الصدمة بين الأجيال للأمريكيين الاصليين

والشعر الشافية لسيمون أورتيز

The Native American Intergenerational Trauma and Simon J. Ortiz's Healing Poetry

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الكلمات المفتاحية: سيمون جيه أورتيز، الصدمة التاريخية، شعر الأمريكيين الأصليين، الشعر الشافي.

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الملخص

لقد تم بلورة الألم النفسي التاريخي بين الأمريكيين الأصليين في أشكال مختلفة لعقود من الزمن حيث أن الجيل الحالي هم الناجون الذين وقعوا نفسياً في شرك ماضيهم. علاوة على ذلك، فإن التذكر المستمر لهزيمتهم وخسارتهم يجعل السكان الأصليين يرون الخسائر ليست تاريخية، بل موجودة أكثر من أي وقت مضى وتتجسد الصدمة بين الأجيال في أشكال خسائر هائلة تهيج الذاكرة بصورة مستمرة

سيمون جيه أورتيز، وهو صوت أصلي تقليدي، يغرس بذور الإحياء والحفظ من خلال شعره الشافي. ومع ذلك، فإن آثار الصدمة الخفية والندوب الضمنية تؤدي في كثير من الأحيان إلى تأصيل نفسها فيما يسمى ذاكرة الناجين الصادمة شعره هو بحث في شكل رحلة إلى الأرض المفقودة التي تبدو أبدية. رحلة السعي من خلال شعره هي البقاء وتذكير شعبه بإحياء واستعادة الأرض والحياة.

Abstract

The historical psychological pain among the native Americans has been viewed in various forms for decades. The present generation is the survivors who psychologically entrapped in their past. Moreover, the ongoing remembrance of their defeat and loss makes the native Americans see the losses not as historical rather they are ever present. The intergenerational trauma incarnates itself in forms of massive losses and agitating memory.

Simon J. Ortiz, a traditional indigenous voice embeds seeds of revival and preservation through his healing poetry. Yet, hidden traumatic traces and implied scars trigger frequently in his poetry rooting itself in what is communal traumatic memory. His poetry is called a quest journey through generations to remain and remind his people to revive and regain land and life. His healing poem is a ceremony to restore and restart the native solidarity and consequently their own identity.

I. Introduction

"Let us go again brother; let us go for the shiwana
Let us make our prayer songs."
From *Woven Stones* by Simon Ortiz

Simon Ortiz, born in 1941, is largely recognized by critics of American native literature as one of the most gifted writers of the "Native American Renaissance" of the late 1960s and 1970s. Although he is an essayist and short story writer, his repute is commonly associated with poetry. His tendency and inclination towards poetry comes from his family (Smith, 2005, 221). Ortiz confesses that "my father was a singer, in the Acoma tradition. He made songs and he sang songs that were from the ageless tradition. My mother also was a singer; she sang, also Acoma songs that are part of stories, hunting songs with my father—hunting prayer songs when my father would go hunting in the fall time" (Ortiz, & Dunaway,2004, 14). Thereafter, Ortiz inspiringly connects the songs of his ancestors to poetry confirming that "poetry is certainly included within prayer and song, a sense of spirituality, a sense of being connected so inexplicably and forever to that whole general story of life as we live and know it and practice it. I think poetry is essentially story or language, language being an energy that forms us and at the same time is the essence of how we come into being". (Ortiz, & Dunaway,2004, 15).

Around the time when Simon J. Ortiz began writing his poetry during the end of 1960s and early 1970s in The United States, a lot of ethnic groups, such as native Americans, African Americans …etc., rebelled against years of oppressions and humiliation. The rebellion was due to racial, economic, and societal inequalities. "Simon's poetry was a reflection of not only his experience as a former mine worker, but of the Southwestern native people's experience in the mining industry" (Tohe, 2004,54). The case of native American people got a deep focus due to its complicated nature and harsh history which goes back to nearly 400 years. In an interview when Ortiz was asked by David King Dunaway about the absent voices of the natives in 1950s, Ortiz confesses shockingly, that "repression, mainly. Subtle repression … there are no Native Americans: 'they're all a vanishing race, right?' … That was a method of repression: a nonacceptance, nonrecognition, much less respect, nonsensitivity to Native American people and culture and ways of life." (Ortiz, & Dunaway, 2004, 18).They lived on impoverished reservations, dismantled by the European colonizer from their land, their home, and a lot of their traditions.

Many rebellious acts and demonstrating stands occurred at Ortiz's time and drew upon his later writings. In 1969, some native American activists demanded cultural and educational centers to be built on Alcatraz Island near the coast of San Francisco after occupying it for eighteen months. In 1972, a march of activists moved toward Washington, D. C.

and occupied governmental buildings of Bureau for a week. They demanded to publicize the broken treaties held between the native American tribes and the government. The march was called "The Trail of Broken treaties" alluding to "The Trail of Tears"; a forced evacuation of the Cherokee tribes in 1838-1939. After a year of the march, another radical group of activists protested collusion of the corrupt tribal leadership and the government by seizing the village of Wounded Knee, South Dakota. After more than two months the government yielded for negotiation. After arresting two of the protest leaders, Russell Means and Dennis Banks, the actions acclaimed a native American courage to question their case and to reopen their wounds. Through attempts of taking the federal government to court, they could reclaim land and demand enforcement of treaties (Constantakis, 2011, 105).

Simon J. Ortiz began writing with the courage of the minor rebellions happened while he was in a fermentation processing. The protest actions of the activists drove him to reassess the history and revive the past. The massacres happened to the native Americans go back to ages of suffering and survival. Being a teacher on the Rosebud Sioux Indian Reservation, Ortiz spent a winter reexamining the photographed atrocities of 1890 massacre at Wounded Knee, South Dakota where about three hundred men, women, and children died because of the bitter cold more than the colonizer's bullets. What caught the poet's intention is not the dead but those who survived! Ortiz instead of being despairing and passive, he chooses to live and to interact amid a milieu still threatening and plagued with the tragic oppressive policy but vital with strong and resilient people (Vickers, 1998, 150). Yet, the case is more tangled; the wounds, the scars and the impact seem everlasting. Ortiz, a modern and contemporary poet, and a model of American Indian voice, articulates the hidden and traumatic sensations of his people in his poetry that encompasses generations.

II. The Native American Intergenerational Trauma and Simon J. Ortiz.

Talking about trauma is vast and vague at the same time because traumatic events are not sufficiently represented. Bliss Cua Lim (2000) defines trauma in her article, "True Fictions: Women's Narratives and Historical Trauma," which covers both the traumatic event and its after-effects:

> The notion of trauma alerts us to the duality of injury: it is both a wound to the body, the moment of the blow, *and* its internalized reception. Trauma is the state, psychological or behavioral, that results from such a hurt. Its symptoms are widely acknowledged to be twofold: first, a propensity to relive the traumatic experience via "repetitive, intrusive recollections

> or recurrent dreams of the event," and second, a "numbing or reduced responsiveness to the outside world" (65).

Traumatic events always end at limits both of comprehension and representation. Cathy Caruth(1996) justifies in her definition that "trauma not as normative, but as break of the normative. A traumatic event constitutes a "very unexpected interruption of experience" (115). Traumatic story is a narrative of a belated experience that tells an escape from reality; the escape from a death, or from its referential force attesting to its endless impact on a life. Cathy Caruth(1996) adds that the traumatic story bears "double telling, the oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life:* between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival" (7).

Poetry offers a good medium to express traumatic events. Trauma is an experience or a past event comes from excessive violence that cannot be fully known or fully understood. It is beyond the limits of delineation. Cathy Caruth adds details to show that:

> trauma is described as the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena. Traumatic experience, beyond the psychological dimension of suffering it involves, suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness. The repetitions of the traumatic event—which remain unavailable to consciousness but intrude repeatedly on sight— thus suggest a larger relation to the event that extends beyond what can simply be seen or what can be known, and is inextricably tied up with the belatedness and incomprehensibility that remain at the heart of this repetitive seeing. (Caruth, 1996, 91-92).

The European colonization of North America draws a historical impact upon the later generations of the native American people whereas the event of the colonization invites the researchers to look through a lens of trauma theory. The native American people endured years of oppression, violence, racism, and forced assimilation. The endurance culminates in what M. Y. Brave Heart, and L. M. DeBruyn coins historical trauma, which is a "cumulative emotional and psychological wounding, over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences" (2003, p.1). After the native Americans experiencing different forms of ethnic cleansing and ugly genocidal procedures for centuries, they were displaced from their own home and relocated in colonies and reservation, left starved, neglected, forbidden to practice their religious and traditional rituals. Their children were reeducated so that their

language, culture, history, land, and kinship relations were almost faded away. No secure place to live or to immigrate to, no productive land to grow, and no promising future to loom. Survival appeared to be at the beginning the basic need and the only hope. Les B. Whitbeck, Gary W. Adams, Dan R. Hoyt, and Xiaojin Chen (2004) summarize the situation in the following:

> American Indian people are faced with daily reminders of loss: reservation living, encroachment of Europeans on even their reservation lands, loss of language, loss and confusion regarding traditional religious practices, loss of traditional family systems, and loss of traditional healing practices. The losses are not "historical" in the sense that they are in the past and a new life has begun in a new land. Rather, the losses are ever present, represented by the economic conditions of reservation life, discrimination, and a sense of cultural loss. (121).

Here Whitbeck and others see that the ethnic cleansing is not over with military defeat and occupation of land. Rather, it persisted for generations. The keys to understanding historical trauma are these daily reminders that left the native Americans "associated with post-traumatic stress order …[and] unresolved grief" (Whitbeck et al., 2004, 121). Brave Heart, and DeBruyn (1998) identify high rates of alcoholism, accidental deaths, child abuse, domestic violence, suicide, and homicide as " the product of a legacy of chronic trauma and unresolved grief across generations; racism and oppression, including internalized oppression are continuous forces which exacerbate these destructive behaviors." (Brave Heart et al., 1998, 56).

The axis that links the native American people and their past is their own traumatic history. Historical trauma among the native American becomes shared memories and shared stories whereas trauma imposes itself as a personal and collective factor. The later generations' identity is shaped by the memories and stories of traumas that are still alive in the present. The native poets try to reconstruct their past in a fictional way through their writing whereas no questions of source material or provability is needed. They supply a historical record accounting of their traditions and cultures. They could speak the unspeakable and narrate the unbearable to document what has been done to their ancestors. Their writing is a way of survival and healing through suffering and genocide. They turned the traumatic histories into moving force of writing. Their history is their own license and their particular advantage to tackle their case in a way that they are witnesses on what happened.

Traumatic events defy full representation. Ortiz tries to liken traumatic feel to an electrical shock that is everlasting and other times to an obsessing Ghost:

I was sick,
Feeling a sense of "otherness."
How can I describe it?
An electric current
Coursing in ghost waves through me?
"otherness"

(*Woven Stone*, 337)[1]

Poetry comes to symbolizes traumatic events in a fictional way. Through vivid and dense language, potent imagery and plain symbolization, the native poets make their thematic intentions clear. They deliver their messages to the coming generations in a way they feel unbounded to facts more than to the truth. Their poetry does not provide graphic violence or victimizes the native people. On the contrary, it offers fictional testimonies of survival experiences and traumatic events for empowerment and healing. The native American history interact with their present and the interaction resonates clearly in poetry because poetry tends to re-narrate events in a mythical way that transcends the historical distances.

The prominent traumatic motif that is widely used throughout Ortiz's poetry is the loss of his homeland and the landscape of Acoma Pueblo. Land in Ortiz's poetry is both essence and reflection of his state, his people's existence throughout generations, and his tribal consciousness. The land to Ortiz is the epitome of his identity. Ortiz once interviewed saying: "with all the Acoma people, and, perhaps, with all the Indian people in the country, a real connection and a real sense of home, and it's always with the community, as a society and the community as a people, and land, the environment, cultural, spiritual, political, social, economic, and so forth"(Ortiz, & Dunaway,2004, 14). The homeland is the space that preserves the stories of the native peoples who unite within their tribal consciousness. In his poem " Our Homeland, a National Sacrifice Area" Ortiz feels sick of a sensation of traumatic loss:

This land yearns
For us.
The people yearn
For the land.
Loss and separation
Are hard to bear.

(*Woven Stone*, 352)

1 All subsequent quotations of the poems are from this collection of poetry. Ortiz J. Simon. (1992). *Woven Stones.* Tucson & London: university of Arizona Press.

The stories of the people are linked to the landscape where these stories are held in the memory of mountains, rivers, valleys, and stones. The poet opens his third section of his volume *Woven Stones* with an epigraph as one way to heal the traumatic impact on his people saying:

The songs, stories, poems and advice will always remember
my father, mother, and my people.

Now we know
What we must do.
Henah shrow uuh.

The land shall endure.
There will be victory.

The People shall go on.
We shall have victory.
(*Woven Stone*, 287)

The landscape is linked to the shared history which is a traumatic one. The stories they narrate are not for the sake of story narrating more than for history documenting and responsibility reminding to be the major intergenerational traumatic medium to transfer oral tradition:

> The oral tradition also includes advice and counsel, that is, those items told to you by your elders to ensure that you are living responsibly, that the relationships among family members are correct and according to Acoma ways of life. There's also, of course, stories told to children to make sure that they're attentive to the principles or philosophies of the Acoma, and historical stories that include a look at the Spanish civilization or settlement or colonization that occurred. (Ortiz, & Dunaway,2004, 14).

Throughout his poetry, traditions are alluded to, in forms of words, songs, stories etc., as a living utility that evokes a sense of continuation and resistance in the face of loss and despair and functioned as identity markers and history reminders. The remembrance of traditions, histories, homeland and landscape attaches firmly with the losses that the remembrance is a literally traumatic. The poet defies oblivion:

I must remember
that I am only one part
among many parts,
not a singular eagle
or one mountain. I am
a transparent breathing.
(*Woven Stone,* 121-122)

The colonization and destabilization draw traumatic changes upon the native people and their life and leave them hopeless and despairing dependent on the colonizer's economy that ruined their independence on their land and stole their local resources, leaving Ortiz traumatically crying "the thieves" in intermittent phrases:

It is an old Aacqumeh home.
Ruins.
What kind of name is that?
The thieves.
The thieves.
(*Woven Stone,* 346)

The poet, commenting on the polluted water, recollects the clear cold springs he and his ancestors once irrigated on. Water is the barometer for life and survival, for health and settlement, for land and future. It is the basic resource of nature. In his homeland, the Acoma people, used to drink and water their plants and flocks from springs and streams that were once "sparkling clear, abundant, and fast" (*Woven Stone*, 346). Now, because of industries, railroads, and erecting new towns, the water is polluted by sewage, and it is no more potable; "After the mid-'50s with the discovery of uranium in the Ambrosia Lake and Laguna areas, it grew into a boom town. It was as drab and disorganized and ill-planned as any boom town ever was. The Aacqumeh hanoh nearby will attest to it; they are the ones whose irrigation and domestic water was affected by the pollution caused by the sewage from the city and its development" (*Woven Stone*, 346). The polluted water leads to polluted environment and unhealthy inhabitants. It recalls symbolically the violated land and the genocidal memories where many of the Indians murdered by poison, pollution, and disease.

The healing poem is a remedy of a disease, a shock or hurt that afflicted the poet's mental state because of the traumatized past. Healing action comes to counterattack and counteract trauma. Writing with a healing sense is a kind of consolation and solace. Susan Brison admits that "the result of the process of working through reveals the performative role of speech acts in recovering from trauma: under the right conditions, *saying* something about a traumatic memory *does* something to it" (Brison, 1999, 48). Here Susan Brison says that narrating stories of a traumatic events is in one way, or another can be considered trauma testimonies and the act of narrating is a way of transformation traumatic memories into narrative poetry to recover or remake the self. (Brison, 1999, 52). In extension, Ortiz's speaking of the land and his history diminishes his illness and offers healing to survive. Brave Heart-Jordan (1991) underlines "the importance of helping historical trauma survivors [is to] give voice to the buried hurts they have borne" (37). In his narrative poem "Our Homeland, A National sacrifice Area" the poet beseeches asking the land to accept his prayer:

In the morning
I got up and prayed
And sang with what feeling
And meaning
I could remember:
Know this
Know that I mean well
Know that I am trying
Accept me, Earth, Sun,
Spirits powers of this land
I am only a little person.
(*Woven Stone*, 344)

The poet, with the intention of being acknowledged and accepted by the land he belongs to it, asks the land to empower him and sustain his attempts for healing from what happened to it and his attempts for reintegrating with it after a long disconnection. The land for the native Americans is more than sacred; it has religious place in their traumatic history. Steven Leuthold (1998) in his book, *Indigenous Aesthetics: Native Art, Media, and Identity*, says that "religion is the conceptual basis for understanding place and space in traditional native cultures ….religion refers to a profound sense of one's place in the universe" (183). There is a clear relationship between poetry and religious ritual. The healing poem is a ceremonial one since the aim of ceremony is to heal a person and restore his lives in a sacred act of renewal to rejoin his connections with others. (Hogan, 1994, 173).

The focal motif of Ortiz's poetry is the land; the sacred and ceremonial land that becomes interchangeable with the prayers:

As he prayed, he thought:
the land, the way of life, the community.
Ours. Our own. Our heart, blood, soul.
Yours, the grandmothers and grandfathers said.
Yours, ours, yours, ours, always, always.
(Ortiz, 2002, 21)

Regaining land is a repeated theme of continuance and survival: "land, culture, and community. These aspects of life are what constitute the peoples' ontological identity, and they will remain the same forever for everyone" (Hollrah, 2004, 82).

Healing indications can be symbolized by the recurring image of water. After the image of the sewage water of the colonizer that polluted the land and the inability of the natives to do anything against the pollution, the poet's voice defies the hardships of the colonization. His pen dug deep in the land subject and went downwards to histories of his ancestors disclosing the amount of trauma his people got by the loss of land which is

now dry and polluted. Otherwise, as a healing action, he never gives up searching of hope and reminding the generations that water is always there if one would like to dig it up breaking the stones of genocide and assimilation:

When I reached bottom
I was exhausted.
It was mid-afternoon.
Qoweena was too far away.
Stones were hot.
I'd always been told
that water could be found.
I walked downstream
in the dry bed.
Hot stone.
Around the next bend,
there had to be water.
Under rock overhangs
In depression, under
Stones.
Blue blue dry sky
Finally, I found water.
(*Woven Stone*, 350-351)

III. Conclusion

The intergenerational trauma leads the later generation to have thoughts obsessed by the historical losses and they infuse the losses with negative feelings felt in their writings. Nevertheless, the writings produced lately help firstly in documenting the truths of their histories and secondly purging the deleterious influence of the facts. In general, poetry comes to edify, heal, uplift, or link the reader to the wholeness and goodness. Moreover, the native American poetry does all of these. It also constructs and maintains a sense of historical continuity. It is an intergenerational vehicle for remembrance and reinvigoration of the past that seems an everlasting present. Simon J. Ortiz's poetry is not an exception. Although Ortiz's poetry appears more realistic and sober, it could not be free from traumatic traces and traumatic scars. He comes further to present his healing poetry as a way to surpass what happened to his people. The healing poem is a kind of religious ceremony since the purpose of ceremony is to heal and restore the self. It provides a sense of resurrection and resilience.

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