Chapter 4

Nations within the Nation

“As a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As woman my country is the whole world.” (Woolf 861)

The idea about the United States as a safe and free land is an imaginative construction which masks the poverty and inequality that generations of people are facing. The white Americans ignored the Native inhabitants and considered themselves as emissaries of a divine plan to uproot the natives from their colonies. That was suggested by Ronald Regan in his television debate with John Anderson:

[America] was placed here to be found by a special kind of people—people who had a special love for freedom and who had the courage to uproot themselves and leave hearth and homeland and come what in the beginning was the most undeveloped wilderness possible. We spoke a multitude of tongues–landed on this eastern shore and then went out over the mountains and the prairies and the deserts and the far Western mountains of the Pacific building cities and towns and farms and schools and churches. . . . and in so doing at the same time we built a new breed of human called an
American—a proud, an independent and a most compassionate individual for the most part. (Regan B7)

A product of the culture and world view transmitted by their ancestors, the American national character is directly linked to this egoism, individualism and selfish desire. The nation, which is conceptualized as large scale solidarity, is constituted by a rich legacy of past memories and the present desire to perpetuate that heritage. That is why Michael Billig defines a nation as “indicated, or ‘flagged,’ in the lives of its citizenry” (6). The nationalistic consciousness portrayed in the novels of Walker and Silko gains its value from the historical embeddedness and commitment of their thoughts. They give an imaginative twist to the past, whereby history becomes a complexly layered “social zone of representation” (Bennet 49).

Anderson has a lot to say about this concept of imagining the nation, which gains its true value when fundamental cultural leanings of antiquity lose “their axiomatic grip on men’s mind” (36).

For African and Native Americans, their history is more related to myths and stories than to the expeditions of conquerors that the whites glorify in their history text books. In the novels of Walker and Silko, myths are integrated with ideological discourses and historical narration. Through this process of integration, the present is often presented as a “bundle of meanings” (Barthes, Mythologies 110). When we analyze their observation
regarding myth making with reference to Barthes’ argument that myths too “have a historical foundation” (110), it can be inferred that we can demystify history by historicizing myths—“that is by treating them as human creations, produced in a specific historical time and place, in response to the contingencies of social and personal life” (Slotkin 80).

The life of an African American in America is centered on migration. Since the great migration of the early twentieth century, thousands of Southern African Americans moved northwards to cities such as Detroit, Chicago, Philadelphia, and New York. These urban experiences crucially transformed the texture of the African American reality. This transformation occurred due to their constant interaction with the white colonizers, who were almost always set against them on account of the contrasting characteristics of colour, religion, and race. Here lies the source of Anti-black racism, based as it is on the belief that blacks are physically and culturally inferior to the whites. Keeping this in mind, we can assume along with W. Bell that America carries with it the burden of the “National sin of slavery and the moral cowardice of perpetuating racial violence, divisions, inequities, and injustice by legal segregation and antiblack racism” (33).

One can talk about other ways of defining the boundaries of the nation. The term “Black Indian,” for example, is a word used to describe the Americans who possess traces of Sub-Saharan or Native American or
Indigenous American ancestry. The history of slavery would reveal that the Africans arrived in British North America during the seventeenth century as indentured servants and labourers. There they married other Africans or Native Americans or English settlers and raised families. By 1860, the Atlantic Slave trade had enslaved more than 3.5 million Africans in the southern United States. Interestingly, slave trade was ardently supported by religion through Biblical interpretations. The white supremacists made use of the interpretations from the Bible to perpetuate the discrimination against the Africans. The white racial ideologues propagated pseudo religious ideas and false cultural dogmas. Needless to say, the white Christian majority’s practices and preaching too never matched. “In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the United States, the ‘rationale’ for racial domination was primarily black cultural inferiority but was replaced by biological racist arguments in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As the United States entered the latter third of the twentieth century, biological racism declined and was supplanted by cultural racism” (Wilson 34).

American history represents the African American as a person born with a mask. He is masked because the American ‘consciousness’ yields him no real self consciousness. His double consciousness as an American and as a black, leads to a peculiar situation of two warring thoughts co-existing in
one body. W. E. B. Du Bois says: “The double-aimed struggle of the black artisan—on the one hand to escape white contempt for a nation of mere hewers of wood and drawers of water, and on the other hand, to plough and nail and dig for a poverty-stricken horde—could only result in making him a poor craftsman, for he had but half a heart in either cause” (13).

African American nationalist spirit gained its impulse from its past which was shattered by the violence and tyranny of the whites, and it articulates a “historical and political genealogy” (Carr 9). In a cultural context that is powerfully shaped by the ideologies of African American nationalism, the African American cultural theorists succeeded in breaking the white critics’ influence on their philosophy. In the theoretical constellation also we come across different nationalisms like civic nationalism, ethnic nationalism, black nationalism and cultural nationalism. American nationalist leaders exhorted the African Americans in America to strive for acceptance as a group in the mainstream. In the American political discourse black nationalists strive for self definition and interracial peace and social acceptance. Black nationalists always stressed historical particularity in their ideology. Rather than being passive, the black power movement is characterized by riots and armed resistance, and it addresses economic poverty, black statehood, and integration. Instead of submission before Euro American institutionalized customs, norms, standards and
integration the movement is dedicated to political autonomy. The black community in America constitutes an internal colony that follows its own values, themes and voices. This is clearly evident in black American folk elements and artistic forms, manifestations of a historically molded black unconscious or ‘soul,’ [which] exhibit, for instance, “a collectivistic rather than an individualistic ethos, a repudiative rather than an accommodative psychology, and an oral-musical rather than a textual tradition of discourse” (Leitch 294).

Within nationalist discourses women have an equal role to play. Their theoretical conceptualizations contextualize diverse thoughts pertaining to marriage, gender, family, and motherhood. African American women writers’ treatment of sexuality, motherhood and reproduction reflected the revisionary undertakings related to nation building from a woman’s perspective. The articulations of nation by African American women begin as a critique of the totalizing nationalist discourse, which never takes into consideration the active role of myths, folklores, and (her)stories, narrated from different perspectives. Instead, African American Nationalism, Pan-Africanism, and Afrocentricity, often promoted by male critics aim at the silencing of gender and sexual identity positions. It is in this context that prominent African American women writers such as Alice Walker, Gayl Jones, Toni Cade Bambara, Toni Morrison, Ntozake Shange, and Louise
Meriwether review the notions of black unity and revolution and champion a process of nation-building that takes into consideration the symbiosis of men and women, and the specific experiences of blacks and women. These writers started critically re-examining the conceptual framings of “women’s subjectivity, identity, and understanding of self in social environments that marginalize women’s experiences with abuse and victimization” (Davies 25). Walker’s *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970), Gayl Jones’ *Corregidora* (1975), Ntozake Shange’s *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide* (1975), Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* (1970), and Louise Meriwether’s *Daddy Was a Number Runner* (1967) are some of the texts that offered resistance against totalising ideologies.

Alice Walker examines some of the features of American history like its demand for freedom and the presence of the suppressed within a democratic system. She maps a landscape where individuals demand freedom from racial oppression within the nation. In her essay “Everything is a Human Being,” there is a dialogue between the author and old, palsied trees. The trees tell her that when it comes to human beings, trees do not discriminate; all people must share the guilt for the destruction done to the planet. The Native Americans view everything as inter-related and live in a respectful relationship with the land. In her novels also Walker criticizes
Wasichus (the term used by Black Elk to refer to the white and other non-red people) for their acts of violence on the land.

Walker laments the destruction of the nation’s forests and wildlife and denounces such atrocities as off-shore drilling, toxic waste dumping and nuclear arms production. She pleads for freedom and seeks justice for the entire earth. She expects our thoughts to be “on how to restore to the earth its dignity as a living being; how to stop raping and plundering it as a matter of course. We must begin to develop the consciousness that everything has equal rights because existence itself is equal. We are all here: trees, people, and snakes alike” (Living 148-149). Walker’s literary expressions are reflections of her world view and her love of life. They also carry a strong sense of commitment to the people. She dedicates her life to civil rights activism, and being a spokesperson for those helpless women who are subjected to ritual genital mutilation, she raises an outcry against the destructive acts perpetrated on Mother Earth.

Unlike The Temple of My Familiar, Walker’s earlier novel, Possessing the Secret of Joy (1992) discusses the abuse and sexual molestation that the women in the African subcontinent had to undergo. The novel foregrounds a political and pedagogic agenda. Female genital mutilation has been a part of the human rights agenda of the United Nations since 1958. After 1979, the World Health Organization (WHO) initiated several steps to abolish such
unhealthy practices, but it has produced lesser effects in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Walker dedicates this novel “with tenderness and respect to the blameless vulva” (Walker, Possessing iii).

The title of Possessing the Secret of Joy is taken from Mirella Ricciardi’s photographic book, The African Saga (1981). Irrespective of Ricciardi’s race or nationality, what really matters is the African readers in Walker’s novel and their response to this comment made by Ricciardi, “RESISTANCE IS THE SECRET OF JOY!” (Walker, Possessing 281). Walker’s comments on her people are significant: “Black people are natural, . . . they possess the secret of joy, which is why they can survive the suffering and humiliation inflicted upon them” (Walker, Possessing 271). In this novel Tashi celebrates her joy of resistance by refusing to be blindfolded during her execution, because she wants to look at the sky, to identify herself with the Narcissistic panther Lara, which leaned over and kissed its own serene reflection in the pond and killed itself.

M’Lissa, the circumciser considers circumcision “not as wound but as a healing” (Walker, Possessing 63). The Olinkan ceremony of circumcision is an instance of patriarchal oppression. Walker presents an Africa where the male and the female are forced to perpetuate this ceremony of negation. As Barbara Christian says, this novel speaks about the Afro-Americans’ demand for freedom of choice and life. Walker challenges the patriarchal
historical narration and writes in an offbeat style. “There is a sense in which the ‘forbidden’ in the society is consistently approached by Walker as a possible route to truth” (Christian, “Everyday Use”125). By making visible the foul practices prevailing in the community, Walker can be regarded as giving birth to what Frantz Fanon describes as a ‘literature of combat.’ Paraphrasing Fanon, one might describe Walker’s fiction thus: “It is a literature of combat, because it moulds the national consciousness giving it form and contours and flinging open before it new and boundless horizons; it is a literature of combat because it assumes responsibility, and because it is the will to liberty expressed in terms of time and space” (240).

This is an instance of Walker recreating the history of the world. This rewriting of history also leads to a dismantling of social hegemony. Tashi in Possessing the Secret of Joy agrees to be “excised and infibulated” as part of her desire to stay aloof from the hegemonic paradigms of British colonialism that dubbed circumcision as a superstitious ritual of the Africans. This is an expression of her “cultural independence” (Kanneh 110), a gesture that allows her to declare that she is “completely woman, completely African, completely Olinkan” (Walker, Possessing 60). Walker here deals not only with the histories of dismembered bodies, but with the history of the origin of acquired immunity deficiency syndrome (AIDS). Tashi, through Hartford, comes to know about the origin of AIDS. He used to supply monkeys and
apes to the white scientists for doing experiments related to the culture of a virus (which they used later to eradicate a whole group of people). The BBC report regarding the colonial clue to the rise of HIV says that “The arrival of colonial cities in sub-Saharan Africa at the dawn of the 20th century may have sparked the spread of HIV” (“colonial clue” news.bbc). This agrees with the fact pertaining to the connection between the spread of colonialism, the increasing number of colonial cities, their living conditions and the spread of the epidemic. Walker interprets the connection often made between the practice of genital mutilation and the spread of AIDS as a European male attempt to downgrade cultural practices followed by non-European societies. Against the hegemonic explanation given to the origin and spread of AIDS, Walker gives an explanation that is culturally linked. The female body is the landscape for nationalist reworking that involves practices like genital mutilation.

While Possessing the Secret of Joy expresses the theme of the physical suppression and obliteration of a biological need, The Third Life of Grange Copeland (1988) deals with the emotional and spiritual problems of the Afro-Americans. The novel begins with a description of Brownfield, who approaches Shipley for a job. The whites’ contempt for the blacks is evident when Shipley observes that “with young Brownfield’s muscles he could do a grown man’s work.” It is “with a mixture of awe and contempt” that he
realizes that “blacks developed earlier than whites, especially in the biceps” (Walker, Third Life 31). Walker very subtly introduces the theme of language when Mem, Josie’s adopted daughter, teaches Grange his master’s language of English. The novelist uses language as a trope for her characters’ fight against white masters. Later Brownfield marries Mem and after a short period of perfect happiness his life becomes the exact replica of the life of his father. The family saga of three generations analyses political problems and racial conflicts. Using the relations within a share cropping family as a point of reference, Walker analyzes the nationalistic spirit underlying the history of African America. Grange’s personal life, his thoughts and emotions are all direct reflections of the dehumanizing social structure of America, where an African is always an “other” before the white patriarchal masters.

Walker, while discussing the sad plight of the share croppers in Georgia, speaks for all the people who are under the cruel clutches of the white masters. No father is able to save his children from slavery. Still Brownfield prays. “He prayed for help, for a caring President, for a listening Jesus. He prayed for a decent job” (Walker, Third life 78). The people’s wish for a faithful leader, national as well as religious, is implied here. This is the heart’s cry of a suffering husband/father for national reconstruction. When Grange takes care of the upbringing of her granddaughter, he gives her an account of the actual history of Africa, the true history of Afro-Americans:
“They stole you from Africa . . . they brought you here in chains . . . they beat you every day in slavery and didn’t feed you nothing but weeds . . . they did nasty things to women” (Walker, Third life 197). In the tone of a historian, Grange narrates the suppressed history of colonialism. He prepares Ruth to face the struggle and to sustain her black self. This is a very slow process that later leads to her involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. She becomes one of the members of the group who fight against racism and apartheid. Walker outlines the historical details that led to the events in the novel in its afterword. In a nation where one half of the people are chasing the freedom withheld by the other through acts of violence and threat, no community, no family, no race, no nation or people can ever develop. Walker says:

Beatings, castrations, lynchings, arrests or imprisonments were daily events, as they are now in a similarly doomed racist society in South Africa. It is almost bitterly comic today, as we see our exploited, poisoned, depleted planet wobbling underneath our collective weight, to think that whole supremacists have actually thought, and in places still think, that they can acquire peace and security for themselves in the world by dispossessing people of color. (Walker, Third Life 344-345)
Walker depicts the hypocritical stance of Euro-American historians whose history textbooks constitute a distortion of facts. In her history of ‘The Tree of the Family of Man,’ Ruth can find all kinds of people. It presents the racial, social, and political hierarchy that one identifies in the social network. Ruth’s textbook carries the signature of a white girl named Jacqueline Paine. In the family tree, she also finds a black man. Walker points to the subtitles that have been given to the different races by a white child. Under the title “Americans” it is written: “Note: The Yellow Race. Chinese, Japanese, etc, and people who live far away from us, in the Far East” (Walker, *Third Life* 260-261). Below the picture of American Indians, it is written: “Our own American Indians. We saved from disease and wild primitive life” (Walker, *Third Life* 261). By the way in which traditional historians portrayed the Africans, they are not represented as belonging to any branch of the family tree, but emanate from a rootless branch, and there is only one word for describing the African man, “a nigger.” Such historical details create a sense of superiority in the white kids and they degrade the blacks based on their colour, race and religion.

If nationalism is the “process of formation, or growth, of nations, a sentiment or consciousness of belonging to the nation” (A.D. Smith 5), Grange is the agent who inspires such a sense of belonging in the mind of Ruth. Walker’s heroines have a thorough understanding of their history,
which is a history of forced labour. They have a firsthand knowledge of slavery, share cropping, domestic work and paid labour. Many of them have struggled for social change and a better future. They are partakers of oral histories and have a better grasp of their role as messengers of history. Ruth and Mem are paramount representations of this sensibility. In *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* Walker raises a number of questions pertaining to the history of blacks and native populations, and their displacement from their native land.

Grange Copeland and Ruth are representations of those survivors who cannot be enslaved, and who will keep on fighting. Walker identifies Ruth as a savior figure. South is a place which entraps, destroys and enslaves blacks, where one suffers perpetual physical and spiritual poverty. Grange tries to reshape his style of life by fleeing to another place, but later he realizes that all places are under the control of the whites. “He had found that wherever he went whites were in control; they ruled New York as they did Georgia; Harlem as they did Poontang Street” (Walker, *Third Life* 201). This is why he encourages Ruth to go to school and to explore the different possibilities of the world. He wanted her to leave Baker County by some means. This novel elucidates how the racial discrimination imposed upon a society affects the domestic life of ordinary Black Africans. Lawrence Hogue says:
In the production of Grange’s first life, through its selection, transformation and arrangement of facts and categories from the American and Afro-American historical past, *The Third Life* produces a particular ideologeme that is different from those made by dominant American discursive formations; the American social system, whose power is exercised by the white male, crushes and emasculates the black man. (91)

Grange receives history lessons from his first hand experiences and not through history text books. Harlem and New York become larger avenues for him to gain lessons in history and politics. He knows how the blacks are treated in reality. Walker deconstructs the national narratives of America by criticizing the unified and totalitarian historical vision propagated by the whites, and “interrogates the national narratives,” “social identities and historical forms” (Doreski 167). Grange helps Ruth to develop an unbiased historical perspective. By analyzing historical issues, Walker explores the historical vitality of the younger generation that might inspire them to dream and work for a better future. Even if the novel concludes with Grange’s death, the novelist presents Ruth as a metaphor of hope. Walker’s protagonists gain in historical awareness through various agencies. While Ruth gained her political consciousness through the history lessons
given to her by Grange, Celie in *The Color Purple* (1982) learns about her own history through Nettie’s letters.

In *The Color Purple* Walker again locates the story in the East African Olinka society which is patriarchal in nature. The novel consists of a series of letters which help the author in unravelling the characters and their lives. Celie’s letters throw light on the horrid conditions in a black family which is devastated by child abuse and domestic oppression. Nettie’s letters reflect the plight of the African societies that are anglicized by the white invaders and are converted to Christianity under the promise of salvation. The personal gets politicized through these letters. The novel celebrates African blackness. Celie’s letters speak about the whites’ discrimination based on colour and race. She writes: “Angels all in white, white hair and white eyes, look like albinos. God all white too, looking like the same stout white man work at the bank . . . God blow out a big breath of fire and suddenly Sofia free” (Walker, *Color Purple* 91). It is her female bonding with Nettie, Sophie, Shug, etc that helps Celie to liberate herself. Marjorie Pryse speaks about the female bonding in the novel:

In *The Color Purple* Walker moves folk heritage further forward, into a context in which loving women become the most successful ‘conjure’ of all . . . In *The Color Purple* black history becomes firmly rooted in the network of female
friendship. And wherever we find interest in folklore in novels by black women we also find stages in the tradition’s emerging perception that women have the ability to reclaim their ‘ancient power’. (17-20)

Walker presents the image of the blacks under the white master’s clutches. Celie’s letters indirectly proclaim that the whites’ skin is fair because of lack of pigmentation only and it is not a feature that one can be proud of. This is her response to the oppressive treatment that blacks suffer from whites due to their skin colour. Sofia’s observation that “White folks is a miracle of affliction,” (Walker, Color Purple 103) points to the same sentiment. The American nation is constructed on the concept of “whiteness.” “The construction of the ‘American People’ as white has served to justify and perpetuate the subordination of the African-American population as well as to assimilate certain immigrant populations and exclude others. In the course of this nation building process, class and race were conflated” (Basch, Schiller and Blanc 40). Walker’s retelling of black history suggests that the black Americans have a separate way of life that is neither Euro-American nor African. Their folk forms are reflections of “historically molded black unconscious” that exhibits “a collectivistic rather than an individualistic ethos, a repudiative rather than an accommodative
psychology, and an oral-musical rather than a textual tradition of discourse” (Leitch 294).

While Celie is empowered by her experiences of family, Nettie’s strength comes both from her family and society. Walker gives us a political reading of the Bible through Nettie’s letters. The letter goes like this:

Think what it means that Ethiopia is Africa! All the Ethiopians in the bible were colored. It had never occurred to me, though when you read the bible it is perfectly plain when you pay attention only to the words. It is the pictures in the bible that fool you . . . All of the people are white and so you just think all the people from their bible were white too. But really white people lived somewhere else during these times. That is why the bible says that Jesus Christ had hair like lamb’s wool.

(Walker, Color Purple 125-126)

Walker is involved in the process of inventing Americas by recasting the myths and rewriting histories. Nettie describes the inequalities and hardships that she finds everywhere. She says that the whites hindered the blacks from learning anything new and practised racial discrimination in their daily life. The novel offers a critique of the whites’ claims of racial supremacy and explores “the possibility of treating all people as one mother’s children—while remaining unremittingly sensitive to the distance
that often separates even the best of human ideals from real historical conditions” (Selzer 70). Along with racial segregation, her letters speak about the European exploitation of the non-European world. The letters in the novel are not just a metaphor, but are as significant as the whites’ historical documents and speak about the whites, their treatment of the blacks, their destructive acts, and so on. One letter goes like this: “The whole territory, including the Olinkas’ village, now belongs to a rubber manufacturer in England . . . . The ancient, giant mahogany trees, all the trees, the game, everything of the forest was being destroyed, and the land was forced to lie flat, he said, and bare as the palm of his hand” (Walker, Color Purple 156). These epistles, which are expressions of personal agony, deconstruct the political history of African America.

Meridian is another woman revolutionary who upholds the African spirit to fight till the end. While Nettie and Celie fight silently, Meridian is outspoken and frank in expressing her views. Harold Bloom regards Meridian as a novel that looks at the “paradoxes of Afro-American identity” (Alice Walker’s Color Purple 22). Meridian’s political involvement is a reflection of her unquenchable spirit to wipe out racial and social discriminations. Bloom observes, “To Meridian, black nationalism must dedicate itself to constructing a political and cultural context in which one might, indeed, enjoy appositive relation to national, identity, rather than a
negative relation to race” (Alice Walker’s The Color Purple 23). Both Almanac and Meridian deal with the stories of misshaped bodies and destructed selves. Silko and Walker discuss the themes of debilitated past and wounded pride. There are certain recurring elements in Almanac and Meridian. “Meridian sees the broken and bloody bodies of Black Elk’s people in her father’s photograph collection. Mr. Hill, whose property was once owned by Cherokees, collects various Native American memorabilia, including posed photographs of Native American leaders and actual photographs of massacred Indian women and children” (Walker, Meridian 39).

There is an image of community central to Native American spirituality and Black American holistic faith. Meridian and the twin sisters of Almanac act as spiritual as well as political visionaries and as agents of community building. The fictional works of Walker and Silko are both a prophecy and history at the same time. While Meridian presents late twentieth century problems, Almanac looks at an advanced global village. The present century is built on neo liberal, free market ideals that empower capitalism and the global market. It threatens the lives of the Third World people. In Almanac, Silko makes it clear how the global capitalists compel the local/tribal leaders to sacrifice their land and labour for the well-being of the rich countries. Globalization takes the same trajectory as colonialism and perpetuates oppression along the lines of race, gender and class. Meridian
explicitly looks at the confusions involved in the African American identity, caught as it is between the histories of settlement, displacement and cultural marginality. The novel exposes the loopholes in the official claims of American democracy, and criticizes the exploitative and repressive policies of the state, which are reflected in the politics that affect the masses in their personal relationships.

*By the Light of My Father’s Smile* (1998) is an exploration of the various threats that the concept of nation faces today. A celebration of sexuality, the novel also incorporates questions of politics into the narrative. Details of the European colonization, the destruction of the people’s heritage and the nation’s history are provided in the novel through the words of Robinson’s spirit. The spirit laments, “Few of them remembered the overthrow of their country’s monarchy by Europeans in a distant century. Their beautiful country occupied. Their king beheaded, the queen raped. Their country stomped on, drained, for over three hundred years” (Walker, *By the Light* 8). Robinson describes the conditions that forced him and his family to settle among the Mundo tribe. It is the church that sends him as a spiritual advisor. Robinson and his wife are under the mercy of the church as they have to continue their anthropological studies among the tribe. Mundo is a tiny band of mixed race of Blacks and Indians who fled across the border
during the Civil War. They are not considered as Africans or Indians, but are regarded as dark skinned Mexicans.

Magdalena is a revolutionary figure in this novel. Even though her father is a priest in the church, there is a point in the novel where Magdalena deconstructs the Bible. It goes like this: “There was a saying among the Mundo: It takes only one lie to unravel the world. And when our father, wearing his preacher’s hat, said God had said man had dominion all over the earth, the Mundo men had declared this could not possibly be true. Perhaps, they had said . . . it is the one lie that has unraveled your world” (Walker, By the Light 81). Along with the story of the enslaved Indians, Walker also introduces the story of the gypsies enslaved by the Europeans. They are bought and sold; they are insulted, tortured and even murdered for sport and pleasure. They are forced to work until their death. Mundo in By the Light of My Father’s Smile is a Mexican cultural group that represents the African and Amerindian bloodlines. Here Walker discusses how the policies of the whites adversely affect Afro-Americans and other ethnic minorities. Even though the novel moves like a pastoral elegy, it discusses the nature-culture opposition in the context of the Ethnic and Euro-American hegemony.

Storytellers and singers have an important role in moulding the nationalistic aspirations of Native America. The experiences of Natives have
formed the substance of their stories and songs from the days of colonialism. This is part of their resistance against the whites. Contemporary Indian literature continues this resistance tradition through the use of oral literature in their works. They write on topics like identity, survival, and protest and their stories are sagas that trace, rebuild and create histories. Indian life moves forward because of this tradition of telling stories and recreating myths. The Europeans who reached the Indian land started displacing the Indians to the reservations. Native Americans depend upon their indegenity and orality and resist the policies of assimilation, acculturation and annihilation, and make use of colonial languages to articulate history from their point of view. Nationalistic discourses are central to Native American literature that expresses the social, cultural and historical realities that surround the people. It is the Euro-American policies of expansion and appropriation that pulled the nation into civil war, and brought mass destruction to the ethnic populations. Their literary expressions are evidences of the authenticity of their nationalistic dreams.

Native American writers struggle against the “long history of enforced denationalization” (Lynn 86) and create a nation through their myths, stories and folklores. Native American politicians, thinkers and writers including Arvol Looking Horse, Mario Gonzalez and Vine Deloria, Jr., Birgil Kills Straight, Alex White Plume are involved in this struggle
against the Euro-American policies. Since the twentieth century there has been a revival of interest in the nationalistic paradigms with the development of the view that the nationalistic urges are rooted in a culture’s myths, its land and its geography. Raymond Williams expressed this view when he stated that “‘Nation’ as a term is radically connected with ‘native.’ We are born into relationships which are typically settled in a place. This form of primary and ‘placeable’ bonding is of quite fundamental human and natural importance” (180).

Native American women writers’ nationalistic voices emerged as a revolt against the conceptual representation of nation as a white, male and industrial entity during the late eighteenth century. Their struggle is against the hegemony of both Euro-American patriarchy and white American feminism.

Leslie Silko’s narrative style is linked to her culture and the Native American lifestyle, which is ultimately connected to nation formation. She critiques the Euro-American narrative discourses by telling stories of physically and spiritually traumatised individuals. Silko’s novels are concerned with Native American cultures and the bond between different native cultures. *Ceremony* (1986), for example, is the story of Tayo, a mixed blood Laguna citizen, who returns to the Reservation from World War II. He still suffers from post-war traumatic stress disorder. It has symbolic
connection with the disorder that comes over Laguna Reservation in the form of a drought, and over the nation in the form of rampant blood lust of the nuclear age. Tayo must undergo a ceremony to restore order to his personal and communal world. Its motive is to unite and integrate the individual with his fellow beings and ultimately with the larger community and the world beyond it. All ceremonies are meant to inculcate a sense of community which is the core concept of the tribal universe. Tayo’s illness represents the land’s disorder. Tayo’s thirst for personal health is linked to the need for wholeness and health in the Laguna nation and the entire world. Within Native America, United States waged war with the natives and at the same time offered political resolutions and acquired rights over the minerals of the nation. Kenneth Lincoln says:

Many Indian cultures were ‘removed’ to the “Great American Desert” during the beginning of the 1830s. This forced migration was more a diasporas under presidential decree and military escort. . . . Already settled in the West, the Indians resisted the intrusion. They militarily protested encroachment from Eastern tribes shoved west and an invasion of land-grabbing, gold-searching, buffalo-slaughtering, treaty-violating Whites who brought with them the railroad, guns plows,
fences, plagues, alcohol and the Bible. The West wasn’t wild until the whites came, Indians complained. (19)

The Indian wars lasted from the 1860s to the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890. The government intended to starve the Indians in the reservations by slaughtering two and a half million buffaloes kept by them. Native America, which is also considered as Buffalo America, respects bison. As the Native American critic Valerius Geist says, “Humans and bison still face the onrush of civilization, depletion of our natural resources, and a shrinking world. The buffalo is a symbol of failures and successes. Its history provides lessons to be studied and hope that we can move forward to healing our planet” (9). The white soldiers who committed several atrocities pushed the survivors to the seclusion of the waste land and issued coat and trousers to them. The survivors here suffer the worst hardships. They have the highest rate of national alcoholism and suicide, substandard housing and social services, infant mortality, tuberculosis and diabetes resulting in a shortened life span. Silko deconstructs the cultural imperialism of the whites and their attitude of technological superiority over their Reservations, which they use as a laboratory to test the effectiveness of their maritime strategies. In the end Silko situates her character Tayo at Trinity Centre, which is the locale for cultural convergence; he sees “the lines of cultures and worlds
were drawn in fat dark lines on fine light sand, converging in the middle of witchery’s final ceremonial sand painting” (Silko, Ceremony 246).

*Ceremony* discusses cultural themes along with the political dimensions of the U.S. demand for control of northern New Mexico which is in possession of uranium mining and Indian lands. The Laguna land is the primary source of uranium used for making nuclear weapons. In the novel Tayo’s feeling of being at home and the sense of belonging to the land derives from his participation in the practices connected with Native American culture and community. The central force of industrial capital in northern New Mexico is the presence of large reserves of uranium. It is central not only to the economy of the area, but to the economy of the nation. It is estimated that approximately fifty percent of the uranium reserves in the entire country is located on Indian owned lands in the West. The Grants Mineral Belt is a region of the North West part of New Mexico, which contains twenty-five percent of the uranium reserves of the national total. Navajo, Jemez, Laguna, Zia and Zuni own the land in the region. Only the Navajos and Laguna Pueblo have leased their land for exploration and mining. The mining operations require 13,279 gallons of water per minute. This affects the water supply on the Indian land. The radioactive pollution of the water is also a matter of serious concern.
Tayo’s union with the Laguna community occurs through the ceremony which provides a new paradigm for political consciousness. The novel unfolds his search for identity. Back from the battlefield, he wants to regain his identity of mixed ancestry, which has been torn apart by centuries of oppression. When Tayo explains his helplessness to the medicine man, the old man tells him about the wars that were part of history. Tayo was forced to attack soldiers, about whose identity he did not know anything. He is now totally worn out. His mental breakdown is because of disillusionment, a mental state that he shares with other buffalo soldiers who are the captives of colonial masters:

Indians wake up every morning of their lives to see the land which was stolen, still there, within reach, its theft being flaunted. And the desire is strong to make things right, to take back what was stolen and to stop them from destroying what they have taken. But you see, Tayo we have done as much fighting as we can with the destroyers and the thieves: as much we could do and survive. (Silko, *Ceremony* 127-128)

The bitter memories of war and its aftermath haunt Tayo. The novel presents a brief history of the Indians’ contact with the whites, especially the Spanish, Mexican and Anglo-American whites. It is the Anglo-Americans who ended the Mexican American War with the Treaty of Guadalupe-
Hidalgo, thus enabling the United States to gain control over the South West. Later the Pueblo natives are pushed back to the reservations. Silko depicts the hazardous condition of the Laguna reservation following the Second World War. The young men who are returning from the warfront are completely devastated. This is how Silko describes the attitude of the whites to the war recruits. “The war was over, the uniform was gone. All of a sudden that man at the store waits on you last, makes you wait until all the white people bought what they wanted. And the white lady at the bus depot, she’s careful now not to touch your hand when she counts out your change” (Silko, Ceremony 42). The young men get enlisted in the army just to get out of their marginality in the hope that they would get integrated into the mainstream nation.

Silko ingeniously depicts the way the army recruiter enlists the young men in the American side by giving them false promises. He says, “Now I know you boys love America as much as we do, but this is your big chance to show it!” (Silko, Ceremony 64). Rocky tells the recruiter that he wants to be a pilot. The recruiter replies, “Sure sure you enlist now and you will be eligible for everything—pilot training—everything” (Silko, Ceremony 65). It is through these tricks that the Americans trap the Indians. Lots of the Indians are killed and lots become alcoholic. Tayo is one of the many deranged Indians returning from the war. The story unfolds through Tayo’s
reminiscences, which in a sense permit him to realize that the ceremony described in the novel is a ceremony also of nation-building.

The Giant Serpent that comes as a messenger in *Almanac* appears in *Ceremony* also. It is in the course of his journey through the mesas that Tayo sees the yellow snake: “He could feel the motion pushing out of the damp earth into the sunshine—the yellow spotted snake the first to emerge, carrying this message on his back to the people” (Silko, *Ceremony* 221). Symbolic of the destructive mind-set of the whites, the snake draws attention to the explosion of the first atomic bomb. Old Grandma remembers how the newspapers described the incident as the biggest explosion that ever occurred in the world. During the World Wars the United States captured the native’s land and turned it into a laboratory for developing their destructive weapons.

Trinity Site, where they exploded the first atomic bomb, was only three hundred miles to the south east, at White Sands. And the top secret laboratories where the bomb had created were deep in the Jemez Mountains, on land the government took from Cochiti Pueblo: Los Alamos . . . still surrounded by high electric fences and the ponderosa pine and tawny sand rock of the Jemez Mountain canyon where the shrine of the
twin mountain lions had always been. (Silko, Ceremony 245-246)

In her novels Silko also speaks about urbanization as an important aspect of the destructive mindset of Euro-Americans. Destructive forces of urbanization and industrialization adversely affect the Native people. From the very beginning Tayo is alienated from his people and his traditions. He cannot come to terms with the fact that his mother is an outcast and his father is unknown. He feels overshadowed by his cousin Rocky and tortured by the violence he witnessed in the warfront. Readers can identify a stark contrast between the traditional values of the Indians and the materialism and blood thirst of the Euro-Americans.

Tayo remembers what happened at the time of European colonization and how the Europeans started mining the good old land for uranium. While Tayo takes a small walk along the arroyos he comes across areas of devastation. “He knelt and found an ore rock. The grey stone was streaked with powdery yellow uranium, bright and yellow pollen; . . . But they had taken these beautiful rocks from deep within earth and they had laid them in a monstrous design, realizing destruction on a scale only they could have dreamed” (Silko, Ceremony 246). The stories from Native American culture and reconstructions of its mythical counterpart have a close link to the wholeness that Tayo achieves towards the end of the novel. As Owens says,
“Fragmentation in Native American mythology is not necessarily a bad thing. . . For the traditional cultural hero, the necessary annihilation of the self that prefigures healing and wholeness and a return to the tribal community often takes the form of physical fragmentation, bodily as well as psychic deconstruction” (195).

Silko’s *Storyteller* (1981) also looks at the issues of search for roots and identity and nation construction. Silko narrates how the Europeans obliterated the rich tradition of storytelling through colonial practices. The Native American ambience and community life give greater thrust to the oral tradition of Laguna culture. But it:

. . . had been irrevocably altered by the European intrusion—
primarily by the practice of taking the children away from Laguna to Indian schools taking the children away from the tellers who had in all past generations told the children
an entire culture, an entire identity of a people. (Silko, *Storyteller* 6)

For Silko stories are not merely for the preservation of culture and psycho spiritual healing, but they also hold a community and a nation together. Her stories, historical retellings, legends and fragmentary tales
thus have a deep political significance. Through her novels Silko emphasizes
the significance of stories in the Native American value system and re-
evaluates the cultural basis of the American nation.

The cardinal story which narrates the whites’ exploitation of the land
is the one entitled “Storyteller.” Here the storytellers narrate the story of the
uranium mining in America that happened much later in the history. “They
only come when there is something to steal. The fur animals are too difficult
for them to get now, and the seals and fish are hard to find. Now they come
for oil deep in the earth” (Silko, Storyteller 22). Silko speaks about the
Alaskan Tundra and the natives who witnessed the European invasion and
exploitation. “The village people had gathered to watch the white men, and
to laugh as they drove giant machines, one by one off the steel ramp into the
bogs; as if sheer numbers of vehicles would somehow make the tundra
solid” (Silko, Storyteller 23). Silko begins her story of the twin sisters by
linking the myths directly to the land:

The Laguna people
always begin their stories
with “humma-hah”:
that means “long ago.”
And the ones who are listening
say “aaaa-eh.” (Silko, Storyteller 38)
“Lullaby” too is about the cruelties of the whites who snatched the Natives’ land from them. It discusses how the whites exploited the loyalty and hard work of the natives. The natives find their sole consolation in nature, which for them is the ultimate source of power and energy. The story ends on a note of prayer:

*The earth is your mother,*

*she holds you.*

*The sky is your father,*

*he protects you.*

*Sleep,*

*sleep.*

*Rainbow is your sister,*

*she loves you.*

*The winds are your brothers,*

*they sing to you.* (Silko, *Storyteller* 51)

As in *Almanac* and *Ceremony*, here also Silko offers a critique of the European invasion that goes by the name of nation building. Originally there was nothing European in this earth. As Homi Bhabha observes, the displacement of authoritarian elements, the eruption of changed conceptions of narration, the involvement of collective imperialist histories, and the eruption of “a range of other dissonant, even dissident histories and voices” (*Location of Culture* 6) should also be treated as part of nation-building,
though the nation in question might be different from imperialist conceptions of nation. Foucault says that power in modern societies operates not through the practice of direct authoritarian rule, but through the operation of knowledges and the institutional discourses that produce them. Power and knowledge are intimately connected. Silko’s stories of the neglected ones who do not appear in the traditional historian’s documents are part of a new knowledge system. Such instances are in plenty here:

Long time ago
in the beginning
there were no white people in this world
there was nothing European.
And this world might have gone on like that

...........
This world was already complete
even without white people. (Silko, *Storyteller* 130)

In the light of Pettman’s observation that “nationality and citizenship, like race and ethnicity, are unstable categories and contested identities” (62), one might suggest that the national identity that Silko’s novels represent is a fluid identity that cannot be reduced to the identity of a white, male U.S. citizen. Her novels redefine the borders of the nation “and
the construction of ‘women,’ inside and outside their borders, are part of the processes of identity formation” (Pettman 62).

*Almanac of the Dead* (1991) is another of Silko’s works that sprawls across five hundred years of the conquest and colonization of the Native Americans. It is a prophetic text that announces that the people of the Americas—the real nation—will not remain vanquished forever. The geographical locale of the novel is Tucson, where all evils sprawl and coagulate. In its breadth and rhetorical details, the book is more or less like the Bible. The novel can be considered as a historical document, a prophetic piece, a myth, an apocalypse, and also as a spiritual handbook. Even though the book is convoluted and full of circumlocution, it revolves round the common thread of the Native people of America reclaiming the land as their own.

Silko compels the reader to perceive the truth from a different perspective. The readers will come across different manifestations of colonization. In the novel we see how the slave trade has given way to organ trade in the era of globalization. Even if the novel is heavy with the stories of drugs, violence and unspeakable crimes, it concludes on an optimistic note. Silko depicts the ancient past of America before the arrival of the European masters. “Hundreds of years before the Europeans had appeared, sorcerers called Gunadeeyahs or Destroyers had taken over in the South. The people
who refused to join the Gunadeeyahs had fled; the issue had been the sorcerers’ appetite for blood, and their sexual arousal from killing” (Silko, *Almanac* 759).

In the novel crimes are committed against human beings and ‘Mother Earth.’ The Euro-Americans offer America poison smog and choking clouds, in return for their hospitality to strangers from different parts of the world. Even though the novel presents a bleak picture of reality, Silko hints at the return of the native. The message of the sacred macaws who guide the revolution through their intermediary, Tacho, is that tribal people must “retake ancestral land all over the world.” The Earth’s spirits want “her indigenous children who loved her and did not harm her” (Silko, *Almanac* 712). Another feature of the novel is the presence of characters who are estranged from any kind of family ties or stability that might fix them. Seese ran away from home at the age of sixteen; Sterling is exiled from his reservation; Root, Lecha’s boyfriend, is estranged from his family, and Ferro is abandoned by his own mother. Another feature is the disconnection of the people from the Earth. The Earth has been polluted, mined, blasted and bombed and weapons of destruction are forever increasing in number and potency. A vast majority of the characters are involved in crimes against humanity and nature. The novel ends with the hope that the people’s army of the South will be moving North, reclaiming the continent.
Silko considers history as a sacred text. The most complete history is the most powerful force. By providing stories and histories of the indigenous people of America, she gives a different perspective on history. Throughout the seventeenth century, European attack against Indians increased and Indigenous populations dwindled, and the colonial settlements in North America increased. Later their rivalry intensified and the Native American colonial lands were appropriated by the settlers. Eric Hinderaker and Peter Mancall describe this conflict as one “between European civilization and Native American savagery,” in which “the triumphs of Anglo-Americans were victories of good over evil” (7).

The description of the life of the Native American working class in this novel lead to a complex understanding of class and the role of genocide and colonization in the making of the U. S. as a racist, patriarchal, and capitalist nation. Silko’s narrative is about the Native American experience, emanating from class struggle and the fight against global capitalism. Her comment on racism is that “it is the only form of mental illness that is communicable” (Silko, Yellow Woman 102). In Part One of the novel, there is a conversation about the stone idols which are of the size and shape of an ear of corn. The dark grey basalt stone figures had been given to the people by the Kachina spirits at the beginning of the Fifth World. The natives carried the small stone figures during their journey from the North. With the
world wars and with the European invasion, these stone figures and traditional symbols are taken away from the Navajos, Pueblos and the Apaches by the White masters:

Indians had no vote in state elections. Indians were Washington’s problem. A muddy wagonload of Indians did not attract much attention . . . The Laguna delegation later reported seeing sacred kachina masks belonging to the Hopis and the Zunis as well as prayer sticks and sacred bundles, the poor shriveled skin and bones of some ancestor taken from grave, and one entire painted-wood kiva shrine reported stolen from Cochiti Pueblo years before . . . The museum of the Laboratory of Anthropology had received and was in the possession of stolen property. The white man’s own law said this. (Silko, *Almanac* 32-33)

Sterling, who is narrating the story of the Almanac here, goes on to explain what really happened in the Laguna land with the Indians and how the whites started mining the land for uranium. It is 1949, and the United States is in need of uranium for weaponry, for the Cold War. The World War II veterans are also home looking for jobs. For the first time the Pueblos realize that they will get such immense wealth by mining the earth. The appearance of the giant stone snake is the prophecy given to the people.
Central to her storytelling is the fabrication of reality that is essentially attached to the Earth. Weaver speaks about this reality as a kind of psychic homicide: “When Natives are removed from their traditional lands, they are robbed of more than territory; they are deprived of numinous landscapes that are central to their faith and their identity, lands populated by their relations, ancestors, animals, and beings both physical and mythological” (Silko, *Almanac 38*).

The central tension in *Almanac of the Dead* concerns the need for a psychic and geographic space in which one can construct one’s authentic identity. The complex narrative of *Almanac* is centered around Tucson spanning nearly five hundred years, connecting the continents of North and South America, Africa, and Europe. This is a postmodern dystopian fiction, where more than seventy characters from different social contexts come together and where disproportionate wealth, exploitative sexuality, and corrupt individualism subsume community relationships and collective memory. The characters in *Almanac* are defined by eugenic thinking and historical ideas of race betterment, targeted population control, and sexual sterilization with modern medical expertise and ruthless capitalism. Silko looks at the most destructive aspects of the European intellectual legacy which proclaims the doctrine of human purity practiced through genocide and cultural erasure.
Against this hegemonic drive toward ethnic purity, Silko proposes a heterogeneous worldview that accepts differences and understanding of differences as essential to individual survival. Her representations of disabled and queer characters like Lecha, Sterling, Seese, Beaufrey, Roots, etc suggest that border subjectivities may develop from experiences of humiliation and mutilation as much as from ethnicity or nationality. These representations often disrupt the assumption that any specific corporeal hybridity guarantees one's ability to understand, accept, or value differences.

*Almanac of the Dead* presents digital diasporas, where each of the characters experiences the existence of an imaginary homeland. The number of homeless migrant workers and the unemployed in the urban centers of the West is higher in the present century. Now the western capitalists are colonizing the space. It is the peak time of virtual realities, cyber space, virtual communities, and the World Wide Web. Howard Rheingold describes this world of hyperreality thus:

Think of cyberspace as social petri dish, the net as the agar medium, and virtual communities, in all their diversity, as the colonies of micro organisms that grow in petri dishes . . . whenever CMC technology becomes available to people
anywhere, they inevitably build virtual communities with it, just as micro organisms inevitably create colonies. (6)

The concept of space is articulated through the Derridean term, “techno-tele-media apparatuses” which points to the fluidity of national frontiers due to various innovations in information and communication technologies. Human beings repeat the violence inherent in the creation of nations through acts of war. Through war against the weaker nation—Mexico in 1848, the United States acquired the South West, which includes the states of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, Utah, California, and Nevada. The violence that affected the Native American states continued “during the Gold Rush period with the lynching and murdering of Californio, Mexican and Latin American miners, ranchers and others who got in the way of the new colonization process. Violence was ever present in the depression of thousands of acres of land from the Mexican and Californio landowners” (Aldama and Qui nonez vii).

When the United States acquired great expanses of land from the Mexicans, they needed strong bodies to work in the land. They recruited millions of Mexicans throughout the past one hundred and fifty-two years to till, plough and irrigate the land. They exploited the Mexican labour, and quite often violence erupted against the migrating Mexicans. There was a huge flow of politically displaced refugees, immigrant workers, and other
exiled groups. The First world nations who exploited these labourers view the flow of the immigrants from the Third World nations as undesirable, parasitic, and a threat to the nation. Thus history ultimately becomes a construct of the white historians. Keith Jenkins comments about this aspect of history:

The fact that history *per se* is an ideological construct means that it is constantly being reworked and reordered by all those who are variously affected by power relationships; because the dominated as well as the dominant will also have their versions of the past to legitimate their practices, versions which have to be excluded as improper from any place on the agenda of the dominant discourse. (17-18)

When the settlers hoarded wealth and appropriated the land, there were only less number of Laguna people who were really affected by their atrocities. As Silko says, “The Laguna people had heard something about ‘The Crash.’ But they remembered ‘The Crash’ as a year of bounty and plenty for the people” (Silko, *Almanac* 41). Seese retells how the masters ill-treated even kids. In the villages in Mexico and Guatemala, they killed little children and babies. “She was rattling off what she was seeing: trash cans are stuffed with newborns. Garbage men in Mexico City find four hundred fetuses and dead newborns each day, not counting the ones found floating
face down among the water lilies in fountains outside the presidential palace” (Silko, *Almanac* 47). In Part Two of the novel entitled “Mexico,” we get to know the native’s idea about the Europeans. Silko explains the Native’s indignation at the European attitude and their beliefs and systems. She laughs at their God and their patriarchal Christian notion about God.

The ancestors had called Europeans “the orphan people” and had noted that as with orphans taken in by selfish or cold hearted clans people, few Europeans had remained whole. They failed to recognize the earth was their mother. Europeans were like their first parents, Adam and Eve, wandering aimlessly because the insane God who had sired them had abandoned them. (Silko, *Almanac* 258)

Silko re-considers the myth of civilizing a virgin land as narrated by Scott Fitzgerald in *The Great Gatsby* as a farce. The white intruders who violate the chastity of the American land rewrite American history as a history of mass murder, forced displacement and cultural suppression. The white masters who capture the natives for land and treasures write a gory national history and recreate the myth of the noble savage. As it is observed in *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923), this “desire to extirpate the Indian and the contradictory desire to glorify him” are rampant among the whites (Greenspan, Vasey and Worthen 43). The majority of the white
people who live in contact with the Indians would like to see this Red brother exterminated, not only for the sake of grabbing his land, but because of the silent, invisible, but deadly hostility between the spirits of the two races. There is a white minority who intellectualizes the Red Man and praises his accomplishments. But this minority is mostly a high-brow section which views everything with contempt.

In the chapter entitled “Army of the Homeless” in the Third Part of the novel, we come across a series of characters, such as Rambo, Roy, and Trigg who work together to retake stolen possessions and land from the affluent. Silko also points to the “organ” trade that is going on in Africa. In the global village, as Silko says, “biomaterials – the industry’s preferred term for fetal-brain material, human kidneys, hearts and lungs, corneas for eye transplants, and human skin for burn victims” (Silko, Almanac 398). This trade secretly takes away organs and plasma from homeless Indians and blacks:

Frozen human organs, less reliable, sold for a fraction of freshly harvested hearts and kidneys. Of course fetal brain tissue and cadaver skin were not affected by freezing. Peaches said Trigg bought a great deal in Mexico where recent unrest and civil strife had killed hundreds a week. Mexican hearts
were lean and strong, but Trigg had found no market for dark cadaver skin. (Silko, Almanac 404)

Africans and Native Americans share a history that has misrepresented and devalued them. We come across the black veteran, Clinton, in the chapter “First Black Indian.” Clinton gives a serious talk on slavery and the African people. He says that no black man will ever betray his country.

Clinton says the AIDS virus is developed in a bio warfare laboratory by the US government and is stolen by the military personnel sympathetic to white supremacists in South Africa. Naturally they had been careful to set AIDS loose in the African controlled states; whites in South Africa would never have risked setting loose the virus on their valuable labor force. (Silko, Almanac 405)

Silko makes the novel a historio-political text by weaving the threads of history and politics for narrating the story of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King and the first director of FBI, John Edgar Hoover in the same plot. This part of the book links the African and Native American history with their shared tribal history. Clinton in the novel speaks about the Vietnam War as the white man’s business where the whites enlisted the black men to do dangerous and nasty things. He narrates how the white
men scheme and manipulate, keep Africans and Natives from realizing the power that they possess. In this part Clinton says that Marx got his ideologies of communism and collective welfare from Native Americans. He says: “Clinton swears he is no Marxist. African and other tribal people had shared food and wealth in common for thousands of years before the white man Marx came along and stole their ideas for his ‘communes’ and collective farms” (Silko, Almanac 408).

Clinton speaks about the Vietnam War as a long, bloody conflict that ended with the United States’ first major military upset, and had huge national and global ramifications. President Kennedy was assassinated during the course of the war leaving the chaotic nation in the hands of his successor, Lyndon B. Johnson. Later Johnson also gained support in the Congress, which on August 7, 1964, passed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, thereby granting limitless military power to the President. There were frequent and deadly air strikes, and the bombers used napalm and other deadly chemicals like Agent Orange. Both military and civilian targets were attacked and they didn’t even spare the flora and fauna of the place.

The Vietnam War saw the highest proportion of blacks ever to serve in an American war. During the height of the U.S. involvement, 1965-69, blacks, who formed 11 percent of the American population, made up 12.6 percent of the soldiers in
Vietnam. The majority of these were in the infantry. . . . But although African Americans have participated in all American wars, they have sometimes faced almost as bitter a hostility from their fellow Americans as from the enemy. (Chambers 200)

Clinton considers the Vietnam War as a snare set by the English men to trap the Black man. Silko incorporates the fictional and real characters like Clinton and Lyndon Johnson to unravel the history and politics of the Vietnam War. She retells the stories of the assassinations in the war, and of the Green Berets introduced by President John F. Kennedy. She calls the white men 'toads'; "Clinton had seen the white toads, Lyndon Johnson and his generals smacking their lips at all the splattered brains and guts of black and brown men" (Silko, Almanac 407). Clinton and his team (Army of the Homeless) seize the radio stations of the city. He wants the people of the United States to reclaim democracy. He wants to dedicate the first broadcast to the children born to the escaped African and Native American slaves. Through descriptions of the African Ogou beliefs, he links the modern generation of African Americans to their rich heritage. Clinton prays to Ogou, the African god of fire and war. "Ogou, Warrior and Metal maker, . . . Ogou, we suffer a great deal in this battle with our oppressors" (Silko, Almanac 413).
Clinton as a person values history and the significance of learning history. When he traces the history of slavery, he says that everyone is a slave to some other person or to something. Even if man is born free, most people are not free. He says that the first slaves that Europeans kept were white. The history of the Cherokee Indians informs us that they were also once slave owners. All these things happened before the whites captured the natives and colonized them. So Cherokee ancestors also once enjoyed the power of their wealth, they too had mansions and education once, they too possessed black and white slaves. Clinton links the sad plight of history and politics with the growing tendency of the white masters to take over the valuable land and wealth of other nations, in the name of the defenders of planet earth. European scholars blame the earth’s pollution not on Industrial wastes—hydrocarbons and radiation, but on overpopulation. It is no coincidence that the Green Berets originated in Germany. “‘Too many people’ meant ‘too many brown-skinned people’. . .‘Deep ecologists’ invariably ended their magazine ads with ‘Stop immigration’ and ‘Close the borders’” (Silko, Almanac 415).

Clinton links the holocaust with American colonization.

“Lampshades made out of Native Americans by the conquistadors; lampshades made out of Jews. Watch out African Americans! The next lampshades could be you” (Silko, Almanac 415). Clinton lists out the facts
and the cruelty behind the white’s slave trade. The slave masters mutilated and slaughtered the slave women and children. He says that slavery was there in various European countries and even in China and Arabia. The White masters in America kept the slaves to satisfy their animal pleasure. Clinton says:

Nowhere had so many slaves been consumed so lavishly or so quickly. Child rape and murder had been perfected in the New World by European slave owners, who had later returned to Europe infected with bloody compulsions they had indulged in the colonies, hidden away from the eyes of their peers and their God as they smeared the fresh blood of slaves on their thighs and genitals. (Silko, Almanac 425-426)

Almanac of the Dead presents a relentless criticism of the corruption in European culture that centers upon money, power, sexuality, and a debased phallocentric order. Some of the characters of Silko draw upon the elitism of eugenic thinking to justify their cruelty. For example, General J., part of a powerful Mexican cadre, is a self-proclaimed scholar of castration and sterilization techniques, who proposes to his friends that illegal refugees be “gunned down from the air like coyotes or wolves” (Silko, Almanac 495). His friend Menardo, a disavowed Indian, agrees, and actively disparages his own people as lazy and destructive thieves. Rejecting his indigenous roots,
Menardo builds up a financial empire and provides exclusive armed protection to wealthy Mexicans, most of whom are of European descent.

“Seeing social position and wealth as rightful entitlements of innate superiority, these characters consider monitoring and controlling inferior people-groups they refer to in terms of hordes and masses—as their personal responsibility” (Jarmann 150). Vine Deloria Jr speaks about the cruel and cunning nature of the Anglo Americans when they portray Indian characters in their movies:

Indians were America’s secret weapon against the forces of evil. . . . With the Korean War era and the movies made during the middle 50s, other minority groups began to appear and Indians were pushed into the background. This day was the hay day of the ‘All-American Platoon.’ It was the ultimate conception of intergroup relations. The ‘All-American Platoon’ was a ‘one each’; one black, one Mexican, one Indian, one farm boy from Iowa, one Southerner who hated blacks, one boy from Brooklyn, one Polish boy from the urban slums of the Midwest, one Jewish intellectual, and one college boy. Every possible stereotype was included and it resulted in a portrayal of Indians as another species of human being for the first time on moving pictures. (We Talk, You Listen 36)
Almanac emphasizes the presence of indigenous people and African slaves who are now dead; it is an alternative history of the displaced and dispossessed groups in America. The corruption, destruction, oppression, exploitation and manipulation gripping the American world is narrated in detail in this novel. It is a representation of the country’s moral degradation and cultural anarchy marked by suicides, homicides, infanticides, genocides, racism, organ and drug trafficking, assassinations, prostitution, sexual assaults, sex changes, female circumcision, abortions, foetal experiments, nuclear exploitation, pornography, movement of illegal immigrants, pedophilia, and environmental abuses.

Silko gives an account of American history that is based on denial and oppression. Slavery in America is an institutionalized socio-economic system that breeds rape and physical abuse. Silko’s novel privileges polyvocalities and alternative viewpoints to expose institutionalized hegemonic histories of the American world which includes the power of Federal Indian policies on tribal peoples, stories of illegal immigrants, war veterans and other such untold tales. Silko is sarcastic about the attitude of the Cuban Marxists who think that Indian villages are hotbeds of tribalism and native religion. In the chapter “Angelita La Escapia Explains Engels and Marx” Angelita delivers a speech. She says that the Natives are waiting for a tidal wave of history to sweep them along. She is not bothered whether they
are following any ideology, or any philosophers. They have only one motto in their life and that is “We must protect Mother Earth from destruction” (Silko, *Almanac* 518).

The Christian missionaries who reached Native America are more interested in destroying the Native American beliefs and religious practices. Angelita remembers how the Catholic nuns used to narrate malicious stories about the benign and gentle Quetzalcoatl. As they used Christianity as a weapon of colonization, they always distorted native beliefs. “The nuns had taught the children that the Morning Star, Quetzalcoatl, was really Lucifer, the Devil God had thrown out of heaven. The nuns had terrified the children with the story of the snake in the Garden of Eden to end devotion to Quetzalcoatl” (Silko, *Almanac* 519). Angelita remarks how Marx learned about Native American communal societies. He learned about societies in which everyone ate or everyone starved together, where everyone stood side by side, whether it was a human being or an insect or a river or a flower. He is amazed by the holistic approach of the people and the element of synergy found everywhere.

Towards the last section of the novel, the characters that appeared in the first chapters reappear. Serlo comes back with a new plan to make a new abode. When the Earth gets depleted of all its resources, the intelligent human beings plan to exploit the next planet. This is clear from the
arguments of Serlo. His interest is in creating an Alternative Earth Module. He wanted to create such a module loaded with earth’s uncontaminated soil, water and oxygen, which would be launched by high-orbit rockets around the earth. Serlo wants to create a nation out of his own distant cousins. “Serlo was anxious to get his institute under way and to obtain sperm contributions from European males of noble birth lest rare and distinguished lineages disappear without issue” (Silko, Almanac 547).

Silko concludes the novel by describing the war that has been going on in Mexico to regain the land. Even if the war is between two nations or many nations, casualties are the poor people starving to death. The people believe in prophecies which proclaim that Europeans in America would disappear and at last the natives would retake the land. Silko describes how the Europeans came and exploited the Mexican cities and its resources. Tucson and Arizona are fleeced of their resources. Tucson is now a “ghost town” or “ghost city” (Silko, Almanac 661).

Silko considers the “heterogenous interfusions” in the novel by foregrounding “the internal complexities and variations” in the population. The Americans are doubly displaced, because American history involves racial exclusions. The American “others” were exterminated through genocide, and the Euro-Americans enriched themselves through racial and economic exploitation (Ackermann 4-10). The struggles of the Indians
continue along the continental national borders and they are the product of historical forces along with the movements like “Indigenous transnationalism” (Adams 39). Contemporary Native Americans’ desire for solidarity across national lines rests uneasily against the nationalist assumptions underlying tribal claims to land and sovereignty, where the fundamental contradictions pertaining to border crossings and nation formation exist.

The last part of the novel entitled “One World, Many Tribes” is about an international holistic healers’ convention. Here all the spirits as well as living beings rejoin. They return to the Mother Earth, without any “blasting, digging, or burning” (Silko, Almanac 710). Silko introduces other real-life characters like Wilson Weasel Tail, who speaks about poetry. The atrocities committed by the Europeans are narrated by Yoeme, who remarks that the wounded Europeans in America dressed up their wounds using the fat of the murdered Indians. Lecha acquires these details from old Yoeme, who taught her on the origin and the ultimate end of earth:

The earth would outlast anything man did to it, including the atomic bomb. . . . The earth would have its ups and downs; but humans had been raping and killing their own nestlings at such a rate. . . . The humans would not be great loss to the earth. The energy or “electricity” of a being’s spirit was not
extinguished by death; it was set free from the flesh. Dust to
dust or as a meal from the pack rats, the energy of the spirit
was never lost. Out of the dust grew the plants; the plants were
consumed and became and became muscle and bone; and all
the time, the energy had only been . . . lost or destroyed. (Silko, 
*Almanac* 718-719)

Silko gives a picture of the historical Ghost Dance, which is a religious
movement that has been incorporated into the Native American life and
faith. It is first performed in accordance with the dictates of prophet
Wovoka, who later becomes Jack Wilson. He prophesies a peaceful end to
white American expansion while preaching messages of clean living, honest
life, and cross-cultural cooperation. The best known facet of the Ghost Dance
movement is the role it reportedly played in instigating the Wounded Knee
massacre of 1890. Silko in *Almanac* looks into the concepts of rootedness,
migration and indigenous internationalism. To some extent this novel is on a
postmodern dystopia, which practices organ trade, terrorism, space
colonialism and cultural displacement. The journey that the characters
undertake is a journey of awareness, imagination and self criticism. *Almanac*
presents an alternative search for tradition and history which moves against
the logocentric and technocratic thought by rejecting centralisms. It is a
search for history and roots. This search for history becomes a search for
one’s existence. The novel is a powerful amalgamation of technical vigour
and linguistic excellence. While *Ceremony* deals with the struggle and existential angst of an individual, *Almanac* deals with the survival angst of whole Native Americans, Afro-Americans, Latinos, and Mexicans. *Ceremony* invokes a healing procedure, whereas *Almanac* deals with re-vision of world history.

Silko unsettles the Euro American frontiers and political theories by depicting the long history of Native Americans and their large scale migrations. In the process of the re-emergence of tribal identities, the Native Americans cross the boundaries created by Euro-Americans. James Mooney provides a different interpretation to ghost dance: “The great underlying principle of the ghost dance doctrine is that the time will come when the whole Indian race, living and dead, will be reunited upon a generated earth, to live a life of aboriginal happiness, forever free from death, disease and misery” (777). Silko speaks about those anthropologists who misinterpreted the Ghost Dance by distorting the truth. She says:

Moody and other anthropologists alleged the Ghost Dance disappeared because the people became disillusioned when the ghost shirts did not stop bullets and the Europeans did not vanish overnight. But it was the Europeans not the Native Americans, who had expected results overnight; the anthropologists, who feverishly sought magic objects to
postpone their own deaths, had misunderstood the power of the ghost shirts. Bullets of lead belong to the everyday world; ghost shirts belong to the realm of spirits and dreams. The ghost shirts give the dancers spiritual protection while the white men dreamed of shirts that repelled bullets because they feared death. (Silko, *Almanac 722*)

The white Eurocentric people never understood the idea that the Ghost Dance is to reunite living people with the beloved ancestral spirits who lost their life in the five-hundred-year war. Wilson lists out statistical details of the masses wiped out from earth by the Europeans. He says that the population of Native Americans was more than seventy million when Europeans first set their foot on their land. After one hundred years, only ten million people were able to survive. Now sixty million dead souls are struggling to retake the land from the European clutches. As Calabazas says in another chapter, Native American people have been on the American continent for thirty thousand years ago, whereas the Europeans have been there for five hundred years only. Wilson sings about the Ghost Dance like this:

*We dance to remember*

. . . to remember how each passed

To the spirit world
. . . we dance and we do not forget all the others

Before us

the little children and the old women who fought

and who died

resisting the invaders and destroyers of Mother

Earth. (Silko, *Almanac 722*)

In “Green Vengeance—Eco-Warriors,” Silko lists out the eco warriors’ plans to take revenge on the United States for its policies. Eco warriors in the holistic convention give a presentation about the US space station and the biosphere tycoons who rapidly deplete the earth’s resources. Eco-warriors depict how the European masters create space colonies at the expense of Third World nations. They preserve clean water, soil and the healthy animals and plants to maintain a clean biosphere which is expected to safeguard them from earth’s pollution. They all emphasize the need of an “international coordinated effort” (Silko, *Almanac 731*). Their plan is to retake and to re-consecrate the land to the spirits of Ogoun and Damballah, to all the native African and American spirits.

We can find a harmonizing approach in the last part of the novel, where the characters scattered in various archives of history come together for a common cause. Calabazas, Barefoot Hopi, Clinton, Lecha, Zeta, Yoeme, Wilson Weasel Tail, La Escapia, Angelita, Tacho, Rambo all join hands to
revoke the land. Silko, through Clinton’s diary, brings before us the famous American Marxist historian and political activist Herbert Apthekar. She substantiates each of the arguments made by her fictional characters with the support of historical details. Clinton gives the details with dates about the slave uprisings. It is in the chapter entitled “Rise Up!” that Angelita La Escapia finds the drawback in the teachings of Engels and Marx. There are activists who postulated ideologies, after reading Native American communal economies and cultures without realizing the true value of Mother Earth. Their flaw lies in the fact that they never realized that the earth was mother to all beings, and they had not understood about the spirits. “But at least Engels and Marx had understood the earth belongs to no one. No human individuals or corporations, no cartel of nations, could own the earth; it was the earth who possessed the humans and it was the earth who disposed them” (Silko, Almanac 749).

The inter-tribal gatherings reflect the significance she has attributed to tribes. Here she envisions a syncretism that is linked to one’s culture and identity; here we find women and men as travellers. Silko portrays the picture of a Native American exodus. She idealizes the Indian life as a response to the empty spiritual life of modern man. Native American history, “rested on a set of common origins and a set of common values” (29). When we look at the narratives of Silko, its polyvocal disconnectedness
cannot be considered as something that symbolizes “destructive fragmentation and isolation experienced by modern (Western) people” (Bloom, Native American Writers 8).

While narrating the historical events and calamities that took place in Native America, Silko correlates the history and the riots that happened in Africa and comments how other nations which have already achieved freedom, stood back and watched. The novel culminates at a point the giant stone snake returns. Silko employs a cyclical pattern to narrate the events. The last chapter of the novel is aptly titled “Home,” which shows Sterling coming back to his home in search of roots. Here he invokes the dead spirits through the stories told to him by his aunty, Aunt Marie. The giant stone snake is interpreted as the spirit of Maahastryu. Silko very aptly brings here the issue of uranium mining in Native America.

The novel can also be read as a clear-cut indictment of the white historian who claims that Columbus discovered America. Walker and Silko explore and critique the history of the oppression of the land, labo(u)r and the bodies of the Third World people. They affirm the strength of social, ecological and spiritual relationships, thereby highlighting the holistic link in the universe. Nation, as one is to understand from these novels, is a discursive formation, though no single discourse can convey the multiple forces behind the making of a nation. When the traditional/realistic
narrative tells the story of the nation, some kind of a devaluation takes place. It imports into the assumption of a preconceived origin for the nation. It never takes into consideration the existence of suppressed histories or the polyphonic forces behind its history. Time and history cannot be homogenized. Walker and Silko exploit this notion and reveal that a modern nation is not real and natural, but is made out of contradictions. In *Nation and Narration* (1990) Bhabha relates national narratives and the discourse of colonialism by looking at them as complementaries. He says:

> It is precisely in reading between these borderlines of the nation-space that we can see how the ‘people’ come to be constructed within a range of discourses as a double narrative movement . . . In the production of the nation as narration there is split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitions, recursive strategy of the performative. It is through this process of splitting that the conceptual ambivalence of modern society becomes the site of writing the nation. (297)

Alice Walker’s celebration of African dreams and Silko’s faith in Native American spirits enrich their works of fiction. Their novels address the issue of multiple marginalization. These writers write about their own lives, tell their own stories, “create both space and identity” for themselves
and establish “their history and their subjectivity through an exploration of their unique and often overlooked cultural legacy” (Turner 109). One can easily detect in them a vision that is rooted on earth and which allows them to perceive vivid “moments of truth” and “new possibilities of thought and knowledge” (Jameson, *Valences* 221). By invoking the past memories and incidents through their novels Walker and Silko blend the horizons of the past and the present, and this in turn unveil the experiences of those people that lived in a different past. Gellner who is critical of the imposition of the culture of the conquerors over the culture of the conquered in the name of nationalism, regards nationalism as a phenomenon which “invents nations where they do not exist” (Gellner 48). Instead of providing a historical narrative that agrees with the details of documented history, Walker and Silko rewrite history by giving voice to the silenced groups.