of the traumatic status of their parents and themselves because of losing their lands and families. Traumatized children encounter difficulties in diagnosing and healing the main source of their distress. As Zahra Ghasemi and others mention “trauma can be a permanent experience with unforeseen durability” because trauma is not the only anxiety of “the surviving victims,” it can affect the victim’s children and even their grandchildren (166).

Native Americans’ children, who were forced to attend boarding schools, have lost their contact with their own family members and tribes, replaced their native clothing with new military dress and got new identities. Besides, they were prohibited to use their native languages; and as a result, they lost their culture. Education of the children in boarding schools were used as a weapon against American Indians to get a comprehensive supremacy over Indians’ lands and culture to extinguish Indians’ culture and identity: “The older girls had learned to be good Christians from the time they first arrived at boarding school” (67). The children were forced to accommodate themselves to the cultural changes that Whites want. They were obliged to think and live not in the ways of their parents. Indigo and Sister Salt change to be healing figures and symbols for Indians.

Rituals has long played such a crucial role in Native Americans’ culture that they become an integral part of the Natives’ identity. A harmonious and indispensable part of Indians’ being depends on their beliefs and rituals. The Natives in *Gardens in the Dunes* insist on having their rituals because they desire the restoration of their ancestor’s traditional method of life in the natural surroundings. Native Americans’ rituals have been mostly misunderstood by the Whites; and as a result, they all have been considered as savage, uncivilized, and primitive. Silko tries to recover American Indians’ culture by telling stories about them. Their culture can be summarized in their land, their home, and their rituals.

One of the rituals that Silko mentions is gardening. According to Whites, Indians have owned more territories that were actually needed for survival, so they tried to reduce Indians’ lands, and they encountered the shortage of the food: “There was nothing to eat on the reservation; the best farmland along the river was taken by the white people” (17). Indians’ gardens are part of their culture and identity that are taken from them. Stephanie Li, in “Domestic Resistance: Gardening, Mothering, and Storytelling in Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Gardens in the Dunes*,” explains that gardening: “reveals basic beliefs about the relationship between humans and the earth” (19). Grandma Fleet asks children to treat the gardens as gifts which need attention and love because they are part of the sacred nature:

Sand Lizard warned her children to share: Don't be greedy. The first ripe fruit of each harvest belongs to the spirits of our beloved ancestors, who come to us as rain; the second ripe fruit should go to the birds and wild animals, in gratitude for their restraint in sparing the seeds and sprouts earlier in the season. Give the third ripe fruit to the bees, ants, mantises, and others who cared for the plants. A few choice pumpkins, squash, and bean plants were simply left on the sand beneath the mother plants to shrivel dry and return to the earth. (GD15)

Grandma is responsible to teach her children the ways to be unified and in harmony with nature to follow their rituals. By bringing together her tribal culture and eco-concern, Grandma shows that eco-concerns are part of their culture. Gardening has a healing power to Indians and so does to grandma. Although the garden in the dunes seem arid at first glance, grandma teaches her grandchildren to respect nature to make it flourish, and be a home. By their return, the natural environment, trees, flowers, and animals welcome them to recover their eco-traumatic losses. Indian culture can be summarized in Indian land, home, rituals, and ceremonies.

Dancing and storytelling can be named as Native's rituals. Wovoka, a Paiute prophet, declares that the solution for all of the problems of Indians is following the rituals. The Whites were so afraid that they could not bear hearing Wovoka's name, they have killed many dancers to stop their ghost dance: "The dance was a peaceful dance [...] As the people danced, great storm clouds would gather over the entire world. [...] The winds would dry up all the white people and all Indians who followed the white man's ways, and they would blow away with the dust" (23). Wovoka and the elders pay close attention to storytelling to young generation while stories convey Native's culture to them and remind them to resist against erasure of their culture: "storytelling also has the power to instill cultural values that in turn resist forces that seek to disrupt the unity of ethnic groups and destroy the memory of oppressed peoples" (Li 21). Eco-traumatic cures for Indians can be summarized in ceremonies, ritual dances in nature, and storytelling.

## 5. Conclusion

*Gardens in the Dunes* portrays Silko's eco-concerns and also the significance of nature for Indians. Eco-trauma can be ceased and recuperated by connecting meticulously to nature according to Silko in the novel. The correlation of all living creatures and nature with human beings is the main perturbation that is demonstrated and illustrated by Silko, who presents that ecological trauma of Indians is due to nature, and it can be cured by nature itself. Throughout the novel, Silko holds out hope for the survival of the Americans' nature. Significance of nature for Indians is proved by paying close attention to the traumatic state of nature because of the war, white's domination, and usage of technology. Hence, it is possible to state that nature is not a part of Indians, it equals Indians' being. They are identified and recognized by their region. Nature is the same as

Native American; and consequently, any devastating harm to nature results in deep distress for Indians. Their place of settlement has a crucial role in their culture and thus their identity. Not only do they suffer and experience trauma because of nature, they can be cured by it because the natural surrounding is their remedy. Silko is aware that bewildered Indians have to stick to their rituals and ceremonies to overcome their traumas.

Silko is primarily concerned with eco-concerns of Native Americans in Whites' society. Indigo's detachment from nature metamorphoses her psychological status and though her identity. Indigo's life is the story of Native Americans' indispensable connection with natural environment. Silko aims to show that psychological condition of Native Americans relies on their close attachment to nature. Due to the fact that the main claim of this article is clarifying and recovering eco-trauma, it can be concluded that nature itself is the solution of the traumatic status of American Indians. Silko has portrayed the land not as a natural environment but as the Native Americans themselves. To save nature, humans should save Indians' culture. The meaning of nature comprehends from the relation between Indians and nature. Consequently, in *Gardens in the Dunes*, Silko designates the harmony and interdependence of the traumatic psyche of Native Americans with nature.

## References

- Amanolahi Baharvand, Peyman, and Bakhtiar Sadjadi. "The Upholders of Anthropocentrism and Biocentrism in Annie Proulx's *Barkskins*." *ANAFORA*, vol. VII, no.1, 2020, pp.189-208.
- Buell, Lawrence. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1995.
- . *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond*. Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 2001.
- Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1996.
- . *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1995.
- . "Parting Words: Trauma, Silence, and Survival." *Cultural Values*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2001, pp. 7-26.
- Connolly, Angela. "Healing the Wounds of Our Fathers: Intergenerational Trauma, Memory, Symbolization and Narrative." *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, vol. 56, 2011, pp. 607-626.
- Daes, Erica-Irene A. "Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Indigenous Peoples and Minorities: Indigenous peoples and their relationship to land." *Economic and Social Council*. Geneva: UN, 11 June 2001, pp. 1-76.
- Değe, Fevziye Gözde. "A Dialogic Quest for Identity: Coming to Terms with the Present Through the Past in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* and *Gardens in the Dunes*." MA. Thesis, Başkent University, 2019.
- Ferguson, Suzanne. "Europe and the Quest for Home in James Welch's *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Gardens in the Dunes*." *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, series 2, vol. 18, no. 2, summer 2006, pp. 34-53. U of Nebraska P.
- Fitz, Brewster E. *Silko: Writing Storyteller and Medicine Woman*. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 2004.
- Garrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Ghasemi, Zahra, et al. "Trauma and Recovery in Shaila Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams*." *Critical Literary Studies*, vol. IV, no. 1, Series 7, Autumn and Winter 2021-2022, pp. 163-182.
- Glotfelty, Cheryll, and Harold Fromm, eds. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Georgia: U of Georgia P, 1996.
- Huggan, Graham and Helen Tiffin. *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*. London: Routledge, 2010.
- Lewis, David Rich. "Native Americans and the Environment: A Survey of Twentieth-Century Issues." *American Indian Quarterly*, vol.19, no.3, 1995, pp.423-450, *JSTOR*.

Li, Stephanie. "Domestic Resistance: Gardening, Mothering, and Storytelling in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Gardens in the Dunes*." *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, Vol. 21, No. 1, U of Nebraska P, 2009, pp. 18–37, JSTOR.

Narine, Anil. *Eco-Trauma Cinema*. New York: Routledge, 2015.

Ryan, Terre. "The Nineteenth-Century Garden: Imperialism, Subsistence, and Subversion in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Gardens in the Dunes*." *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2007, pp. 115–132. JSTOR

Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Gardens in the Dunes*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000.

Snodgrass, Mary Ellen. *Leslie Marmon Silko: A Literary Companion*. North Carolina: McFarland, 2011.

Yadav, Beena. "The Survival of Native American Identity in the Writings of Leslie Marmon Silko." Ph.D. Diss., U of Lucknow, 2015.