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How Environment and Natural Space Reflect Cultural Power Struggles in the Novels of Leslie Marmon Silko

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A Thesis in the Field of English for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

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Abstract

This study investigates how Leslie Marmon Silko's treatment of the natural world in her three novels *Ceremony, Almanac of the Dead*, and *Gardens in the Dunes,* represents both the differences among the novels' featured cultures and the universal human instinct to shape and control nature and other beings. I propose that Silko's descriptions of landscapes and peoples have evolved over time, and that each successive novel has grown to include more illustrations of delicately interwoven landscapes that reflect a mixture of races and cultures as opposed to more easily identified single races and cultures. I additionally posit that each distinct type of natural surrounding represents a safe haven only for the culture with which it is associated, and frequently is a danger to other cultures. I theorize that as cultures battled for control over land—and over each other—Silko might give the power over human mortality to the earth itself, which exerts a will of its own and a capacity for vengeance as it is progressively abused by humans. Ultimately, Silko's novels, as well as extensive critical articles and books, biographies of the author, and interviews with the author all demonstrate evidence of an intimate, continuously evolving relationship between the natural environment ascribed to each culture, and in turn, each culture's relationship to that environment and to other cultures and the earth itself. The investigation also concludes that Silko chooses to represent the values, moral structure, and idiosyncrasies of each culture by assigning each a distinct natural environment and clear method of relating to it—and indeed does so by making that environment a safe haven only for that culture.

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Chapter I

Introduction

The work of Leslie Marmon Silko has been widely celebrated and much critiqued since the publication of *Ceremony* in 1977. Despite its centrality to discussions of Native American lore and storytelling tradition, her novels' brilliant use of natural space and earth's power to reflect distinctions and power struggles between the cultures about which she writes has not been fully explored, and in the case of her most recent novel, *Gardens in the Dunes*, has largely been ignored. How does Silko's treatment of the natural world—including plants, animals, and earth itself—in her three novels *Ceremony, Almanac of the Dead*, and particularly *Gardens in the Dunes* represent both the differences among the novels' featured cultures and the universal human instinct to shape and control nature and other beings?

In this thesis, I will argue that the author chooses to represent different several cultures—and thus, their values and ways of life—using diverse types of and relationships to natural surroundings. Additionally, each type of natural surrounding represents a safe haven only for the culture with which it is associated, and frequently, a danger to others. As various ethnic groups battle for control over land—and over each other—in each novel, Silko ultimately gives the power over human mortality to the land itself, which exerts a will of its own and a capacity for vengeance as it is progressively abused by humans.

Silko's own multi-cultural heritage—including Laguna Pueblo, Mexican, and Anglo-American ancestry—has influenced her work in a myriad of ways, but perhaps most notably through her novels' villains. Through her three novels, Silko often indicts Europeans for believing that land can be possessed as an attribute, and thus abused, and suggests that they will eventually be replaced by those of indigenous peoples, who respect and see themselves as part of the land. Additionally, the novels suggest that, if current behavior is continued, earth's abusers will ultimately be punished by the earth itself, which will rain down a series of natural disasters on the civilizations that have displaced those who stewarded the earth. Silko herself makes a number of provocative comments in her interviews to suggest that she may intend for her readers to interpret her writings to foreshadow the demise of the European cultures and return of the indigenous powers that once controlled the earth's resources.

While there has been a plethora of scholarship regarding Silko's use of landscape and natural space in her individual novels—particularly in *Ceremony* and *Almanac of the Dead*—there has not been a single publication that examines the thematic threads of ecology and environmentalism in all three of her major works together. Silko's earliest and arguably most famous work, *Ceremony*, has inspired many more academic publications than her other novels, and while many authors have posited theories about the roles of animals and land in this work, none have written specifically about how Silko's use and descriptions of landscapes and natural space represent the differences among the novels' featured cultures and the ways they struggle to shape and control nature, the earth, and each other. Silko's second novel, *Almanac of the Dead*, has also been widely studied, and while some authors have theorized that indigenous cultures

experience violent separation from the natural world and thus experience cultural identity crisis, none have made the specific connection between Silko's use of language and descriptions of natural space to illustrate this separation and identity crisis. One author does explore Silko's use of language and metaphor in relation to ecology and culture, but rather superficially and only in relation to *Almanac of the Dead*. Silko's most recent novel, *Gardens in the Dunes*, has very little scholarship on it, and I will be the first to tackle Silko's use of language and natural space to reflect culture in that novel.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, no author, to my knowledge, has compared and contrasted the ways in which Silko uses descriptive language and landscape illustrations to reflect culture in all three novels collectively. Thus, the criticism has yet to provide an overarching, complete understanding of Silko's vision and track the evolution of her language use from her earliest novel to her most recent novel, as I intend to do. In addition to demonstrating the great similarities and differences between Silko's use of natural space language in all three novels, this study will also analyze how her descriptions of landscape have evolved over time, and how each successive novel has grown to include more illustrations of delicately interwoven landscapes, reflecting a mixture of races and cultures as opposed to single races and cultures.

Chapter II

Ceremony

In her widely acclaimed first novel, *Ceremony*, published in 1977, Silko discusses four distinct cultural groups, as well as the cross-cultural blends created by varying interracial relationships. These cultures are: Native American, "white" American, Japanese, and Mexican. Each culture is represented by a diverse set of natural surroundings and circumstances specific to—and safe for—only that culture. While the environmental traits—including relationships with plants and animals—assigned to each individual culture are readily identifiable, the boundaries become increasingly difficult to distinguish as the cultures begin to intermingle. Silko, possibly as a result of her own multi-cultural heritage, does a masterful job of illustrating the intricacies of heritage and mergers of tradition that occur when two cultures collide. She spends much of the novel treating characters of mixed Native American and Mexican descent and demonstrating how the two cultures are related to one another. Even the lack of easily identifiable section divisions or chapters in the story is a physical reflection of the theme of interconnection between all things and cultures. As the novel's cultures compete for control over land and each other, Silko ultimately takes power over human mortality away from all of them and grants it to the earth itself, which displays a startling will of its own in direct relation to how it has been treated by its various groups of inhabitants. The Native American culture is the central group of people on which *Ceremony* focuses, and they are represented by a very harsh landscape. Experiencing a severe drought as the

novel opens, the Native Americans are frequently mentioned in relationship with extreme heat, lack of water, and dry, dusty conditions that inhibit plant growth and challenge successful animal farming: "The drought years had returned again, as they had after the First World War and in the twenties, when [Tayo] was a child and they had to haul water to the sheep in big wooden barrels in the old wagon . . . they brought out their wide spotted tongues and ate those strange remains because the hills were barren those years and only the cactus could grow."[1] The lack of water wreaks havoc on both people and animals, driving them into a fearful state of scarcity: "One of the gray mules . . . walked a skinny trail, winding in blind circles from the grass to the water trough, where it dipped its mouth in the water and let the water dribble out again, rinsing its mouth four or five times a day to make sure the water was still there" (9). The poor, terrified animal has been reduced to recycling the same mouthful of water repeatedly just to feel the wetness on its tongue. "As dry as it was, with the grass getting thin and short," Josiah had to check more frequently on his livestock, who had "been living off rocks and sand" (83). Harley, a young Native American, "had a handful of wild grapes not much bigger than blueberries; he reached over and gave Tayo some. The leaves were small and dark green" (42). The drought has caused all life to shrink and nothing to flourish, as symbolized by these tiny grapes and shrunken leaves. Other crops suffer too: "[Tayo] set his foot down into the crackling leathery stalks of dead sunflowers. Across the highway . . . there was a big cornfield, but the plants were short and thin, and their leaves were faded yellow like the grasshoppers. There would be only a few cobs on each plant, and the kernels would be small and deformed" (143). The lack of water is negatively impacting all human,

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[1] Leslie M. Silko, Ceremony (New York: The Viking Press, 1977) 9.

animal, and plant life, but provides a specific challenge to the Native Americans—which they overcome. The harsh weather conditions make it extremely difficult for plant life to survive on Native American land, and prevent the growth of all but the toughest plant breeds: "Years of wind and no rain had finally stripped the valley down to dark gray clay, where only the bluish salt bush could grow" (171). Tayo observes the "tall yellow rice grass and the broken gray shale ridge undisturbed . . . [next to] junipers and yuccas" (220). All of these are very hearty examples of plants that can survive in extreme desert situations.

In "Writing Nature: Silko and Native Americans as Nature Writers," Lee Schweninger argues that:

> Silko uses nature not only to define the characters' landscapes and show how those landscapes are symbolically linked to the hero's regeneration but also to relate the very essence of human existence. In her novel [*Ceremony*], language (that unique characteristic that distinguishes humans from other animals) and nature are inextricably connected. The obligation of being human is to see the human connection to nature and to speak it, to tell the earth's story.[2]

Nature plays a crucial role in Silko's writing, as the landscapes are symbolically linked to the characters in the stories. Like Blumenthal before him, Schweninger points out that Silko relies on the land and on wildlife descriptions to help shape her characters and paint a gripping portrait of a peaceful, earthbound culture gasping and flailing to hold on to the single strongest tenet of their identity—their land.

The novel's only instance in which a Native American—partial or full-blooded—experiences environmental abundance and easy access to water of any kind is when Tayo

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[2] Lee Schweninger, "Writing Nature: Silko and Native Americans as Nature Writers," MELUS 18.2 (1993): 51.

performs a water-gathering ritual in an attempt to end an earlier drought. Though Tayo, *Ceremony*'s main character, is actually mixed-race, he embodies the traditions, customs, and spirit of the Native American people, and does not relate to his white heritage—though he is troubled by it. "For people who are bicultural, and nearly all Indians fit this category, the conflicts and clashes between the world of Anglo and the world of Indian are critical ones."[3] In an attempt to end his peoples' suffering, Tayo arises before dawn one morning and rides to a canyon that has a running spring, all the while observing Native American rituals and praying for rain:

> Josiah never told him much about praying, except that it should be something he felt inside himself. So that last summer, before the war, he got up before dawn and rode the bay mare south to the spring in the narrow canyon. The water oozed out from the dark orange sandstone at the base of the long mesa . . . . he had picked flowers along the path, flowers with yellow long petals the color of the sunlight . . . . he heard the water, flowing into the pool, drop by drop from the big crack in the side of the cliff . . . . here the dust and heat began to recede; the short grass and stunted corn seemed distant (86).

The very next day, the rains come. This is the first of many examples in Silko's novels of how respecting the land and holding ceremony sacred yields abundance. This ceremony is also the first example of Tayo reconnecting to his culture by connecting with the land. In his 1983 article "Senses of Place in Ceremony," Reyes Garcia argues that the concept of place is significant to mankind on more than just a physical level, and insists that the power of community actually comes from communication and respect for tradition and the land.[4] In *Ceremony*, Tayo becomes increasingly disconnected from his culture as a

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[3] Linda Hogan, "Native American Women: Our Voice, the Air," Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies 6.3 (1981): 1-4.

result of his experience at war, but becomes reconnected with his land—and thus, his culture—throughout the course of a healing ceremony using various parts of the land and nature itself. He is able to return both physically and spiritually to a harmonious state with his homeland and the natural world. Garcia argues that, by developing his sense of place or home, Tayo can develop his sense of identity. In *Ceremony's* exceptionally ambitious plot, Tayo's fate—as well as that of his entire war-torn generation and the whole Laguna Indian tribe—relies upon his successful completion of Betonie's year-long healing quest. Claudia Eppert explains:

> In order for Tayo . . . to recover from the traumatic legacies of growing up Native on a North American Laguna Pueblo reservation . . . he must unlearn colonizing discourses and exercise Native ancestral memories that he had abandoned or repressed. This process of unlearning and relearning results not only in his personal healing but also in the collective repair of the witchery the medicine men tell him has been unleashed upon the world.[5]

This high-stakes venture comes to a climax in the uranium mine at the novel's end, when Tayo finally has an opportunity to exact his revenge on Emo for treating him cruelly and brutally murdering his closest friend, Harley: "[Tayo] visualized the contours of Emo's skull; the GI haircut exposed thin bone at the temples, bone that would flex slightly before it gave way under the thrust of the steel edge" (Silko, Ceremony 234). However, the natural elements come to his rescue, and he is reminded that giving in to this "witchery" will forever prevent him from reestablishing his connection with his culture and the natural world: "The witchery had almost ended the story according to its plan;

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[4] Reyes Garcia, "Senses of Place in Ceremony," MELUS 10.4 (1983): 37-48.

[5] Claudia Eppert. "Leslie Silko's Ceremony: Rhetorics of Ethical Reading and Composition." JAC 24.3 (2004): 727-54.

Tayo had almost jammed the screwdriver into Emo's skull . . . . He would have been another victim, a drunk Indian war veteran settling an old feud" (235). By choosing not to kill Emo, Tayo symbolically determines that "witchery" will not triumph.

As argued by Susan Blumenthal in 1990, respecting animals and the traditions surrounding their treatment is equally as important to the Native Americans as respecting the land. In her article "Spotted Cattle and Deer: Spirit Guides and Symbols of Endurance and Healing in *Ceremony*," she associates Tayo with the symbolically suffering, yet enduring deer in *Ceremony*. When Rocky and Tayo kill a deer together, Tayo is disturbed by the fact that Rocky "deliberately [avoids] the old-time ways," and does not show the deer the respect typical of Native American ritual (46). Tayo, however, respectfully covers the deer's head before Rocky disembowels it and sprinkles cornmeal on its nose to feed its spirit, thereby honoring the deer's sacrifice. Ultimately, Blumenthal theorizes that Tayo's strong spiritual connection to animals is an important part of what helps him eventually recover from his wartime illness and regain his connection to the Native American land.[6] Another example of a Native American showing ceremonial respect to the animal kingdom occurs when Tayo crosses paths with a mountain lion. He honors the mountain lion he encounters while freeing Josiah's cattle from the white man who stole them by reciting "mountain lion, becoming what you are with each breath, your substance changing with the earth and the sky," and sprinkling pollen into his footprints (182). In an interview, Silko herself reinforces that the mountain lion "is her guide, as he

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[6] Susan Blumenthal, "Spotted Cattle and Deer: Spirit Guides and Symbols of Endurance and Healing in "Ceremony,"" American Indian Quarterly 14.4 (1990): 367-377.

has been for Native American hunters throughout the time, and his presence helps to establish the true nature of this journey."[7]

While *Ceremony* does uphold Native American perspectives and values—particularly regarding the treatment of other living things—it does not arbitrarily praise all that is Native American. If Native American traditions reflect values that "white" Americans do not understand or subscribe to, then the reverse is also true; Silko seems to imply that the hardships being experienced on the reservation are a result of old Native American medicine and ceremonies losing their efficacy under the influence of U.S. white culture. Louis Owens elaborates on the novel's refusal to wholeheartedly commit to describing one culture as good and another as evil:

> Throughout the novel, Silko works carefully to ensure that such binary oppositions are impossible to construct and that readers seeking to find distinct "realities," "planes," "dimensions," or "times" operating within her text will find that the text refuses to divulge such divisions. Rather than interweaving "lanes" definable as "human," 'myth/ritual," and "socio/cultural"—or working in several "dimensions" we might label "myth," "history," "realism," and "romance"—Silko spins an elaborate web that makes distinguishing between such concepts impossible.[8]

He further explains that, "the Indians of Silko's novel have failed to maintain the proper respect and understanding in relation to mother earth. Perhaps because of pressures from the dominant Euramerican culture . . . "(Owens, 179). While there is evidence to support

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[7] Leslie M. Silko and B. A. Hirsch, "'The Telling Which Continues': Oral Tradition and the Written Word in Leslie Marmon Silko's 'Storyteller,'" American Indian Quarterly 12.1 (1988): 1-26.

[8] Louis Owens, Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press,1992) 168.

this theory, white Americans in *Ceremony* are still presented as a destructive force that threatens Native Americans and the earth.

White Americans are posited in the novel as the archrivals of the Native Americans; they act as if they own the land and treat it however they please, they discriminate against Native Americans physically, emotionally, and monetarily—but still travel to Gallup to watch their traditions as if at a performance—and they take the most desirable portions of the environment away from other cultures for their own use. "In the city of Gallup we see how the struggle between white and Indian identity is played out through territorial mapping. While Gallup is built on Indian territory and relies on the Indian tourism industry, planners continually suppress the real presence of Indian."[9]

In *Ceremony*, white American culture is represented by lush, green natural surroundings and easy access to water. This stands in stark opposition to the hot, dry, dusty conditions that represent the Native American presence. In Gallup, a primarily white, poorly-managed town that becomes unsafe for Indians after dark, there is a free-flowing river running through it that supplies plenty of water to the town's people. Sadly, this ready access to water has not prevented the arroyo from becoming an unsightly slum—one of the many signs that Gallup is a shabby, demoralized town. It also boasts "salt-cedar and willow thickets that [grow] along the stream banks" and other plant life (Silko, Ceremony 100.). On the white man's ranch where Tayo finds Josiah's lost and wandering cattle, the land has thriving "[thickets] of scrub oak" and "pine trees . . . . The rolling hills scattered with lava rock and pine ridges between clearings" (174). As Tayo

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[9] Karen Piper, "Police Zones: Territory and Identity in Leslie Marmon Silko's 'Ceremony,'" American Indian Quarterly 21.3 (1997): 483-497.

continues to journey deeper into the white rancher's property, he notices that "The pines were tall and thick, and brushy pinon and cedar filled the spaces between the big trees, blocking out nearly all the light" (178). This densely packed, flourishing forest couldn't be more distinct from the sparsely populated, dry land the Native Americans occupy. In a 1998 interview, Silko herself comments on how her own discomfort in a foreign environment helped inspire her to write *Ceremony*: "Most of the island was precipitous and steep; it was the most alien thing, and I went from thirteen inches of rain when I was living in Chinle before I went up there to 180 inches of rain. There was ocean, fog, tall trees; I felt sort of claustrophobic. I suffered."[10] The suffering of her Native American characters in *Ceremony* and the danger they feel when exposed to an alien landscape appears to be inspired by her own experience.

The town's white people are very protective of these resources and are clearly uninterested in sharing them with their neighbors: They "talked about sanitation and safety as they dragged [blacks, Mexicans, and Indians] to the paddy wagons" and removed them from town, immorally using hygiene as a plausible excuse for ridding the town of homeless people and minorities . . ." (100). Indian women attempted to hide along the riverbanks in lean-tos, but "white men came and called until the [Indian] women came out of the lean-tos, and then the men yelled at them and threw empty bottles, trying to hit them . . . . The police came. They dragged the people out of their shelters—and they pulled the pieces of tin and cardboard down." The whites then

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[10] Robin Cohen, "Of Apricots, Orchids, and Wovoka: An Interview with Leslie Marmon Silko," Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony: A Casebook, ed. Allan Chavkin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

proceeded to burn the remnants of the shelters and destroy the land: “thick black smoke climbed furiously into the cloudless blue sky, hot and windless” (103). Not only are the whites determined to remove people of other cultures from the land they consider theirs, but they have no compunction about burning and destroying the land itself merely to rid it of any trace of another people. The great irony is that they took this land from Native Americans to begin with. Betonie, the old Medicine Man tells Tayo, “When the railroaders came and the white people began to build their town, the Navajos had to move.” The Navajos had settled peacefully in the hills, living harmoniously with the land until the whites pushed them out and turned Gallup into a “filthy town” (108). Betonie goes on to explain how the whites stripped the land of much of its natural plant and animal life and exploited it for monetary gain:

> All but a small part of the [tree-laden] mountain had been taken . . . . By the National Forest and by the state which later sold it to white ranchers who came from Texas in the early 1900s. In the twenties and thirties the loggers had come, and they stripped the canyons below the rim and cut great clearings on the plateau slopes . . . [they] shot bears and mountain lions for sport. And it was then the Native American people understood that the land had been taken, because they couldn’t stop these white people from coming to destroy the animals and the land. It was then too that the holy men at Native American and Acoma warned the people that the balance of the world had been disturbed and the people could expect droughts and harder days to come (172).

This passage indicates that the Native Americans are clearly concerned about the earth’s reaction to this abuse, and fear retaliation, while the whites do not even consider the earth a being capable of conscious response. They are more concerned with using the land they wrestled from Native Americans as a way to control their population and cultural infiltration, as they see it. In 1997, Karen Piper brought the discussion of territoriality to the table in her article “Police Zones: Territory and Identity in Leslie

Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*." She uses true-to-life examples of how the Native American tribe's land has been historically abused to demonstrate the differences in how Native American and white cultures treat their land and other people. She illustrates how Silko's *Ceremony* mirrors real-life relationships between Native Americans and whites:

> The year that Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* was published was the year the Native American tribe received a warning that the Rio Paguate, the main river that runs through the reservation, was contaminated with radium-226. It later became public knowledge that not only were all of the Native American's wells highly irradiated, but that the tribal council building, community center, and reservation road system had been constructed with radioactive mining waste as well. These findings led to the suggestion by the U.S. government that the area be designated a "National Sacrifice Area," so that further dumping could continue. American Indian Movement (AIM) leader Russell Means pointed out, in response, that for a land-linked people, the sacrifice of any geographic region, even one poisoned like this, meant the sacrifice of all native peoples residing within it (Piper 483).

Piper also argues that, in white cultures, "a parcel of land . . . is considered empty before it has buildings on it—it is valuable only for the possible things and events that may occur upon it," demonstrating the vast difference in the way they view the land in comparison with the way Native Americans view it as interconnected with all life (489).

In a related study, Reyes Garcia argues that "loss of place means genetic extinction; loss of the sense of place signals cultural extinction—histories and stories squandered."[11] This very Native American viewpoint supports the hypothesis that, with the European destruction and degradation of land comes the destruction and degradation of entire Native American cultures, never to be recovered. The more white Americans force Native Americans off of their homeland, the more disconnected the Native

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[11] Reyes Garcia, "Senses of Place in Ceremony," MELUS 10.4 (1983): 37-48.

Americans become from their culture itself. In this way, by forcing Native Americans off of their land, whites are actually exerting control over the survival of their culture.

In her 2002 "The Semiotics of Dwelling in Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony," Catherine Rainwater provides more support for this assertion, and claims that the sense of land and "home" is inclusive not only of the "horizontal" or physical realm, but also the "vertical" or metaphysical realm.[12] Through the lens of this theory, *Ceremony* is juxtaposed between the Native American and the white—the real and the hyper real. Rainwater demonstrates that *Ceremony* is Silko's effort to show Native Americans' loss of dwelling in all senses—including both the physical and the vertical—and the culture's effort to reclaim its place. This fascinating commentary provides support for my assertion that whites in *Ceremony* attempt to use the land to control Native American cultures and rob them of their identities.

David Rice's 2005 "Witchery, indigenous Resistance, and Urban Space in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*," argues that early Native American authors:

> . . . challenged romanticized notions of Indian culture and identity by portraying characters who slip into the deracinated no-Indian's-land between Native and Euramerican worlds. However . . . these characters are ultimately unable to establish stable identities for themselves, and therefore they never [have] a chance within a civilization bent on turning Indians into Europeans.[13]

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[12] Rainwater, Catherine, "The Semiotics of Dwelling in Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony," Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony: A Casebook, ed. Allan Chavkin. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002): 117-133.

[13] David A. Rice, "Witchery, Indigenous Resistance, and Urban Space in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*," Studies in American Indian Literatures 17.4 (2005): 114.

This argument is germane to my assertion that Silko uses *Ceremony* to convey the idea of cultures attempting to control each other using the environment; by ensuring that Native Americans are either forcibly removed from their land or controlled by being paid substandard wages, required to live in shanties, and made to perform traditional dances and rituals for the benefit of a white audience's entertainment instead of for their ceremonial purpose, white Americans make certain that Native Americans lose touch with their identities and enter an endless struggle for self. Rice goes on to say that, "The place of the city in Silko's cultural dynamic is crucial; urbanization represents an essential element of Euramerican destructiveness and a necessary aspect of Native American syncreticism and growth in her novel" (115). Indeed, the urbanization of Native American land and thus, the overrunning of their culture, is a tool used repeatedly by "Euramericans" in *Ceremony*. Rice argues that Tayo's struggle to reconcile his experience of the white world with his Native American world is bound up in "a larger worldwide struggle for survival," and Tayo must align himself ideologically, spiritually, and ecologically with his culture and reconnect to the land in order to survive (116).

Whites also demonstrate a lack of respect for animal life that stands in stark contrast to the reverence Native Americans show animals. Peter J. Beidler describes white man's attitude toward animal life: "As ranchers, for example, white men raise stupid Herefords which are ill-adapted to desert terrain and available food supplies, then fence and corral them so that they cannot run free."[14] The white ranchers do not know, as the Native Americans do, that "cattle are like any living thing. If you separate them from

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[14] Peter G. Beidler, "Animals and Theme In "Ceremony," American Indian Quarterly 5.1 (1979): 13-18.

the land for too long, keep them in barns and corrals, they lose something (Silko, Ceremony 74)" When two whites find Tayo searching for Josiah's cattle on Floyd Lee's property, they are about to drag him off to jail when they discover something more interesting—mountain lion tracks. One says, "Just leave [Tayo] where he is and let's go get the lion hounds before it gets dark." The other responds, "Yeah, we taught him a lesson . . . These goddamn Indians got to learn whose property this is!" Tayo "lay there and hated them. Not for what they wanted to do with him, but for what they did to the earth with their machines, and to the animals with their packs of dogs and their guns (188)." The disparity between Tayo's reaction to the mountain lion and the white officers' reaction to it is arresting. As demonstrated earlier, Tayo honors the animal, sprinkles pollen in its tracks, and takes only the guidance it offers him. Conversely, the patrolmen opt to ignore Tayo for an opportunity to hunt and kill the mountain lion—not because they need its meat or pelt to survive, but because it will gain them the admiration of their superiors and the townspeople. For them, Tayo and the animal are very similar: both are helpless prey to be captured and brought back to the town as trophies. They shun Tayo to pursue the mountain lion only because it is more uncommon.

In his 1979 "Animals and Theme in Ceremony," Peter G. Beidler claims that it is impossible to understand the characters in Ceremony—or their problems—without first understanding the role animals play in the story. He explains that the white man's destructive and irresponsible treatment of animals, from cattle to frogs to flies, in the story is reflective of how little he values Mother Earth and his fellow man; conversely, the Native American's respectful and kind treatment of animals reflects the culture's reverence for Mother Earth and all of mankind (14).

In *Ceremony*, the Japanese culture is only encountered in the Philippines during the war Tayo and his cousin Rocky are fighting. In great contrast to both Native American and white American cultures, the environment of the Philippines—which exposes Tayo to the Japanese culture—is characterized by great unstoppable rains, extreme humidity, and jungle-like plant life. Tayo recalls, "Jungle rain had no beginning or end; it grew like foliage from the sky, branching and arching to the earth, sometimes in solid thickets entangling the islands, and, other times, in tendrils of blue mist curling out of coastal clouds. The jungle breathed an eternal green that fevered men until they dripped sweat the way rubbery jungle leaves dripped the monsoon rain" (Silko, Ceremony 10) In this encounter with unending torrential downpour, Tayo realizes that everything has both positive and negative characteristics, and that nothing is absolute. While the Native Americans on the reservation had been praying desperately for rain to end their drought, this harsh, unstoppable rain shows Tayo that rain can be as detrimental as it can be helpful. "Jungle rain lay suspended in the air, choking their lungs as they marched; it soaked into their boots until the skin on their toes peeled away dead and wounds turned green" (10). Here, the rain is destructive and their enemy, making it more difficult for them to fight. The environment seems to be supporting the Japanese with whom they are at war and deliberately sabotaging the soldiers.

> When Tayo prayed on the long muddy road to the prison camp, it was for dry air, dry as a hundred years squeezed out of yellow sand, air to dry out the oozing wounds of Rocky's leg, to let the torn flesh and broken bones breathe, to clear the sweat that filled Rocky's eyes . . . . He would blame the rain if the Japs saw how the corporal staggered; if they saw how weak Rocky had become, and came to crush his head with the butt of a rifle, then it would be the rain and the green all around that killed him (10).

Silko herself, in a 1992 interview, said, "Too much of anything good can be bad—too much rain can cave in your adobe ceiling, or drown your little corn plants. So

rain isn't absolutely good. Nothing is absolutely good or absolutely bad, in that old way of looking at things. It balances."[15]

The rain is killing Tayo and his fellow soldiers, and his only prayer is for the dry, dusty weather he can count on back home, where he is comfortable. At home, Tayo would never pray against the rain, but his miserable conditions and the rain's total and systematic destruction of his humanity and that of his compatriots is killing him.

> The sound of the rain got louder, pounding on the leaves, splashing into the ruts; it splattered on his head, and the sounds echoed inside his skull. It streamed down his face and neck like jungle flies with crawling feet . . . then from somewhere, within the sound of the rain falling, he could hear it approaching like a summer flash flood, the rumble still faint and distant, floodwater boiling down a narrow canyon. He could smell the foaming floodwater, stagnant and ripe with the rotting debris it carried past each village, sucking up their sewage, their waste, the dead animals (11).

This relentless hammering water, usually a potent source of life, is only a source of death for these soldiers, and it is also sweeping away other signs of life in the villages where they are seeking comfort: people, animals, and even the waste that proves they were there. This water is metaphorically cleansing the country of these Native Americans.

The culture with whom the Native Americans have the closest bond and share the most similarities with in *Ceremony* is the Mexican culture. They have long inhabited the same land, they are both relegated to a lesser status by whites, and they have a strong trade relationship. Their bond is symbolized in the Mexicans' provision of bootlegged alcohol to the Native Americans during the Prohibition in the United States. Though there is plenty of racism between the cultures, there is also an abundance of cross-cultural relationships, both romantic and platonic—many of which result in biracial children, like

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[15] Linda Niemann and Leslie M. Silko, "Narratives of Survival," The Women's Review of Books 9.10 (1992): 10.

Betonie the Medicine Man. The environment associated with the Mexican culture is very similar to that associated with the Native American culture: Mexican Night Swan "[gestures] at the bright sun and cloudless sky," and complains of the intense heat (77). She describes the landscape in her little town, and mentions that they too are suffering from a long drought: "The wind was blowing dust down the little side streets and I felt like I was the only one living there any more. The drought was drying out the land, stealing away the river, so that even the cottonwoods and tamarics along the banks were drying up" (80). Like the Native Americans, the water sources are drying up and the only plants that are surviving are extremely heat-tolerant desert plants.

The main distinction between the responses of the Native Americans and the Mexicans to the natural world is in the Mexican treatment of living things. They do not revere insects and animals the way the Native Americans do, and do not perform ceremonies to honor them. They even kill indiscriminately, which stands in great contrast to the Native Americans, who only kill out of necessity. "The old [Mexican] man sat on a stool by the front door with a red rubber fly swatter in his right hand. . .the ribbons were speckled with dead flies and a few that made feeble attempts to pull loose" (93). At first, young Tayo interprets this demonstration as an invitation to kill flies until a disappointed Josiah—his Native American uncle—catches him in the act. Josiah educates Tayo by telling him the Native American legend of the fly who saved their people from starvation, and teaches him that the fly is to be revered and never killed.

Critic Peter G. Beidler pays special attention to how, after Tayo's involvement in World War II, his "lack of respect for animal life carries over into his lack of respect for his own . . . ." (15). As Tayo begins to heal himself after returning from the war, his

attitude toward animals changes, and he becomes more respectful. The change in his attitude can be seen most emphatically in three areas: "his respect for animals, his acceptance of the apparent evil they do, and his imitation of them." All of these attributes reflect typical Native American attitudes toward animals, and indicate a level of respect for them not typically demonstrated toward them by whites or Mexicans, according to Silko.

Despite the cultures' differences, there are many instances in the book of those with mixed heritage working together and using traditions from multiple cultures to strengthen their own. There are also instances of both cultures combining the best qualities their environments have to offer to create the strongest possible result.

For example, Josiah, a Native American, buys a herd of cattle in Sonora, Mexico from Ulibarri, a cousin of his mixed-race girlfriend Night Swan. He chooses to breed them with traditional Native American cattle, Herefords. His hope is that the mixed offspring will offer both the Hereford's impressive milk and meat production and the Mexican cattle's resilience to drought. Notably, in an effort to further educate himself about his potential experiment, Josiah consults white American texts on cattle farming, but finds them inappropriate for his situation; this is emblematic of the general failure of western science to consider the idiosyncrasies of the Native American or Mexican experience.

Night Swan herself is of both Native American and Mexican heritage, and has light eyes like Tayo. She teaches Tayo an important lesson about valuing his mixed heritage and not allowing his individuality to burden him: "Indians or Mexicans or whites—most people are afraid of change. They think that if their children have the same

color of skin, the same color of eyes, that nothing is changing . . . . They blame us, the ones who look different. That way they don't have to think about what has happened inside themselves" (92). Though she identifies more strongly with her Mexican heritage, Night Swan reveals her connection with the Native American part of herself when she chooses to leave Socorro and settle in view of Mt. Taylor, a sacred Laguna mountain.

Old Betonie the Medicine Man is of both Native American and Mexican heritage, and turns out to be the only person who is able to help Tayo regain his former sense of self after the war. Tayo notices that he has hazel eyes like Betonie, and is comforted by the fact that like himself, Betonie does not belong to one particular culture. He explains to Tayo that in order to cure him, they needed to create brand new ceremonies that make use of objects from the whites, since it was the white influence that largely caused his illness in the first place.

Old Betonie's house represents both a confluence of cultures, boasting collections of Native American, Mexican, and white American artifacts, and a safe haven for those of mixed heritage. It looks down on the Gallup Ceremonial grounds—ironic for a medicine man, but represents his knowledge and acceptance of white culture, as he sees it intersecting with Native American culture. He says "They keep us on the north side of the railroad tracks, next to the river and their dump. Where none of them want to live . . . . They don't understand. We know these hills, and we are comfortable here" (107). Though the whites have deemed this land unacceptable for themselves, Betonie embraces it as his home, pointing out that his people had been there many years before the whites moved in. Betonie points to the back of his house and says, "The west side is built into the hill in the old-style way. Sand and dirt for a roof; just about halfway underground.

You can feel it, can't you" (110)? His house is safe and hidden away, underground, from the dangerous white settlement below. Additionally, he has held onto his Native American heritage by building in "the old-style way" despite pressure from the whites to conform to their ways and perform for the tourists. In this safe haven of mixed cultures, Tayo finds more happiness than he has ever experienced. After part of his treatment from Betonie, Tayo reaches what he calls "the highest point on the earth" and says he can feel it, though it has nothing to do with measurements or height (129). He is happy and safe here, smiling and strong for the first time in the novel. Rather than using his environment as a way to control other cultures, Betonie is teaching him to accept the best of all his heritage and heal himself. As Tayo stands at the edge of the rimrock and looks below after the ceremony Betonie performs on him, he "[takes] a deep breath of cold mountain air: there were no boundaries; the world below and the sand paintings inside became the same that night. The mountains from all the directions had been gathered there that night" (134). Up here in the mountains, Tayo feels the freedom of unlimited possibility. The air is cool and clear, unlike the hot, dusty air at home or the rainy, humid air in the Philippines. All of his cultural heritage combines to help him think clearly and envision a future of health and happiness. Betonie's mixed heritage also gives him a unique perspective on whites, which he shares with Tayo:

> [Indians] want us to believe all evil resides with white people. Then we will look no further to see what is really happening. They want us to separate ourselves from white people, to be ignorant and helpless as we watch our own destruction. But white people are only tools that the witchery manipulates; and I tell you, we can deal with white people . . . .we can because we invented white people; it was Indian witchery that made white people in the first place (122).

Here, Betonie advocates for a broader perspective and advises Tayo not to be fooled by his people into believing that whites are the root of all evil. By refusing to separate entirely from whites and by embracing both sides of his cultural heritage, Tayo will be in the strongest position to control his identity and resist being overtaken by another culture. In an interview, Silko herself says that blaming whites entirely is "such a simplistic view, because from the very beginning, betrayals of our people occurred through deeply complicated convergences of intentions and world views."[16]

Tayo's interactions with another important biracial figure in *Ceremony,* Night Swan, are also characterized by cool air, milder weather, and feelings of safety and comfort. "It was cool. The curtain at the back of the room drifted in a cool stream of air from the window or door behind it" (Silko, Ceremony 90). Tayo says, "The room pulsed with feeling, the feeling flowing with the music and the breeze from the curtains . . ." (91). He is comforted by both her presence and her home, and feels safe and secure. The mild breeze stands in stark contrast to the impossible heat of his homeland, and represents a sort of middle ground that nurtures both parts of his heritage.

Night Swan also has hazel eyes, just like Tayo and Betonie. If eyes truly are the windows to the soul, then Betonie, Tayo, and Night Swan's mixed-color eyes represent souls that are combinations of multiple cultures. With the hazel eyes of mixed-race people, these three characters are equipped to see and understand the Native American, white, and Mexican worlds.

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[16] Per Seyersted, "Two Interviews With Leslie Marmon Silko," American Studies in Scandinavia 13 (1981): 17-33.

Despite these extremely varied descriptions of the natural landscapes associated with each culture in *Ceremony*, it ultimately appears that the earth itself has power over human mortality. It exerts a will of its own and seems to punish its inhabitants when it is not treated properly or given appropriate ritual or ceremony. Much of the story is centered around the great drought afflicting the Native American and Mexican peoples, and Tayo spends the majority of the novel attempting to end the current drought, which he feels he has caused because he wished away the relentless rain in the Philippines during the war. Josiah has taught Tayo that all things are sacred and connected, and that "droughts happen when people forget, when people misbehave," implying that the earth is punishing them for failing to show proper appreciation and reverence (42). When Betonie tells Tayo about the white ranchers and loggers who stripped the earth's canyons, cut down great forests, and shot thousands of animals for sport, he says that, ". . . the holy men at Native American and Acoma warned the people that the balance of the world had been disturbed and the people could expect droughts and harder days to come" (172). Betonie expects the earth to retaliate against the whites' pillaging and prepares to deal with the consequences of such mistreatment, even though he is not a part of the culture responsible for the mistreatment. This implies that if the earth is mistreated by any party or culture, it will punish all of its inhabitants by creating environmental havoc and withholding resources they need to live.

Regardless of the control various cultures try to exert over one another, the earth ultimately exerts the most control over all of them, and cannot be controlled itself. In her 2000 "The Novel as Chant: Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony as Ceremonial Healing," Gay Wilentz discusses the idea that in Native American culture, a single body part or

illness cannot be healed; rather, the whole person or culture must be healed, and holistic causes of illness—including oppression and offense of Mother Earth—must be addressed in order to solve the problem. [17] This supports my assertion that the devastation of the environment—by any party—ultimately causes the earth to retaliate, taking control of human mortality and exerting its own power over human life.

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[17] Gay Wilentz, The Novel as Chant: Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony as Ceremonial Healing (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000).

Chapter III

Almanac of the Dead

Silko's second novel, *Almanac of the Dead*, is vastly longer and more complex than *Ceremony* and tells the stories of an incredible variety of characters from an abundance of cultures. Though Tucson, Arizona is both the temporal and geographical focal point for the novel's setting, the text spans an abundance of nations and cultures over a period of 500 years. The epic story includes characters of Native American, United States Caucasian, Mexican and Mexican-Indian, Venezuelan, African American, Mayan, Argentinean, Cuban, and Spanish heritage, but not unlike *Ceremony*, the primary conflicts in the novel concern the relationships between American whites, Native Americans, and Mexicans, both full and partial-blooded. The beliefs, qualities, and behaviors of these three cultures are brought vibrantly to life through the descriptive environmental language Silko employs throughout the book.

It is important to note that *Almanac of the Dead's* panhemispheric plot proves makes it a more ambitious work than *Ceremony*. Silko's comprehensive vision of socioenvironmental pathology raises the stakes by encompassing all of North and South America and an unprecedented variety of cultures. Further, the story details the recuperation of the most primordial time layers of human inhabitance and spans 500 years of history. In another departure from the hopeful, uplifting *Ceremony*, *Almanac* reflects a decidedly darker tone and illustrates human depravity at its ugliest. In "Darker Side of Mediation: Violence and Its Emotional Effects in Leslie Marmon Silko's

Almanac of the Dead," Marja-Liisa Helenius argues that, "depictions of the gruesome effects of violence on the characters [in *Almanac*] aim to provoke emotional reactions also in readers, the witnesses of Silko's act of storytelling . . . . *Almanac* clearly suggests that violence is an innate tendency plaguing all of humankind; violence inhabited the American continent long before the arrival of the Europeans."[18] The dark, frightening world Silko creates offers riveting illustrations of the book's plethora of cultures and the distinct environments they inhabit.

First and foremost, Native American cultures—including Yaqui, Pueblo, Hopi, and Lakota Indians—are represented by the unique landscape they inhabit. Like *Ceremony*, all Native Americans in *Almanac* reside—and feel most comfortable in—dry, hot, dusty landscapes where the heat is too extreme for most plants to grow. Sterling, a Native American gardener, notices that, "The dry heat had parched the leaves of the desert trees pale yellow. Even the cactus plants had shriveled."[19] As Zeta walks around her beloved ranch, she notices that, "The desert shrubs, cactus, mesquite, and paloverde grew lush from the steep sides of the hills and ridges . . ." (177). These spiny, drought-hearty plants contribute heavily to the type of environment Native Americans are used to, and so they view them as a sign of comfort and protection—particularly since whites view this same landscape as a threat. Calabazas describes how "White men [are] terrified of the desert's stark, chalk plains that seem to glitter with the ashes of planets and worlds

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[18] Marja-Liisa Helenius, "Darker Side of Mediation: Violence and Its Emotional Effects in Leslie Marmon Silko's Almanac of the Dead," The Electronic Journal of the Department of English at the University of Helsinki 5 (2009): 2.

[19] Leslie M. Silko, Almanac of the Dead (New York: Penguin Books, 1991) 30.

yet to come . . . . The old people did not call the desert Mother for nothing" (222). While whites are frightened of the hot, barren deserts, the Indians are very comfortable on this land, and even feel protected by it, referring to it maternally. Silko makes it clear that Native American land represents a great danger to whites: "Yoeme said the veins of silver had dried up because . . . the [white] mining engineer himself, had dried up. Years of dry winds and effects of the sunlight on milky-white skin had been devastating" (120). This passage implies that whites are not cut out for life in Native American landscapes, and are in fact in danger of death if they stay too long.

Though they are terrified of Native American land, there are many instances in *Almanac* where whites force Native Americans off of their land for purposes of exploitation and monetary gain. Native Americans lament the fact that,

> Tucson built its largest sewage treatment plant on the northwest side of the city, next to the river. Farther south, near the Mexican border, the Santa Cruz runs as clear as a mountain stream. The Yaqui people know the location of the sewage plant is no accident. Calabazas' goats and little donkeys and livestock from the Yaqui barrio wander on city property surrounding the sewage plant. The Yaqui livestock fatten on the tall river grass and willows as they always have since the days before there was a city of Tucson to condemn Yaqui land (189).

The fact that whites built a toxic and dangerous sewage plant right next to the river that supports the life systems of the Native Americans who live there demonstrates a complete and utter disregard for the health and safety of their fellow human beings. Their carelessness implies that they see Native Americans as less than human, or expendable. This is all reminiscent of Piper's argument that Native American land has been historically abused, as she illustrates in her example of the Laguna tribe receiving warning in 1977 that its main water supply had been knowingly contaminated—by white Americans—with toxic radium-226. Not only did those responsible for the contamination

do nothing to eradicate it, they actually designated that land a "National Sacrifice Area" so they would be permitted to continue destroying it.[20] Gregory Hooks and Chad L. Smith concur and comment on the current reality of the situation Silko describes in her fiction, stating that:

> . . . Native American lands tend to be located in the same county as hazardous sites. In the twentieth century, the United States fought and won two global wars and prevailed in a sustained Cold War. The geopolitical demands of remaining the world's leading military power pushed the United States to produce, test, and deploy weapons of unprecedented toxicity. Native Americans have been left exposed to the dangers of this toxic legacy.[21]

Christopher Vecsey uses a specific example of white destruction, sharing that,

> In the middle Rio Grande, perhaps the oldest continuous area of human habitation in America, the Indians worked their corn and other food plants so as to preserve their environment. They prevented flooding; they kept grass in the arid climate; they did not deplete wood supplies. White innovations in the same area brought about floods, erosion, and other natural disasters, which seriously damaged Indian subsistence.[22]

White American ignorance concerning the relationship between Native Americans and their land in the novel is further demonstrated by the fact that, "Sometime after the Apaches arrived at the island fortress off the Florida coast, white men from a school for Indians in Pennsylvania [came] to take away their children. The Indian school

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[20] Karen Piper, "Police Zones: Territory and Identity in Leslie Marmon Silko's 'Ceremony,'"American Indian Quarterly 21 (1997): 483-497.

[21] Gregory Hooks and Chad L. Smith, "The Treadmill of Destruction: National Sacrifice Areas and Native Americans," American Sociological Review 69.4 (2004): 558 - 575.

[22] Christopher Vecsey and Robert. W. Venables, Eds, American Indian Environments: Ecological Issues in Native American History (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1980) 10.

in Pennsylvania was in damp country, and many of the Apache children fell ill and died" (Silko, Almanac 234). These Native American children are from the desert, and are accustomed to hot, dry, dusty conditions. Forcing them to live at a school in "damp country"—which is equivalent to jailing them, as they were held by force—is a way for whites to compromise their health, break their spirits, and make them so uncomfortable with their surroundings that they cannot or will not fight as fiercely to escape.

The whites in *Almanac* claim all of the fertile land available—whether it already had inhabitants or not—until "the Indians [were] left the poorest land; it was true. In the hills only marijuana would grow; pumpkins and gourds only grew down in the small valleys" (601). By taking all of the fertile and "desirable" land for themselves, whites are essentially saying that land is valuable only for what it can produce, or what can be built upon it to generate resources. Linda Hogan points out that "destruction of tribal land and people has been the result of energy development in many areas. Indian people have been the victims of oil development, coal mining, uranium mining and milling; yet [they] are dependent upon these destructive processes for income and employment."[23] Whites go so far as to ignore treaties and agreements made with the Native Americans: "The terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo had guaranteed protection for all land titles granted prior to the arrival of the U.S., but the treaty and been violated again and again by whites greedy for the best land" (236). Elizabeth Archuleta concurs, explaining that:

> For American Indians there has been no justice, especially if one considers that the United States and powerful individuals used the law to increase their land base beyond legal limitations when they excluded communal

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[23] Linda Hogan, "Native American Women: Our Voice, the Air," Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies 6.3 (1981): 1-4

> land grants presumably protected and recognized by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. The United States government acquired rights over communal lands by redefining acceptable legal definitions for land use and ownership, which were based on Western conceptions of land use.[24]

Robert Sack expands on this belief, which he coined "territoriality" in his 1986 book *Human Territoriality: Its Theory and History.* "Territoriality appears as a general, neutral, and essential means by which a place is made, or a space cleared and maintained, for things to exist. Societies make this place-clearing function explicit and permanent in the concept of property." [25] For example, to the whites in *Almanac*, pieces of land are considered empty if there are no buildings on them; they are valued only for the possible buildings and events that may eventually appear on them. Sack continues, "Territoriality conceptually separates space from things and then recombines them as an assignment" (486). This concept of natural space as a mere stage upon which to play out one's desired plot or story, however, is in direct conflict with the Native American belief in interdependence between personal character and physical place. Lee Schweninger agrees, stating that, "Native Americans respect and revere the land, the environment, and the human interrelatedness to that environment in ways foreign to the European immigrants."[26]

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[24] Elizabeth Archuleta, "Securing Our Nation's Roads and Borders or Re-Circling the Wagons? Leslie Marmon Silko's Destabilization of "Borders," Wicazo Sa Review 20.1 (2005): 113-137.

[25] Robert D. Sack, Human Territoriality: Its Theory and History. (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 127.

[26] Lee Schweninger, "Writing Nature: Silko and Native Americans as Nature Writers," MELUS 18.2 (1993): 47-60.

Given this Native American belief in the intimacy between character and environment, it is highly problematic when they are forced off of their native lands. As in the situation where the Indian children fell ill and died as a result of being removed from their homes and exposed to foreign weather, relocating Native Americans away from their homelands weakens both their cultural identities and their ability to survive, making them easier for whites to control. In his 1991 publication "Ecological Restoration as Post-colonial Ritual of Community in Three Native American Novels, Christopher Norden argues that: "The Anglo-American modernist tradition often as not seems willfully blind to the causal connection between historical forces such as colonialism, urbanization, mercantilism, and industrialization on the one hand and the individual experience of alienation from community and nature on the other."[27] Here, Norden makes an argument about *Almanac of the Dead* moderately similar to the one that David A. Rice made about *Ceremony*: in Silko's books, as a result of Euramerican historical behaviors, Native American cultures experience a violent separation from the natural world, which results in cultural identity crisis. He goes on to say that *Almanac of the Dead*

> offers what is undoubtedly the most elaborate and detailed accounting of the decline and fall of Western civilization yet written by a Native American author, or anyone else for that matter . . . . Silko points to the ecological restoration of degraded or compromised ecosystems as a key element in the ritual restoration of nature and culture, and 'healing' which must return into balance alienated individuals, broken families, fragmented communities, and a dead or dying natural world (95).

Burke A. Hendrix also argues for the necessity of reclaiming Native American land in order to ensure the survival of their cultures in his 2005 publication "Memory in

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[27] Christopher Norden, "Ecological Restoration as Post-Colonial Ritual of Community in Three Native American Novels," Studies in American Indian Literatures 6.4 (1994): 94-106.

Native American Land Claims." His article outlines three justifications for Native Americans to pursue their original land claims: "To regain properties where original ownership has not been superseded, to aid the long-term survival of their endangered cultures, and to challenge and revise the historical misremembering of mainstream American society."[28] Bridget O'Meara concurs with these sentiments in her 2000 publication "The Ecological Politics of Leslie Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*," which argues that "while a [postindustrial, democratic, neoliberal] image of the world is enthusiastically proliferated by politicians and capitalists alike in overdeveloped countries, the material, social, and ecological lives of many Third and Fourth World communities is increasingly threatened."[29] She describes *Almanac* as "[exploring] and [critiquing] interlocking histories of oppression that inscribe the land, labor, and bodies of indigenous peoples" (65). She argues that *Almanac* recovers lost knowledge of oppressed peoples while simultaneously affirming and strengthening their cultural and environmental relationships. The relationship between Native Americans and their land is undoubtedly more intricate than a simple unwillingness to relocate or fear of the unknown; rather, their very cultural identity survives generation after generation by sharing an intimate connection with the land itself and the ancestry it holds within it. Adam Sol concurs, sharing, "Native peoples who still maintain ties to their heritage are

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[28] Burke A. Hendrix, "Memory in Native American Land Claims," Political Theory 33.6 (2005): 763-785.

[29] Bridget O'Meara, "The Ecological Politics of Leslie Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*," Wicazo Sa Review 15.2 (2000): 64.

constantly shown to have a strong relationship to the land, while those without roots in the land mistreat and are subsequently mistreated by the landscape itself."[30]

In *Almanac of the Dead*, Native American beliefs about the value of the earth, its inhabitants (plant, animal, and human) and how they should be treated effectively illustrates their fundamental disagreement with white culture. While Native Americans believe they are one with the land, that land cannot be owned, and therefore borders and nations cannot exist, white Americans demonstrate, through forcibly overtaking others' lands, that land possession is an important part of nation-building—which they deem acceptable and desirable. "El Feo did not believe in political parties, ideology, or rules. El Feo believed in the land. With the return of Indian land would come the return of justice, followed by peace" (513). This statement clearly summarizes Native American values: as opposed to white materialism, Indians do not value ownership of things, animals, people, or even land for the sake of simply owning it; they associate their very identities with the earth upon which their people have been existing and weaving their culture for generations. Thus, they value the land as the keeper of their ancestors, memories, and ways of life—not a commodity to be bought or sold. By taking their land from them, whites did not take a mere commodity, like an expensive painting or brick of gold, but took their very identity.

At the beginning of her novel, Silko includes an unusual map that perfectly conveys the Native American belief that time and borders are fluid: it is wildly out of

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[30] Adam Sol and Leslie M. Silko, "The Story as It's Told: Prodigious Revisions in Leslie Marmon Silko's "Almanac of the Dead," American Indian Quarterly 23(1999): 24-48.

scale and covered with many character names, pictures, and prophecies. Silko's "map" chronicles the lives of her characters and their spiritual beliefs, and does not concern itself with exact margins and distances. It is demonstrative of the belief that people cannot be divided by such European notions as land or time. Calabazas, one of Silko's Mexican-Indian characters, illustrates this view by saying, "We don't believe in boundaries. Borders. Nothing like that." He explains that maps and deeds are inconsequential and the concept of seconds and minutes is imaginary: "We have always moved freely. North-south. East-west. We pay no attention to what isn't real" (222). To them, the concepts of time and natural space ownership are make-believe. Silko speaks to this belief in a 1993 interview with Laura Cotelli, stating that, "in the days before monarch's maps with boundary lines, the tribal people of the Americas thought of the whole earth as their home" until the border line was drawn between Mexico and the United States and, "sought to destroy ancient liaisons between peoples on opposite sides of the newly-created borderline. . . . This arbitrary privileging works to divide American Indians from each other and creates false distinctions that were not there before colonialism."[31]

Native Americans in *Almanac of the Dead* do not subscribe to white American theories of property division and ownership. Rather than individually collecting as many resources as possible and hoarding them for themselves, they share their belongings equally with others to ensure fairness and equality for all: "*Commune* and *communal*

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[31]Laura Coltelli, "Almanac of the Dead: An Interview with Leslie Marmon Silko," Conversations with Leslie Marmon Silko (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2000) 2.

were words that described the lives of many tribes and their own people as well. The mountain villages shared the land, water, and wild game. What was grown, what was caught or raised or discovered, was divided equally and shared all around" (314). This beautifully captures the sentiment by which Native Americans live their lives: sustainably and as a community that supports and nourishes each other. In contrast, the white community embraces an each-man-for-himself mentality that is unsustainable, and frequently causes whites to encroach upon Indian land and resources. Ironically, since Native Americans believe in sharing all they have with humanity, had whites simply asked for a gift of resources, they may have received it: "To the indigenous people of the Americas, no crime was worse than to allow some human beings to starve while others ate, especially not one's own sisters and brothers" (316). This statement highlights a very basic and striking distinction between all of the native populations and whites in *Almanac of the Dead.* While native populations believe in sustainability, supporting each other, and sharing, whites believe in supporting only one's self and taking what you need or want whenever you need or want it—regardless of how it affects others. Another example of prioritizing unity and the relationships between groups of people over amassing abundance occurs in the case of a Native American baby, El Feo:

> [El Feo] had come from a village close to the turquoise sea. He had been sent as an infant to the mountains so the coastal clans and the mountain clans did not forget they were one family . . . The people on the coast had all the fish they could eat; otherwise they were poor. Tribal land the people had cleared for farming had later been claimed by the federal government; then the land had been resold to German coffee planters (468).

Native American elders use this innocent child as a tool to unite land and people, as unity is deemed all-important, and his family trusts that their relations in the mountains will

raise him as their own. While whites are demonstrating a lack of respect for Native Americans by overtaking their land and reselling it for a profit, the Native Americans are willingly lending their babies to tribes in other regions to strengthen the connection between them, and between the parts of the earth on which they live.

Native Americans in *Almanac* take defending and protecting their beloved Earth very seriously, as they think of themselves as *of the earth* rather than simply on the earth. They view fighting to protect their environment as a unifying and sacred act, and perform it with passion—even when it costs them their lives. The Barefoot Hopi, a champion for indigenous peoples taking back their land, makes a great distinction between the mindset of the Native Americans and that of white Americans when he discusses terrorism: "Poisoning our water with radioactive wastes, poisoning our air with military weapons' wastes—*those* are acts of terrorism" (734)! To the Native Americans, bombing a bridge to save the Colorado River is not an act of terrorism, but a desperate move to save their natural resources from exploitation. While bombing the bridge:

> The brave eco-warriors focused all the energy of their beings to set free the river, and so they merged instantly in the explosion of water and concrete and sandstone. They are no longer solitary human souls; they are part of a single configuration of energy . . . . They love us and watch over us with our beloved ancestors" (733).

This passage exemplifies two Native American beliefs: First, that earth is sacred and worth protecting at any price, and second, that death frees the human soul from a lonely physical existence, and unites it with the ancestors who have gone before them to create a single configuration of energy.

> As the human soul approached death, it got more and more restless and more and more energy for wandering, a preparation for all eternity where the old people believed no one would rest or sleep but would range over the earth and between the moon and stars, traveling on winds and clouds,

> in constant motion with ocean tides, migrations of birds and animals, pulsing within all life and all beings ever created" (234).

This Native American belief stands in harsh opposition to the commonly perpetuated white, Christian view of what happens after death: a peaceful, restful existence in heaven with other humans who have left earth before them. The Native American belief that after death, the soul becomes an actual part of the natural world, traveling on the wind and moving with the ocean and flocks of migrating birds, highlights the deep spiritual connection they have with Earth in life. For people who hold the Earth and natural world very sacred and are extremely reliant on it to uphold their way of life, the ultimate repayment of all the Earth gives to them is to give their souls back to Earth at death, adding to her power to help and support other people.

As they did in *Ceremony*, Native Americans also show great respect for animals in the novel, and see them as trusted spirit guides and friends. They follow character Tacho wherever he goes and provide him with guidance and prophecies: "The macaws kept reading off lists of orders, things that Tacho-Wacah must do. Tacho bribed the birds with candy, and then for two or three nights Tacho had beautiful dreams" (339). In the novel, whites never defer to animals as guides or friends or even beings to be respected; they instead view them as a commodity, something to be hunted down and traded or sold. Native Americans are also very conscious of sustainability, the food chain, and waste, and attempt to use every part of animals—even once they are deceased—to benefit another living being. Sterling the gardener flings two drowned lizards over the embankment thinking other creatures will eat them and says, "That way their lives aren't wasted" (23). By giving the animals back to the earth, their deaths can provide nourishment to the living and strengthen the natural environment shared by all.

White Americans in *Almanac* are largely presented in a negative light. As a group, they tend to be very disrespectful of other cultures, manipulating them for personal gain; disrespectful of the land, often exploiting it for monetary purposes without regard for health, safety, or sustainability; and uninterested in preserving other cultures' heritage and lands. They are highly disrespectful of other cultures, referring to Native Americans and Mexicans as, "swarms of brown and yellow human larvae called natives," who they despise for obstructing their acquisition of wealth and land, and threaten to "disrupt a precious line of pureblooded white aristocracy" (545). Silko clarifies her view of white society with the words: "The U.S. government might have no money for the starving, but there was always government money for weapons and death."[32]

Like Native Americans, white Americans too, are associated with a distinct natural environment in *Almanac*; as opposed to the dry, hot, dusty environment associated with Native Americans, white Americans are represented by plentiful trees and greenery, easy access to water (sometimes by force), turbulent rain and thunder storms, cold weather, densely populated areas, shiny new buildings, and bright, colorful plant imagery—all of which very often describe occurrences that Native Americans view as horrific. Upon arriving in Tucson, Sterling notices that "Downtown Tucson looked pretty much like downtown Albuquerque before [whites] had "urban-renewed" it—and tore down the oldest buildings with merchants who had catered to Spanish-speaking and Indian people" (28). The "new" town is described as unfriendly toward and unsafe for Indians, and is completely devoid of the older, historic buildings that represented the

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[32] Jane Olmstead, "The Uses of Blood in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*," Contemporary Literature 40.3 (1999): 464-490.

Native American settlements that once stood there and of the establishments that formerly catered to non-European cultures. Destroying these buildings is akin to symbolically destroying the Native American culture, and the brand new white American buildings clearly indicate that Indians are unwelcome in the "new" Tucson.

As uncomfortable as whites are on Native American land, so are Native Americans on white land. While using her psychic powers to solve a murder case for whites, Native American Lecha makes numerous references to foreign foliage and greenery hiding the truth, and even relates the killer to the lush landscape, "seeing" in her mind the way he handled the kidnapped boys as plants:

> He realizes they are trees while he is touching them. He fondles the boys between their legs, and a branch sprouts and pushes out. The tips are soft leaf-bud moist with sap. He never means to squeeze to hard or to crush. But they are tender, fragile. He plants carefully and prays for tall trees. He dreams of towering oaks and spruce that lean and sway but do not break in summer storms. He realizes his dreams are of the mountains, not the sea" (141).

When considering where the bodies are, Lecha thinks, "They could be buried anywhere. Under all those leaves. The creep was always wandering around in the forest, way back in the trees" (139). Silko equates the forest and thick trees, alien to her as a Native American, with the manipulative qualities of the white killer. Lecha also equates cold and snow—neither of which are part of her natural environment, and are exclusive to white territory in the novel—with death and ugliness. While thinking about her studio audience on her upcoming show and reflecting on the harsh winter, which she isn't used to, Lecha "[remembers] the mountain peaks had reminded her of the mounds of new graves covered with snow" (146). She is unused to the foreign weather, and this snow makes her feel smothered and reminds her death. During her taping, she realizes why she paid such

attention to the snow capped mountains, and blurts out to the audience, "The man is dead. He is buried in a snowbank. The snow is dirty from muddy water cars splash over it." Even this premonition about the snowbank is clouded by Lecha's memories of a trip to Alaska, where

> the only excitement had come in the spring when the big rivers, the Yukon and the Kuskokwim began to thaw and all night the earth along the riverbanks shook with the thunder of the breakup of the ice. At breakup time the newspapers from Anchorage and Fairbanks began to catalog grisly discoveries in melting snowbanks . . .the body count of winter's toll had been the only interesting Alaska news (148).

These grisly discoveries leave Lecha uncomfortable with snow and ice, but whites remained unaffected by it. Similarly, thunder and rain reoccur often in the novel, and are represented as very threatening to Native Americans, but welcome and calming to whites: "Lecha has forgotten how cold the rain can be. Tucson for her has always been the dry heat in June. A hundred three degrees, six percent humidity, and the cicadas breaking into song over the good weather. The wind blows the rain against the metal panels of the house trailer . . ." (Silko, Almanac 165). Lecha refers to the heat and low humidity as "good weather," and feels unsafe and far from home in the rain. In another example, Seese, a young white woman, finds herself caught in several severe storms and is actually comforted by them: "The [wind] gusts splattered sand against the sliding glass doors. Nights like these when she was a girl, she had pulled the covers up to her chin and had gone right to sleep. The sound of the wind had made her feel so snug and safe inside" (Silko, Almanac 56). This weather, which makes Native Americans so uncomfortable, actually makes Seese feel safe and protected.

The whites' ready access to water—even when it means stealing it from Native American land—is also a reoccurring theme in the novel. In order to reassure new

arrivals to the desert that they have made a wise choice in moving to Tucson, real estate developer Leah Blue intends to drill deep-water wells on Indian land and "scrape out canals and lakes." She freely acknowledges the enormous problem the Indians will have with her environmental irresponsibility: "Indian tribes or ecologists might try to sue to stop her deep wells . . ." (376). While she drills away Mother Earth's natural resources—and the lifeblood the Indians live on—Leah Blue offers to provide the Native Americans with drinking water in the form of "bottled glacier water from the Colorado Rockies" (660). Her lack of understanding that the Native Americans' primary concern is for the integrity of the land is astonishing. She shows absolutely no respect for the land she pillages to fulfill her greedy building scheme or for the people she leaves without a natural water source.

The whites' lack of relationship to earth is also made clear by their elitist, alienating behaviors. Serlo, a self-absorbed white supremacist is plotting an "Alternative Earth module" with "underground caches of supplies and weapons" that will allow him to live sealed away underground, independently of all other living things (542). He believes that, "In the end, the earth [will] be uninhabitable." Clearly, this is a man with no connection to the earth—or any other living thing—whatsoever. His identity is defined entirely by his wealth and ability to create his surroundings. His desire to separate himself from the current world is entirely race-driven: "There was little use in bringing a genetically superior man into a world crowded and polluted by the degenerate masses" (546). This lack of connection to the earth allows whites to use the environment as a means of controlling others, who are greatly connected to the earth and care about its fate.

> The white man hated to hear anything about spirits because spirits were already dead and could not be tortured and butchered or shot, the only way the white man knew how to deal with the world. Spirits were immunity to the white man's threats and to his bribes of money and food. The white man only knew one way to control himself or others and that was with brute force (581).

This statement, made by Native American Lecha, illustrates how uninterested whites are in anything spiritual or intangible, and how they use force to control cultures that are immune to monetary persuasion. Whites in this book seem to believe that God gave them dominion over the earth and that man is more important than land.

Though they don't hesitate to commandeer it for their own purposes, whites despise and fear Native American land. Caucasian real estate developer Leah Blue cannot understand:

> why the Indians or the environmentalists had bothered to sue even if her deep wells *did* harm other wells of natural springs, which her deep wells *did not*; what possible good was this desert anyway? Full of poisonous snakes, sharp rocks, and cactus! Leah knew she was not alone in this feeling of repulsion; most people who saw the cactus and rocky hills for the first time agreed the desert was ugly. In her dream city, the water lilies and cattails, the giant cypress trees and palms, would soothe their eyes, and people could forget they were in a desert (750).

Leah voluntarily speaks for her fellow whites when she describes her repulsion at Native American land, and assumes that her idea of beauty—water lilies and palm trees—is shared by all who matter. Fellow Caucasian Max Blue also finds the desert a terrifying prospect: "Max had never walked into the desert from the fairway. The desert meant danger and death . . ." (637). He also says that "back roads placed [people] where any cheap punk could gun [them] down" and were unsafe, as opposed to "turnpikes and big thoroughfares" (349). This passage indicates that whites, unlike Native Americans, are uncomfortable with the kind of ecosystem in which Native Americans feel at home, and

find it a threatening place to be; they are much more comfortable in big cities and populated areas. This sentiment is repeated with the story of Max Blue's plane crash: "It had been as if Max Blue had died that day in the sand and tumbleweeds next to the runway at Fort Bliss" (350). Silko is careful to specify that Blue's tragedy occurs in the sand and the tumbleweeds—dangerous and frightening territory foreign to a New Jersey white man, but very much home and welcoming to a Native American. Whites are most fearful of the desert because it represents the Native people who live there, about whom they have made many assumptions:

> . . . the East Coast journalists would have laughed harder than the *americano* soldiers or the general, who was probably glancing nervously at the brushy slopes of the rocky foothills above the fort, watching nervously for the legions of war-painted Apaches . . . . The journalists loved the ease with which this savage desert and its savage creatures so effortlessly yielded front-page copy (231).

The strangeness, wildness, and inaccessibility of these lands lead whites to assume that Native Americans are a warring people as determined to use "brute force" to acquire land as they are. "The southwestern United States continues to feel the impact of imperialism as a result of a colonized legal system that arbitrarily, but systematically, continues to racialize and categorize nonwhite peoples as savage or dangerous."[33]

Whites are no more tolerant or appreciative of the animal kingdom than they are of Native Americans. Calabazas shares that "before the whites came we remember the deer were as thick as jackrabbits and the grass in the canyon bottoms was as high as their bellies, and the people had always had plenty to eat. The streams and rivers had run deep

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[33] Elizabeth Archuleta,"Securing Our Nation's Roads and Borders or Re-Circling the Wagons? Leslie Marmon Silko's Destabilization of Borders," Wicazo Sa Review 20.1 (2005): 113-137.

with clean, cold water" (Silko, Almanac 222). Whites have plundered the land until animals are scarce, killing so many that they cause starvation among the tribespeople. When the four children, each with a piece of the almanac, were on their journey, they spent much of it starving because whites had pillaged the land of the tribes around them: ". . . they saw there was little food to be had. They were told the aliens had stolen their modest harvests year after year until the people could hardly keep enough to seed the gardens the following season. The children saw few birds or rodents and no large animals because the aliens had slaughtered all these creatures to feed themselves and their soldiers and their slaves" (247). The Indian use of the word "alien" to describe whites is especially ironic, as whites have historically referred to all non-whites as "aliens." In another example of wealthy whites who have depleted earth and are already looking for a new environment to consume:

> The new enemies . . . are the space station and biosphere tycoons who [are] rapidly depleting rare species of plants, birds, and animals so the richest people on earth [can] bail out of the pollution and revolutions and retreat to orbiting paradise islands of glass and steel . . . . The rich need not fear the rabble while they [enjoy] their 'natural settings' complete with freshwater pools and jungles filled with rare parrots and orchids (728).

The white population is entirely unconcerned with treating earth sustainably and ensuring the availability of resources for future generations. Instead, like a swarm of hungry insects, they plan to greedily suck the earth dry and simply take their own culture—to the exclusion of all others—and move to a new environment. They are also unconcerned with whether this new environment is natural or synthetic, as long as it looks like "paradise." This demonstrates a complete lack of spiritual relationship with the earth and its many different cultures.

Unlike Native American landscapes, white American landscapes boast vibrantly colorful flowers and flower imagery. In her 1996 article "Death of Love/Love of Death: Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*," Janet St. Clair explores Silko's use of metaphor in relation to human experience, touching upon the fact that, when colorful flowers and natural beauty are mentioned, it is almost always in connection with ugly and unnecessary death.[34] In fact, Jane Olmstead notes that, "Silko's critique of U.S. culture and society condemns a pornographic obsession with images of death."[35] When Beaufrey's boyfriend Eric commits suicide with a .44 revolver, the critics rave about David's glossy photographs of the suicide that evoke "a field of red shapes which might be peonies—cherry, ruby, deep purple, black—and the nude human figure nearly buried in these 'blossoms' of bright red" (Silko, Almanac 108). These beautiful words, which are usually reserved for describing natural beauty and earth's loveliness, are instead used to describe a most horrific sight, insinuating that these words of beauty are actually masking a deeply-rooted ugliness that is engrained in white culture. In another scene, an onlooker sees a wall of beautiful vines with vibrant purple flowers, and they remind him of the "twists of human intestines" (334). In yet another instance, an assassinated motorcyclist is found hanging upside down in a lush, blossoming paloverde tree, and is referred to as a "strange fruit" by the woman who spots him (432).

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[34] Janet St.Clair, "Death of Love/Love of Death: Leslie Marmon Silko's Almanac of the Dead," MELUS 21.2 (1996): 141-156.

[35] Jane Olmstead, "The Uses of Blood in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*" Contemporary Literature 40.3 (1999): 464-490.

Overall, Silko portrays the white environmental landscape as a place of superficiality, selfishness, and most notably, danger to Native Americans. While this text largely seems to indict all whites, there is a single instance in *Almanac* that extends an invitation for whites to join indigenous peoples in restoring the earth. At the Holistic Healers Convention, twin spiritual leaders Wacah and El Feo announce:

> All were welcome. It was only necessary to walk with the people and let go of all the greed and the selfishness in one's heart. One must be able to let go of a great many comforts and all things European; but the reward would be peace and harmony with all living things. All they had to do was return to Mother Earth. No more blasting, digging, or burning (710).

Channette Romero notes that "Although the text finds fault with dominant Euro-American ways of viewing the world, it encourages all Americans, including those of white European descent, to participate in ridding the earth of exploitation."[36] The claim that "all [are] welcome" to participate in bringing peace and harmony to earth suggests "Silko is critiquing a specific worldview derived from Europe as opposed to targeting the white race as a whole" (626). Silko seems to be advocating a universal shift in all cultures' behavior toward the environment and toward each other rather than indicting all knowledge and peoples connected with European culture. As Adam Sol observes:

> . . . a lesser novel than *Almanac* might devolve into a diatribe praising native peoples at the expense of the forces of domination . . . . *Almanac* does have its moments of straight-on anti-European polemic—the novel is, after all, about the self-destructive nature of male-dominated Christian European culture and its imminent departure from the Americas. However, the object of Silko's attack is not necessarily whites per se, but rather those who have contributed to the destruction of native cultures, the abuse of the earth, and the enslavement of native peoples (43).

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[36] Channette Romero, "Envisioning a Network of Tribal Coalitions: Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*," American Indian Quarterly 26.4 (2002): 623-640.

Jane Olmstead concurs with this observation, contributing that, "There is no question that *Almanac of the Dead* is a pointed attack on Western culture and capitalism, the charge of tribalism oversimplifies a novel where group formation is based on a combination of blood ties and affiliation" (480). Jane St. Clair also views charges of tribalism as missing the novel's point:

> Imperfect Indians notwithstanding, *Almanac* frequently seems to betray a radically separatist ethnocentrism. Indians, after all, are flawed by their contamination by white cultures . . . . But the apparently violent tribal bias of the novel is deceptive. It is subverted, to a large degree, by that same hopeful inclusiveness that lends Ceremony its abiding beauty . . . . The myriad plots are finally understood not as lines at all, but as great looping convergences that encompass more time, and more space, until time and space—those cornerstones of modern Western thought—become the eviscerated signifiers of a radically limited vision.[37]

However, Sol also suggests that white culture's lack of faith and spiritual power will contribute to its demise: "The white man only knew one way to control himself or others and that was with brute force. Against the spirits, the white man was impotent" (Silko, Almanac 581).

As Bridget O'Meara suggests, "*Almanac of the Dead* imagines possibilities for building broad-based political coalitions among a wide range of individuals and groups, across time and space, national and legal boundaries, social formations, and ideological positions. However, it also opens up a space for exploring conflicts and tensions within alliances and networks."[38] O'Meara argues that "[a]ctivism is complex, often messy: an

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[37] Janet St.Clair, "Uneasy Ethnocentrism: Recent Works of Allen, Silko, and Hogan," Studies in American Indian Literature 6.1 (1994): 83-98.

[38] Bridget O'Meara, "The Ecological Politics of Leslie Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*," Wicazo Sa Review 15.2 (2000): 63-73.

apparently counterhegemonic position, in the absence of an ongoing politics of criticism, can deny that complexity, becoming rigid and dogmatic, making it easily appropriated, co-opted, diffused, and integrated into the current hegemony" (70). Wolfgang Sachs expands upon this position, stating that:

> In part, ecology—understood as the philosophy of a social movement—is about to transform from a knowledge of opposition to a knowledge of domination. In fact, ideas and concepts—like "risk," "eco-system," "sustainability," or "global"—which were once hurled from below to the elites at the top, begin now to bounce back from the commanding heights of society to the citizens at the grassroots. In the process, environmentalism doesn't remain the same; it becomes sanitized of its radical content and reshaped as neutral and expert knowledge until it can be wedded to the dominant view.[39]

Sol makes a related observation, stating that "Silko evokes a dark vision of the European-dominated world with the hope of participating in radical changes to come, and enacts a prodigious ambition" (47).

The Mexican (which, for the purposes of this argument, will also include those of mixed heritage who identify themselves as Mexican) culture's use of landscape in *Almanac* strikes an eerie chord of similarity to both of the aforementioned cultures: while, as in *Ceremony*, Silko's descriptions of the physical Mexican landscapes are quite similar to that of the Native American landscapes, the Mexican military and upper class shares the white perspective that the land exists for their use and exploitation. Wealthy Mexicans are busily destroying endangered tropical rain forests in order to make room for multi-million dollar mansions on sacred land. They also use the brutal methods adopted from the whites to extract land taxes from other cultures: "Yaquis who refused to

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[39] Wolfgang Sachs, ed. Global Ecology: A New Arena of Political Conflict (Halifax: Zed Books) xv-xvi.

acknowledge the Mexican government or to pay taxes of their land were rounded up and shot. The soldiers filled the arroyos with their bodies, and families never knew who had been murdered or who had escaped. Those ghosts can't rest" (Silko, Almanac 190). This utter disregard for human life, sacrificed for monetary gain and control of the land, is reminiscent of white culture. "Menardo agreed with General J. that the bands of illegal refugees trying to make a run for it should be gunned down from the air like coyotes or wolves . . . the best policy was to kill them as you found them. Otherwise, you ran into all the logistical problems the Germans had encountered with disposing of the Jews" (495). Like the whites, they are treating each other as disposable property, or mere casualties in a war for the land. This passage further implies that these particular Mexicans believe animals have no spirits or souls, and exist solely for their use, like whites. This perspective makes it easy to obliterate others simply for the sake of claiming the space they take up.

In opposition with these beliefs, however, are the Mexican leaders of the revolution and their followers. Angelita rallies her armies by explaining that once they have reclaimed their land from whites, they will return to a society where "everyone [eats] or everyone [starves] together . . . rock, insect, human being, river, or flower. Each depended upon the other; the destruction of one harmed all others" (519). This respect for Mother Earth—shared by the Native Americans—is not reflected by white beliefs at all. The belief that harming one part of the earth or its inhabitants will harm the rest is a much more holistic perspective then the isolationist theories embodied by white culture. Root even celebrates the great variety of living things on earth and credits that variety for his culture's survival: "Survival had depended on differences. Not just the differences in the

terrain that gave the desert traveler critical information about traces of water or grass for his animals, but the sheer varieties of plants and bugs and animals" (202). Again, this holistic perspective, which reflects great respect for the earth, is shared by fellow indigenous culture, the Native Americans.

Despite some differences in their beliefs about how land should be regarded and used, the actual natural environment of the Mexicans is very similar to that of the Native Americans. Like Native Americans and whites, they feel very safe in their own environment—which represents danger to other cultures. When Calabazas describes his battle with whites as his family was forced off their fields, he says, "We have always had the advantage because this country is ours—it's our backyard. We know it in the black of night. We know it in the July heat of hell. The gringos come in and the going for us gets rough. But we just get tougher. That's how it's always been" (218). He also describes how, when the Italian families moved into Tucson they didn't mind at first "because Calabazas' people did their best work in the desert mountains, and on the vast burning miles between Tucson and Sonora. Because it was the land itself, that protected native people. White men were terrified of the desert's stark, chalk plains that seem to glitter with the ashes of planets and worlds yet to come . . . . The old people did not call the desert Mother for nothing" (221). While whites are terrified of the hot, barren deserts, the Mexicans are very comfortable on this land, and even feel protected by it. On a similar note, "Once Liria had asked Calabazas what their protection was from outsiders, and he had pointed at the sun and then out at the creosote flats and rocky foothills of cactus and brush. 'We are safe for as long as we have all this,'" Calabazas had told her . . ." (222). They completely rely upon their natural surroundings for protection. As Seese looks

around the cactus garden at the ranch, she notices that "the largest and most formidable varieties of cactus had been planted next to the walls of the house . . . . it occurred to Seese that Calabazas' cactus also created an elaborate barricade around the house" (82). The Mexicans are excellent at using their natural resources for defense, indicating a deep and thorough connection with the earth. Root echoes this connection when he muses, "The fresh smell of the desert, creosote, sage, and sand. The temperature of the air and the temperature of his own body so perfectly aligned that he was no longer sure where his body ended and the rest of the world began . . . ." (198). Calabazas, too embodies a powerful relationship to the earth and a love for his natural environment: "Day and night Calabazas had schemed, locating faint trails through dark volcanic rock and thick spiny bushes and cactus that figured in all his dreams." Though they sound intimidating, this "volcanic rock" and "thick spiny bushes" are featured in his dreams of ambition and joy, indicating his comfort with these natural surroundings. However, he thinks, "without a guide, [a] traveler might die of heat and dehydration within sight of a cluster of rocks," indicating that this land is only safe and welcoming to Mexicans, and is very dangerous for outsiders (237).

Similarly, Silko indicates that other cultures' natural surroundings are unsafe for Mexicans. When Iliana, Menardo's wealthy wife dies, "The accident could be traced back to the first afternoon Menardo ever spent with Alegria, and their visit to the building site on the edge of suburban Tuxtla where a last hilltop of jungle trees and vegetation had persisted" (278). This thick, green, lush land connotes danger; Iliana's death is related to this mystical, overgrown jungle, so unlike the safety of the dry, hot, spiky Mexican desert. This idea of the dangerous, mystical jungle causing Iliana's death is reconfirmed

by the physical circumstances surrounding her death: “The wall of glass at the far end glowed with a luminous light filtered through the jungle leaves. The light was strange. Reflected off the high polish of the brilliant-white marble stairs, the light seemed more pervasive than the summer-afternoon sun at one o’clock” (297). The highly-polished staircase that reflects the wild jungle light, which ultimately causes her accident, implies that as a non-white, she was living above her station in the lap of luxury and away from her natural, safe environment in the desert.

Though all three of these cultures are battling for control over the land, Silko makes it clear throughout the novel that ultimately, it is Mother Earth who controls her own destiny, and she will not tolerate abuse by humans. Further, she will punish her abusers and reclaim her lands if the abuse does not stop. The ancient almanac prophesizes that earth will fight humans until they realize they must live harmoniously with her, and Native American tribal elders have long foretold that earth would survive anything mankind could do to her. They theorize that “man is too insignificant to desecrate [earth],” and will likely only destroy themselves in the process of trying (762). “In each version [of the prophecies of different tribes] one fact was clear: the world that the whites brought with them would not last. It would be swept away in a giant gust of wind. All they had to do was to wait” (235). This Native American belief emphasizes their ultimate trust in Mother Earth—and their incredible distrust of whites and their disrespectful behavior. Their belief that all of white culture will be eradicated by the Earth itself in “a giant gust of wind” suggests that earth will protect herself from destructive forces and safeguard only those cultures that treat her with respect. The velocity and aggression of

the whites' predicted downfall also reflects the velocity and aggression with which they initially overtook Indian land and displaced their culture.

The Barefoot Hopi calls out a warning to the whites at the Healer's Convention:

> You destroyers …don't know how much the spirits of these continents despise you, how the earth hates you; now your cities burn from the sun, and millions abandon cities in the Southwest for lack of water. This is nothing! This is only the beginning! . . . All the riches ripped from the heart of the earth will be reclaimed by the oceans and mountains. Earthquakes and volcanic eruptions of enormous magnitude will devastate the accumulated wealth of the Pacific Rim. Entire coastal peninsulas will disappear under the sea; hundreds of thousands will die. The west coast of the Americas will be swept clean from Alaska to Chile in tidal waves and landslides. Drought and wildfire will rage across Europe to Asia. Only Africa will be spared because the anger of the spirits has already been appeased by the rivers of blood in the great war that freed South Africa (734).

By and by, the Hopi's prophecy comes true, as casualty begins to strike those that have disrespected the land. As aforementioned, wealthy Iliana dies by falling down the stairs of the mansion she had built in the middle of a sacred rain forest. A group of affluent Mexicans, trying to escape their chaotic hometowns, are abandoned in the middle of the desert, where they ultimately die of dehydration. The spouse of real estate developer Leah Blue, who is drilling wells into the Native American water supply, is struck by lightning while playing golf. Airplanes flying over Alaska to explore petroleum mining mysteriously crash. The weather has become completely unpredictable and violent; there are droughts all over, and "terrible winds and freezing" have succeeded "burning, dry summers." Though white authorities try to search Native American land for caches of weapons Indians were rumored to have hid in the mountains, they fail, because " even the four-wheel-drive trucks the police drove could not cross the landslides which the mountains had shaken down in previous weeks . . . . the mountain spirits were shaking

the earth and would not stop until the white man's cities were destroyed" (710). "Earthquakes and tidal waves would wipe out entire cities and great chunks of U.S. wealth. The Japanese were due to be pounded by angry earth spirits, and the world would watch in shock as billions of dollars and thousands of lives were suddenly washed away. Still there would be no rain, and high temperatures would trigger famines that sent refugees north faster and faster" (755). This reinforces the belief that Mother Earth intends to eradicate the population that is trying to take possession of her. Perhaps by demonstrating that she and she alone holds the power to create and possess—and will, alone, survive what kills her tormentors—she will give hope to the indigenous people who believe in her power, and strike fear and respect into those who do not.

Silko writes that it is the era of the "Death-eye Dog," and the spirits are angry; while human offenders are suffering, Mother Earth will survive. So, too, will those who have loved her and treated her with respect: "It might require a hundred years of spirit voices and simple population growth, but . . . tribal people would retake ancestral land all over the world. This was what earth's spirits wanted: her indigenous children who loved her and did not harm her" (721). Native Americans prophesize that, "When [the Native Americans] had taken back all the lands of the indigenous people of the Americas, there would be plenty of space, plenty of pasture and farmland and water for everyone who promised to respect all beings and do no harm" (518). Respect and doing no harm to the earth is a premise for the privilege of living there. This passages indicates that the goal of the earth's revolution is not merely to defeat her abusers, but to return indigenous land to the people so that they may once again share it with each other and all who "[promise] to respect all beings," once again putting mother earth in her most revered place. Silko

makes it very evident through her use of language and descriptions of the natural world that earth ultimately controls humanity and is a far more powerful force than any culture inhabiting her.

Chapter IV

Gardens in the Dunes

Silko's third novel, *Gardens in the Dunes*, explores a stunning array of natural landscapes including the American Southwest, Long Island, Brazil, England, Italy, and the island of Corsica in the Mediterranean. Her riveting descriptions of the plants and landscapes indigenous to each of these places—and in some cases, those artificially transported to territories to which they are not native—reveal captivating idiosyncrasies and political beliefs of the people who belong to each of these lands. As Ellen Arnold, wrote in 1999, "*Gardens in the Dunes* . . . draws on elements of the naturalist tradition to build an exciting tale of adventure, intrigue and mystery . . . [the novel] challenges and reshapes those conventions into something that is distinctly indigenous."[40] Daniel Moerman agrees with this assertion, and adds: "I know of no other novel in which plants, and peoples' attitudes toward them, play such a central role."[41] Indeed, as in all of Silko's novels, the artistry with which she details various natural environments discloses the ideals and attitudes of the four primary cultures represented in the book: Native American, white American, British, and Italian. Karenne Wood concurs, arguing, "the novel effectively contrasts the traditional worldview of Native peoples with the glitzy,

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[40] Ellen Arnold, "Gardens in the Dunes," Studies in American Indian Literatures 11.2 (1999): 2.

[41] Daniel E. Moerman, "Gardens in the Dunes," Economic Botany 54.3 (2000): 5.

glamorous lifestyle of wealthy Americans and Europeans in the early years of the industrial age."[42]

When Silko set out to write this book, she ironically intended to "write a novel about gardens and flowers" as an apolitical response to criticism that her two earlier novels were *too* political. However, she soon realized that "[she] had actually stumbled into the most political thing of all—how you grow your food, whether you eat, the fact that the plant collectors followed the Conquistadors."[43] Stephanie Li supports this theory, and writes: "As displayed throughout *Gardens in the Dunes*, gardening reflects social values and the complex ways that humans relate to and conceive of the natural world."[44] This can have serious repercussions for oppressed peoples because, as Terre Ryan argues, "Silko's gardens demonstrate that imperialism begins in our own backyards"—as we will see in this novel (115).[45] Li's argument that "Gardening reveals basic beliefs about the relationship between humans and the earth," is well supported by the many examples of Native Americans honoring their gardens, using them as shelter, and relying upon them as a food source, and conversely, the many examples of whites using natural environments as a commodity to be bought and sold, terrorizing the land, and

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[42] Karenne Wood, "Gardens in the Dunes," American Indian Quarterly 23.2 (2000): 191.

[43] Ellen Arnold and Silko Leslie Marmon, "Listening to the Spirits: An Interview with Leslie Marmon Silko," Studies in American Indian Literatures 10.3 (1998): 2-19.

[44] Stephanie Li, "Gardening, Mothering, and Storytelling in Leslie Marmon Silko's Gardens in the Dunes," Studies in American Indian Literatures 21.1 (2009): 19.

[45] Terre Ryan, "The Nineteenth-Century Garden: Imperialis, Subsistence, and Subversion in Leslie Marmon Silko's Gardens in the Dunes," Studies in American Indian Literatures 19.3 (2007): 115-132.

manipulating nature to suit their preferences rather than respecting its natural rhythms and cycles. Denise Cummings points out that "It is not coincidental that [*Gardens in the Dunes*] ends where it began, back in the old gardens; there, an image of growing life emerges out of old scars and wounds."[46] Indeed, the novel's gardens are the primary source of joy and rebirth in the novel.

As in *Ceremony* and *Almanac*, Silko creates a Native American landscape in *Gardens in the Dunes* that is hot, dry, and dusty with sparse water sources. Their environment is very spacious, wild, and uncultivated, supporting only the growth of desert plants. Like the other books, Silko portrays her Native American characters as feeling safe and protected on this land, while uncomfortable and even threatened in foreign environments. However, more than the others, this book especially establishes gardens and natural spaces as sanctuaries for the Indians, often physically keeping them from harm. In the very beginning of the novel, Silko writes, "in a time of emergency, the old gardens could be counted on for sanctuary."[47] When policeman show up at main character Indigo's childhood home looking for children to forcibly send away to school, Grandma said, "it was time to go back to the old gardens" (21). While they do not feel safe from predators in their home—located very near the predominantly white city of Needles—they view the "old gardens" as a safe place where they can seek asylum from those who wish to influence their culture. Stephanie Li notes that, "[Grandma Fleet

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[46] Denise K. Cummings, '"Settling' History: Understanding Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, *Storyteller*, *Almanac of the Dead*, and *Gardens in the Dunes*," Studies in American Indian Literatures 12.4 (2000): 67.

[47] Leslie Marmon Silko, Gardens in the Dunes (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999): 15.

presents] the world as an integrated universe where the presence of humans is inextricable from the processes of nature" (19). As a result, she raises Indigo and Sister Salt (Indigo's older sister) to be conscious of the effects their actions have on the earth and teaches them to recognize earthly phenomenons—like rain, thunder, and clouds—as manifestations of their ancestors. She also teaches the girls that, because the Sand Lizard people have protected the old gardens for so long, the gardens can now be counted on to protect them (Silko, Gardens 23).

As the girls, fleeing from the police, approach the gardens, the weather noticeably shifts from debilitating cold to warm and temperate, and the closer they get to their refuge, the safer and more welcoming the conditions become (34). Their genuine home in the gardens seems to beckon them, the familiar weather demonstrating that they are truly in a safe place. When Indigo and Sister Salt stop, hungry and tired, to explore a beautiful sandstone canyon on their journey that is out of reach of the nearby white soldiers on horseback, they climb down its steep walls to discover enormous palm trees that hid them entirely from view, and a plethora of dried dates that would feed them for days (41). Again, this natural space that is accessible only to the Sand Lizard tribe in the novel, provides both food and shelter for the girls. When they finally reach the river, they celebrate their achievement, as its presence indicates that they are near their destination. Knowing that that policemen and soldiers often cross the river near their location, they crawl on their hands and knees "through the willow and tamarisk thickets, to conceal themselves from anyone who might also be there . . ." (58). The desert plants, plentiful on Native American land, serve as a protective shield against anyone who might wish to remove the girls from their home and support Li's theory that the presence of humans is

inextricable from the processes of nature. As the girls approach Mrs. Van Wagnen's house where they expect to find information about the whereabouts of their lost mother, they are horrified to see that it has been burned to the ground and abandoned. Initially "overwhelmed by the loss," the girls soon discover food-bearing plants that have survived the trauma and fill their long-empty bellies" (61). Even in the aftermath of tragedy, the Native Americans again find solace in their environment. After Indigo escapes from the Indian School, she discovers Edward and Hattie's beautiful, elaborately designed garden that conceals her from the school officials who are chasing her. As a result of the gardens' thorough protection, the officials never do find her, thus freeing her to travel the world with Edward and Hattie, who ultimately reunite Indigo with her sister. Once again, she finds safe haven—even in a predominantly white territory—in the familiarity of a garden.

In addition to relying on their natural environment for protection, Native Americans in Gardens also rely on their connection with the natural world to establish their identities. Stephanie Li posits that, "Indigo's powerful sense of identity and self-assurance, which is deeply rooted in the natural world, enables her to….resist possible dissolution of her cultural roots" (29). When Indigo finds herself an unwilling and somewhat unwelcome guest at Susan's house while traveling with Edward and Hattie, she forces her way out of the dark, cluttered bedroom to which she has been appointed, and seeks safe haven in the property's ornate gardens. Even while surrounded with overwhelming white influence and cultural pressure, she refuses to submit to this foreign culture, and instead returns immediately to the natural world, which is always a source of comfort and protection. Uncomfortable with the "white food" she has been forced to eat

and the idea of relying on others to feed her, she promptly makes her own breakfast of wild mushrooms and corn (17). When faced with an alien, unsettling environment, Indigo again seeks the shelter and familiarity of the nearest garden in an effort to protect herself and find comfort so far from her home. When she discovers that corn stalks in England are planted very far apart, Indigo determines that the reason must be that they have the protection of the garden walls surrounding them and do not need to stick together, whereas at home, they must be planted close together "like a big family" to provide the Native Americans with shade and protection from the strong winds (244). This idea of closeness and familiarity providing protection is a recurring theme in the novel, and is mirrored by the cultural environments represented: white people have the protection of the government, the advantage of a larger population, and more advanced weaponry, so they are comfortable relating to one another at a distance, or standing alone like the corn in England. Further, a large part of white culture in the novel focuses on individuality and separate families. Conversely, Native Americans have only the support of each other on which to rely, so they form closer-knit tribes and family units for protection. Additionally, Native American culture in the novel is based largely on the unbreakable bonds of family and friends, cultivating intimate relationships with other members of their culture, and supporting each other's basic needs to ensure survival of the group.

In addition to treating the land as a sanctuary that protects them from harm, Native Americans in the novel harbor a deeply-rooted respect and appreciation for earth, acknowledging and working within its seasons and cycles and never taking its gifts for granted. As Karenne Wood says, "To read this book is to . . . recall that timeless relationship to the earth through an understanding of seasonal cycles and the promise we

recognize in a handful of healthy seeds" (Wood 191). Evidence of this mutually beneficial relationship between Native Americans and the earth occurs throughout the novel, and is established at its very outset. Grandma Fleet teaches Indigo and Sister Salt to "[a]lways treat each plant respectfully. Don't argue or fight around the plants—hard feelings cause the plants to wither" (Silko, Gardens 17). Here, she acknowledges plants as beings with feelings and emotions, susceptible to negativity and a lack of appreciation. She advises the girls to care for the plants "as if they were babies," humanizing them and determining their lives as equally important to those of humans (17). Li adds that, "Grandma Fleet's stories illustrate the importance of respecting nature and instruct the girls on how to establish mutually beneficial relationships with the environment" (Li 26).

In observing that, "The richest set of relationships with plants is reserved for 10-year old Indigo," Daniel Moerman cites her tendency to address plants as friends—or at least beings capable of comprehension—and uses the example of Indigo speaking to a Datura in Aunt Bronwyn's garden: "Hello, old friend . . . . You sure grow tall in England. Are you trying to get closer to the sun?" [48] By asking the plant this question, she is granting it the powers of reasoning and free choice that humans have. She acknowledges these powers in water as well when sailing across the Atlantic Ocean: "all water was alive, she knew, but this dark salt water was bigger and more powerful than any freshwater. This ship and everyone on it belonged to the restless dark water until they reached land" (223). Her fear of the ocean and recognition that it has absolute power over

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[48] Daniel E. Moerman, "Gardens in the Dunes," Economic Botany 54.3 (2000): 441.

the ship and its voyagers makes water a living, breathing, thinking entity instead of a mere resource for human use.

When much-needed rains come, “Grandma Fleet greeted the clouds with tears in her eyes; their beloved ancestors returned to them as precious rain” (47). Grandma does not view rain as a simple environmental function of the planet; instead, she expresses enormous gratitude to the earth and her ancestors, who she believes are part of the earth and are still watching over them and providing for them. This perspective elevates rain from a mere weather fluctuation brought on by chance to a cultural phenomenon brought on by prayer. When preparing for her imminent death, Grandma insists she be buried underneath her beloved apricot trees so that her human body—no longer useful to her—would nourish the earth and help the trees become stronger and more prolific (52). In this way, she can pay tribute to the earth for its many blessings during her life.

In addition to offering tributes and prayer, Native Americans also respect the natural environment by never taking more from it than they need or profiting at earth’s expense, as other cultures in the novel do. When Indigo and Sister Salt, not having eaten for quite awhile, finally discover an abundance of food, they take only what they need and “[leave the rest] for hungry creatures” (52). Instead of greedily taking more than they could eat, the girls demonstrate their gratitude to earth for providing them with food and their respect of earth’s other inhabitants, who might go hungry without the food they left behind. When Indigo visits the lush gardens of Aunt Bronwyn, her parrot Rainbow tries to help himself to seed pods; Indigo corrects his behavior, telling him “it [is] not polite to take [them]” from someone else and that when they arrived back at home, where the same Datura plants grew, “he could have as many spiny seed pods as he wanted” (245).

Here, Indigo demonstrates that her culture is very conscious of other peoples' resources and she selflessly refuses to take what isn't hers in order to ensure there is enough for all. It is more important to her to ensure that "Any hungry people who came to the gardens [would have] all the food they needed" (57). When Sister Salt grows lonely for the old gardens at home, but is economically trapped in a camp where water is scarce, she creates a stone garden instead of a plant garden: "The colored rocks and pebbles took a great deal of time to arrange but finally she completed the stone garden on the sand outside her tent—a garden that needed no water" (213). By acknowledging that water is scarce and thus sacrificing the type of garden she is used to, Sister Salt puts the earth's needs and interests before her own. In creating a rock garden that needs no maintenance and requires no water, she preserves vital resources that could be used to save a human, plant, or animal life.

Native Americans also do their best to cultivate the earth and populate it with as many plant varieties as they can to ensure that there is enough food to feed their entire culture and enjoy the incredible variety of plants the earth has to offer. In the grand tradition of Sand Lizards, Indigo collects seeds and bulbs everywhere she can on her worldwide journey with Hattie and Edward, remembering that:

> Grandma Fleet always advised the girls to collect as many new seeds as they could carry home. The more strange and unknown the plant, the more interested Grandma Fleet was . . . . Others did not grow a plant unless it was food or medicine, but Sand Lizards planted seeds to see what would come; Sand Lizards ate nearly everything anyway, and Grandma said they never found a plant they couldn't use for some purpose (84).

Unlike other cultures in the novel, Native Americans seek to proliferate as many varieties of plants as they can access and are committed to discovering the purpose behind the existence of each one. Stephanie Li observes:

> Through their emphasis on cultivation and preservation, the forms of gardening and mothering practiced by the Sand Lizard people of Silko's novel can be understood as critical modes of domestic resistance against both cultural and physical genocide (20).

Here, Li suggests that Native Americans worship and respect the earth not only out of reverence and cultural belief, but also as a way to fight the forces that seek to control and even annihilate them. By being completely self-sufficient and emphasizing sustainable farming and gardening practices, they are ensuring their survival in the case that a culture of greed, self-indulgence, and excess destroys the natural world. Christopher Norden observes, "It is precisely the meaningful relationships between individual, community, and natural environment, characterized by stewardship and sustainable use on the part of human beings, that characterize traditional Native cultures . . . ." (95).

Native Americans in *Gardens* treat animals with the same loving reverence they show plants. When Grandma is teaching the girls how to find edible seeds and mesquite beans in pack rats' nests, she tells them: "Old Ratty does all the work for you, so don't harm her" (Silko, Gardens 47)! She also teaches them how to restore the rat nests when they are finished harvesting so the rats can live comfortably. By respecting the role rats play in feeding her people as well as the survival and comfort of the rat, Grandma equates rats to humans and demonstrates that they are as worthy of respect as any other being of the earth. Late in the novel, Indigo muses that she "still didn't know the name the parrot wanted to be called" (224). Instead of establishing power and ownership over the parrot by selecting a name for him, she respects his identity as an individual being of the Earth and waits for him to communicate what he would like to be called. When Grandma teaches the girls to distinguish the particular howl of the coyote that indicates a successful hunt and then collect the meat for themselves, she advises them to "leave the coyotes

plenty of bones; otherwise next time they might not call out an invitation to share their feast" (46). Her inference that the coyotes make a conscious choice to share their bounty or not indicates that she views them as creatures capable of rational thought and deserving of respect. She shares a story with Indigo and Sister Salt of a time she complimented an overhead eagle on being such a wonderful hunter, and in response, the eagle dropped her mouthful of prey right into Grandma's lap. This story illustrates not only the eagle's ability to comprehend Grandma's compliment, but Native Americans' mutually beneficial relationship with animals in which both groups acknowledge the other's strengths and weaknesses and contribute to each other's well-being with whatever means they have at their disposal. When Indigo, having snuck into Hattie and Edward's greenhouse, spots Linnaeus the monkey, she says, "I know you want to get out," and immediately releases him from his cage. She then asks, "Is there anything to eat?" and Linnaeus gestures toward his food bowl, inviting her to partake of his meal. The fact that she releases the monkey demonstrates her belief that animals should not be caged and kept solely for human entertainment, but instead allowed to freely roam their natural environment. Additionally, the fact that Linnaeus answers her food inquiry by gesturing to his bowl in a welcoming manner indicates his ability to comprehend her request as well as his ability to empathize with the circumstances of other beings and improve them if he can. Lastly, when Indigo is finally introduced to the pony she has been very eager to ride at Susan's house, she is disappointed because she can tell the pony is angry and "doesn't like to be ridden" (172). Hattie ignores Indigo's concern, telling her that "He's a spoiled pony but you'll show him who's boss!" Though very uncomfortable with the idea of being the "boss" of another living creature and conscious of the pony's anger and

distrust, she ignores her instinct and rides him anyway. Ultimately, the pony becomes uncontrollable and injures Indigo, who blames herself for not trusting her beliefs and respecting the pony. Indigo's failure to treat the pony as she felt she should—with respect and concern for his well-being—resulted in her harm. Her injury indicates that if Native Americans do not honor their belief that animals should be treated as well as people and the earth, there will be dangerous repercussions.

In addition to treating them with respect, Native Americans also rely upon animals for prophecies, signs, and protection. When a large river snake visits Indigo and Sister Salt, Sister says, "it [is] a good sign; if soldiers or others were lurking in the area, the big snake [would disappear]" (172). This occurrence signifies the girls' respect for and trust in the snake as their protector; he seems to favor helping Native Americans, who "won't harm [him]" over other cultures who might capture or kill him—indicating his reasoning powers and ability to make choices (36). Whenever a stranger approaches the sacred old gardens that are home to the Sand Lizards, they are forewarned by "the cliff swallows [who] would signal their approach by circling nervously around their nests" (49). Again, the swallows are given the characteristics of a human; they are capable of interpreting danger and issuing warning to the Native Americans. They act as a protective measure against invading cultures and strangers. Birds come to Indigo's rescue once again when she gets lost running away from school. Though she does not recognize her physical environment, she recognizes the songs the birds call out to her and realizes she is close to her home (71). In yet another instance, Indigo, having just arrived at Susan's house with Edward and Hattie, is feeling terribly homesick for the old gardens. Suddenly, she hears "the noisy chirping of dozens of blackbirds in the huge tree outside .

. . . The big flock reminded her of all the crows that suddenly appeared before the dancers and the Messiah arrived at their camp . . . she realized they came to greet her and welcome her" (159). As Indigo is planning her initial escape from Edward and Hattie's house, she confides her plan only to Linnaeus. However, "[he] did not want her to begin the journey yet; it was too hot and she would die along the way. The monkey sensed the approach of the desert heat" (108). By confiding in Linnaeus, Indigo establishes him as her friend whose judgment she values. Linnaeus' warning connotes the human emotions of concern and fear, and characterizes him as a protector. He is not only capable of situational comprehension, but also of prophecy; he likely saved Indigo's life by warning her not to run away so near an incoming heat wave.

In all of the aforementioned instances, animals assume the role of protector to Native Americans and act in the interest of their well-being. They appear to mirror the care, respect and dignity with which Native Americans treat animals, as previously demonstrated. These mutually beneficial relationships between humans and animals solely occur inside the Native American culture; this phenomenon does not appear in relation to any other culture in the novel.

In great contrast to the hot, dry, sparsely populated Native American landscape, the white American landscape in *Gardens* is represented as temperate, wet, and crowded. There is no shortage of water in the United States; flourishing groves of trees bigger and taller than Indigo has ever seen at home decorate the land. The white American landscape is riddled with elaborate, perfectly manicured gardens that are cultivated for aesthetic purposes only—not as a source of food or medicine. The gardens boast numerous varieties of plants, both indigenous to their land and acquired—often illegally—from the

lands of other cultures. As illustrated by Hattie's garden, the many flowering spaces are shaped into "orderly squares and rectangles, outlined by low walls of stone" and "almost as big as the boarding school" (83). Their pristine arrangement stands in stark contrast to the wild, freely-growing plants in the Native American landscape. Also unlike the Native American landscape, the white American environment has many indoor spaces, all of which are described as cluttered, dark, and museum-like in their inaccessibility. In contrast to the simplicity of Native American furnishings, there is an always a superfluity of furniture that seems to have dozens of small drawers and compartments, all of which are packed to the hilt with possessions. In many ways, this environment represents the complete opposite of the Native American environment in both a physical and cultural sense.

This opposition becomes clearer when examining how white Americans value and treat their natural environment. There are several instances in *Gardens* where the well-being and health of plants is ignored for the sake of aesthetics. Susan, a spoiled, pretentious society matron who lives in New York, prepares for her annual "Masque of the Blue Garden" soiree by paying large amounts of money to have several varieties of non-native blue flowers shipped in for decoration. Indigo is horrified by the fact that Susan completely dismisses the natural growth cycle and native landscapes of the countless blue flowers she insists on having brought in especially for her ball:

> Narcissus in July? Wisteria flowers in midsummer? . . . . The Scottish gardener's cold greenhouse was chilled with blocks of ice delivered three times a week; even the intensity of the light in the glass house was controlled, with muslin shrouds to affect the length of day so the big pots of wisteria, pruned into graceful trees, would bear cascades of sky blue and pure white blossoms for the Masque of the Blue Garden . . . . blue hydrangeas, blue campanulas, blue cornflowers, blue aster, blue lupines, and pale sky blue columbine . . . . transplanted weeks before, showed the

> ravages of drought and heat . . . . but they had to last only one night—the night of the ball (183).

Oblivious to the fact that none of the plants she paid dearly to have shipped in for the Masque are native to her homeland, Susan fails to notice that the New York weather conditions are actually killing them. However, she cares only for appearances: as long as she has her stunning array of blue flowers with which to impress her society friends, it's quite immaterial to her whether they live or die after they have served their purpose at the party. She views Earth's bounty as a mere decorative commodity to be bought and sold. Similarly, Susan has two enormous beech trees dug up and transplanted merely because she wants her party site "to give the appearance of maturity" (182). Indigo is quite disturbed by this, and is horrified to see the "great tree lying helpless, its leaves shocked limp, followed by its companion; the stain of damp earth like dark blood seeped through the canvas." This morbid comparison of uprooted earth to blood demonstrates the humanity Indigo recognizes in the trees, while Susan fells them without a thought. In yet another attempt to control her environment, Susan decides to demolish her beautiful Italian garden and replace it with an English garden. Though she had the Italian garden designed herself the year she was married, she decides that, "now she [finds] the arrangement of shrubs and trees according to their hues of green artificial and . . ."(_186). She is unconcerned with the wastefulness and cruelty of killing the plants merely to replace them with something she would prefer to see; she cares only for her own whims, and insists on getting her way. This incredible disregard for Mother Nature suggests that Susan does not view herself as being in partnership with the earth, but rather sees plants as a commodity designed for her benefit, whatever the cost. Li echoes this sentiment:

> Gardening reveals basic beliefs about the relationship between humans and the earth. For example, Grandma Fleet honors indigenous values by recognizing the old gardens as a source of food, shelter, and identity, and she passes this respect for the earth on to her grandchildren. By contrast, many of the white characters in the novel adopt a more domineering and colonialist approach to the natural world; Edward develops a lucrative orchid business, and Susan recreates her garden each year for her aesthetic pleasure (19).

In contrast with the sustainable practices of Native Americans, white Americans focus on consumption; they treat the natural world as if it will infinitely supply them with resources, regardless of whether they care for it or not. Ryan elaborates on this perspective, claiming that Silko uses the image of the garden to exemplify imperialism "on international, national, local, and domestic levels" (116). He argues that she achieves this by emphatically contrasting nineteenth-century American gardening aesthetics and ideologies with the Sand Lizards' subsistence farming:

> Silko intertwines the stories of heretical scholar Hattie Palmer, her botanist husband, and Sand Lizards Indigo and Sister Salt to demonstrate the ways in which white European and American men have sought to dominate all other human beings and all of the earth's landscapes . . . . It encompasses acts of violence and . . . botanical piracy against indigenous peoples, and the earth (116).

In another European show of disrespect for the natural world, Edward's father attempts to control his environment by grafting several varieties of fruit trees onto one another, creating unnatural, mutant plants that feature multiple types of fruit on a single tree (90). Once again, aesthetics—and the desire to control the natural world—take priority over the health and well-being of the environment.

Gardens also demonstrates many examples of botanical piracy and the environmental abuse that often accompanies it. Edward, identified as a "plant hunter," takes a disastrous trip to Pará River in Brazil to steal and photograph rare orchids, which

he intends to sell to collectors back home for a handsome profit (128). "Orchid mania" has already stripped the jungle of its natural resources, making these plants increasingly scarce (129). When Edward spots them high on a dangerous granite ledge, he climbs up to get them, only to fall to a gruesome near-death and acquire devastating injuries—as if being punished for his failure to respect nature's law and his theft of indigenous plants. In another instance of botanical piracy, Mr. Vicks steals "disease-resistant specimens of rubber tree seedlings from . . . the lowland drainages of the river" in order to ensure that England and the United States can compete with Brazil—who currently holds a monopoly—in the cheap natural rubber market (129). In a similar instance, "Henry Wickham smuggled seventy thousand rubber tree seeds past Brazilian customs officers to break Brazils' monopoly of natural rubber" (129). Though they are destroying a natural landscape, removing plants from their native environment, and breaking the law, these two men exemplify the white American desire to control the natural world at any cost—and without a thought to the consequences of their actions.

What white Americans view as "progress," Native Americans often consider destruction. There are several examples in the novel of natural landscapes being decimated for purposes of building, controlling the land's output, and changing the environment:

> Sister was shocked at the destruction she saw below: the earth was blasted open, the soil moist and red as flesh. The construction workers appeared the size of flies crawling over the hills of clayish dirt. The river had been forced from her bed into deep diversion ditches, where her water ran angry red (61).

This second comparison of displaced soil to bleeding human flesh indicates that Sister Salt views the earth as a living, breathing being to be treated kindly and respected, while

the white American culture is acting as if they have ownership of the land, and thus the right to manipulate it and tear it apart for their convenience. In yet another comparison of discarded nature to dead humans, Sister Salt thinks, "now the river was unrecognizable—rechanneled and trapped into narrow muddy chambers outside its old bed. The poor cottonwood trees and willows were ripped out and plowed into mounds of debris, where their roots reached out plaintively like giant skeleton hands" (216). She continues, making two more comparisons of abused earth to human death:

> The river was trapped, and only a narrow stream, muddy red, flowed south. The river was stripped naked; all its willows and tamarisks were gone, its red clay banks scraped; and exposed piles of white skeletons of cottonwood trees dotted the swaths of scraped red earth. The deep gouges made to build the dam had trapped rainwater and now were filled with weeds and sunflowers (394).

The narrow flow of the muddy red stream connotes the flow of human blood, and the comparison of lifeless white tree branches to skeletons clearly suggests a relationship between the river's death and a human death. White Americans are stripping the earth of its natural resources in order to create more space for industry, energy development, and big business. Linda Hogan expands on this idea, adding, "not only has energy development become a part of the destruction of tribal people, but there is also the long history of denial of rights under treaties, rights to legal justice, cultural identity, and economic equality."[49]

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[49] Linda Hogan, "Native American Women: Our Voice, the Air," Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies 6.3 (1981) 2.

In addition to physically abusing the land as a method of control, white Americans regularly exploit and destroy the natural landscape in order to achieve wealth and fame. Daniel Moerman comments on the book's many examples of this behavior:

> Edward sees plants primarily as objects of commerce. Edward makes a disastrous attempt to gather rare Amazonian orchids to sell and fails miserably, nearly dying. Then, he plans to steal citrus cuttings in order to make candied citron to sell. These examples demonstrate Edward's imperious nature as clearly as his relationships with Hattie and Indigo (441).

What Moerman fails to mention is that Edward desperately wants the live citron cuttings because he believes not only that he can sell them as candied citron, but that he can trade them for shares of mining stock and meteorite specimens he can sell for an even larger profit. He is so focused on the financial gains he stands to receive that he casually dismisses his wife's accusation that Dr. Gates, his partner in this endeavor, made a pass at her (Silko, Gardens 377). Edward's greatest ambition is to discover a new plant species that would bear his name; for this purpose, he searches Tampico and bothers the natives, looking for unknown medicinal plants "with commercial potential" he hoped would make him famous (86). He views plants as a mere commodity to be bought, sold, and exploited to enhance his lifestyle. This becomes even more apparent when Edward falls ill and becomes terribly depressed—until he reads about an aqueduct from the Colorado River that will serve as "a new source of abundant cheap water [that] would assure the success of his new citron groves even in dry years when the wells were undependable" (279). Instantly joyful again, he thinks only of how this water could ensure his profits, and doesn't give a moment's thought to all the people this water is being diverted away from who will inevitably suffer. In another example of destroying the earth for monetary purposes, Eliot deliberately burns down the jungle after his team has pillaged it for plant

specimens in an effort to prevent others from obtaining its valuable resources. In order to ensure that they are the only people on earth who possess a live specimen of the Laelia cinnabarina orchid, he burns its entire natural habitat to the ground (141). By destroying all of the remaining plants, he is able to control the rare orchid market, and thus ensure a larger profit. He is entirely unconcerned with how his actions will affect the earth, and is consumed only by thoughts of the money he ensures for himself by destroying the plants.

In *Gardens*, white Americans often treat other cultures as disposable, valueless, and inhuman. Though she grows lonely in the Old Gardens, with few relatives remaining, Grandma Fleet refuses to live on an Indian Reservation because, "There was nothing to eat on the reservation; the best farmland on the river was taken by white people" (141). Similarly, Sister Salt explains that the Mojave and Chemehuevi Indians were given tiny reservations along the river near Needles, and that all of the other Indians who used to live along the Colorado River—before whites came and forced them out—were crowded into the most populous reservation at Parker. However, the Native Americans cannot farm their new land because "most of the land was above the fertile river bottom, on old floodplains impossible to irrigate . . . . White farmers claimed the best river bottom land" (141). Both of these examples demonstrate white Americans' dismissal of Native Americans' strong cultural connection to their land. The whites' attitude of entitlement that allows them to ruthlessly seize whatever land they desire, regardless of the effect it might have on other cultures, results in Native Americans being treated as insignificant and unworthy of the consideration afforded other whites. By forcefully stealing the best and most fertile land for themselves and compelling the previous residents to coexist on tiny, overcrowded reservations with no way to cultivate a food source or maintain a

spiritual connection with their land, they are essentially expressing that Native Americans are undeserving of the basic human rights they themselves demand. Dehumanizing the Native Americans and making them *other* or outsiders makes it far easier for whites to guiltlessly exert control over their culture. By forcing the Native Americans to leave everything they know, whites are also forcing them to adapt to new lifestyles and new methods of survival, effectively erasing their previous identities. As Reyes Garcia observes, "I [want] to make clear the living links between places and survivals and to accent the life forces that hold together blood and land. Loss of place means genetic extinction; loss of the sense of place signals cultural extinction" (37).

When Indigo gets lost wandering away from Susan's house and is picked up by white farmers who deliver her to a kind Native American woman who agrees to keep her safe until she is retrieved, Indigo is initially puzzled by the fact that the only food available was clams harvested from the nearby ocean. "Where your gardens?" Indigo asked. As the woman gazes forlornly up at the surrounding hills, Indigo recognizes her answer: "the land where their gardens used to grow was taken [by whites]" (Silko, Gardens 169). Though the woman has learned to survive by eating only what the ocean provides and generating income by making buttons from sea shells, the whites' seizing of her property has forced her to reevaluate and adjust her entire way of life in order to endure.

Several other incidents in the novel support these assertions and even take them a step further, with whites likening Native Americans to animals or slaves. When Indigo and Sister Salt are captured by the Indian Police forcibly removing children from their homes at the behest of their white supervisors and sending them to boarding school,

"[the police] dragged Indigo toward the train, where the other children were cowering or sobbing, crowded four to a seat. Indigo was shocked to learn she and her sister were about to be separated" (67). By not only tearing children away from their homes, but also separating them from their families and sending them to a white-run boarding school, whites are literally disconnecting Native American children from the influences that characterize their very identities: family, tradition, and homeland. By losing all of the familiarities of daily life that establish who they are, they can more easily become disoriented and confused—making them far more susceptible to the fear tactics and manipulation imposed upon them by whites attempting to reeducate them in the ways of white society. Even the conditions on the train—crowding four times as many children as the train was meant to accommodate, particularly in extreme heat—recall the conditions by which farm animals are packed and transported for slaughter. In another incidence of forced cooperation, white brokers visiting Brazil on business frequently "came upriver and demanded [Indians'] entire stock of [an orchid] species to corner the market. Indians who did not cooperate were flogged or tortured . . ." (133). Additionally, "the rubber station at Portal was infamous for the use of torture and killing to increase the output of the indentured Indians who gathered the wild rubber" (133). Though whites are merely visitors to these lands Indians call home, they still feel entitled to seize their property for personal profit, destroy their natural resources to protect their markets, and abuse those who assist them in gathering these resources. This behavior is emblematic of the horrors of slavery, and again demonstrates an absence of respect or appreciation for other cultures. In another example of the dangers associated with removing humans from their natural environments, Indigo watches three Native American girls from Alaska slowly

wither and die at the Sherman Institute where they are being held. Though the white instructors remained baffled by their illness and impotent in their treatment of these girls, their cause of death was quite clear to other Native Americans: "the California air was too hot and too dry for their Alaskan lungs, accustomed to cool, moist air" (68). Here, white Americans' complete failure—and lack of desire—to understand that other cultures are accustomed to and comfortable in entirely different natural environments results in unnecessary death. Rather than honoring Native Americans' physical and mental health requirements, their captors expect them to adapt to their natural environment and comply with their ways of life—even if it results in the destruction of Native American culture and demise of their people. Betty Pfefferbaum, Rennard Strickland, Everett R. Rhoades and Rose L. Pfefferbaum expand on the failure of white Americans to properly address the health needs of Native Americans in their 1995 publication *Learning How to Heal: An Analysis of the History, Policy, and Framework of Indian Health Care*. They posit that, during the 1890s when *Gardens* takes place, whites considered Native Americans to be "different, dependent, and too often culturally, if not spiritually, inferior," and thus incapable of making their own decisions about health care or developing treatments appropriate for their culture.[50] As a result, when the Jacksonian policy of Indian removal was redirected to a reservation system, "policy changes occurred against a backdrop of . . . efforts to "civilize" and "assimilate" Native peoples" to white ways by forcing them to submit to traditional American health care (Pfefferbaum 369).

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[50] Betty Pfefferbaum et al, "Learning How to Heal: An Analysis of the History, Policy, and Framework of Indian Health Care," American Indian Law Review 20.2 (1995): 369.

Perhaps more damaging than this willful eradication of Native American culture is that after they grew dependent on white healthcare systems, whites "provided for medical services and supplies in exchange for land and promises to remain on reservations" (369). The authors also comment on the living conditions of Indian Schools—like the one Indigo is forced to attend—in the 1800s, citing "concern about conditions in the schools such as crowding, faulty ventilation . . . poorly trained [staff]" who were "uninterested, and even incompetent" (371). These accusations are certainly reflected in Silko's adaptation of an Indian School. She illustrates how changing a culture's natural environment and forcing people to adapt to a new situation is a powerful method of controlling another culture.

Unlike Native Americans, who treat animals with great respect and reverence and view them as spiritual guides, white Americans in *Gardens* largely treat animals—like plants—with ambivalence, and use them to satisfy aesthetic requirements or perform tasks that monetarily benefit humans. When Edward is on his orchid-gathering mission in Brazil, his colleague gives him a monkey to act as his "assistant" and gather orchids that are out of the men's reach. While Edward was initially insulted, assuming that a monkey was incapable of the intelligence needed to differentiate the numerous varieties of orchids and bring them back undamaged, "The monkey did the work of two men," and was rewarded with "shelled walnuts" (Silko, Gardens 137). Though they do not treat the monkey cruelly—even rewarding him with treats when he performs his duties well—the men expressly view him as a servant there solely to serve their needs. Ironically, though Edward doubted his intelligence, it is the monkey who ultimately saves his life, locating his unconscious body and getting the attention of men who could help him. Still, though

the monkey remained loyal when his human friends did not, Edward continues to treat the monkey as a mere annoyance, ascribing to him little intelligence and character (147). As Indigo, Hattie, and Edward are traveling through crowded streets, Indigo watches, fascinated, as a circus train unloaded elephants, camels, lions, and tigers. She also notices, however, that though the streets were crowded with people, not a single one of them even glanced at the exotic animals (154). Given her culture's great appreciation for animals, it is not surprising that the white Americans' utter disinterest in them takes her by surprise. Their failure to express any interest at all in the animals reveals their inability to relate to them or appreciate them. In support of this statement, Susan purchased a pair of parrots to display in her conservatory to impress her visitors. However, when one of them dies, she laments that "now the whole look is spoiled," and no longer wants the living parrot (187). This delights Indigo, who adopts the bird and treats him as a trusted friend, talking to him, stroking his feathers, and taking him on outings with her. Susan's disinterest in the living parrot demonstrates that she was never interested in the birds' intellect, history, or abilities, but only in their aesthetic value as a pair. She "[didn't] bother to name the birds," as she does not see the point. Again, this reveals that she has no interest in their individual personalities or talents; they are solely a way for her to boast her wealth to her visitors (187). Unlike the Native Americans' appreciation of animals as powerful, intelligent creatures that should be respected and valued, white Americans only appear to use animals to enhance their own existences, whether by creating a profit or decorating a conservatory.

In *Gardens*, the white American natural environment creates a comfortable safe haven for members of its own culture, but is a dangerous threat to those of other cultures.

Comparable to the earlier illustration that Native Americans are very comfortable with their own natural environment, White Americans too are most comfortable in their own natural environment—though it represents a danger to other cultures—and express fear and distrust of other cultures' environments. When Hattie informs the ship's captain that their destination is the island of Corsica, "The captain [expresses] surprise Americans would risk a visit to such a lawless place (the mountains were full of bandits and revolutionists), a place with so little to offer the traveler" (271). Though he has no firsthand knowledge of the place, the captain immediately judges Corsica as an unsafe place for whites to visit based solely on rumors that he has heard about the culture that inhabits the island. When Edward discovers Indigo inside his house, he immediately finds a rope with which to tie her up, insisting that, "the rope [is] only a precaution—for the child's own good, so that she [does] not escape and flee into the desert" (106). This is terribly ironic, as though Edward is terrified of the desert and views it as dangerous Indian territory, the desert is Indigo's home, to which she wants desperately to return. By attempting to forcefully keep her from her own natural environment, Edward suggests that his culture's definition of a safe environment is superior to any other culture's definition of a safe environment. By tying her up, he can exert control over her by preventing her from returning to the environment in which she is most comfortable.

When Indigo, Hattie, and Edward take the train to New York, they are delighted with the spacious compartments and gourmet food. Indigo, however, notes that the train looks "nothing like the train car with wooden benches that Indigo and the other Indian children had ridden," and becomes afraid of this unfamiliar environment, pressing her cheek against the window and gripping Hattie's hand (117). Though her train ride to the

Institute was not a pleasant experience, many things about it, including the surrounding landscape, the conditions, and the other travelers, were familiar to her. However, this white American experience of a train ride—with its fancy food, open design, white passengers, and views of "lush green . . .citrus groves. . .spring grass and wildflowers"—is completely foreign to her (118). Later, when they all arrive at Susan's home, Hattie and Edward are quite comfortable with the intricately designed, expansive, very costly house in which they are to be guests. Indigo, however, is very uncomfortable: when she is invited into the parlor, which is very ornate and riddled with breakable glass and marble collectibles, she grows extremely nervous and claustrophobic, and inadvertently breaks a glass figurine in her efforts to escape the house unnoticed (106). Indigo feels terribly out of place in this stuffy, heavily decorated house that represents the complete opposite of her open, spacious, uncluttered home. The foreign house makes her feel pressured to behave as its residents do, thus sacrificing her true nature.

Though they do not play as large a role in *Gardens* as Native Americans and white Americans do, white Europeans represent a very distinct culture that is strikingly different from the American whites in the book. Silko uses the character of Aunt Bronwyn, who lives in Bath, England, to represent the English culture and its beliefs. Aunt Bronwyn is actually an expatriate, but married an Englishman and has lived so long in England that she identifies primarily with the British culture. The British landscape is described as damp and cool with gray skies, rolling hills, and endless tall trees. The English countryside is extremely colorful, dotted with seemingly endless varieties of flowering plants (232). Indigo expresses amazement at how damp and green everything is: "water, water everywhere, it seemed (233)." Edward notes that, "Susan with her

Scottish gardener, troops of workers, and Colin's money might labor for years, but Long Island would never appear as lush, green, and wooded as southwest England (233)."

Aunt Bronwyn shocks Edward and delights Indigo by expressing that "she is an avid follower of the theories of Gustav Fletcher, who believed plants have souls and human beings exist only to be consumed by plants and therefore transformed into glorious new plant life" (240). This belief is far more similar to that of Native Americans than white Americans. By insisting on being buried beneath her favorite apricot trees so that her body would fertilize them and spur new growth, Grandma Fleet expresses agreement with this philosophy. Aunt Bronwyn's belief that humans exist for the well-being of plants indicates a deep and abiding respect for the earth. She also insists that "If a garden [isn't] loved it could not properly grow" (240)! The notion that plants require love to flourish humanizes them. Native Americans, who treat their plants as lovingly as they treat their relatives, also share this belief. Aunt Bronwyn shares that, "when she first moved to the old cloister . . . [she] joined the Antiquity Rescue Committee, a local group organized to protect an ancient grove of oaks and yews on a hilltop. . ." (240). The mere existence of this committee draws a stark distinction between Britons and white Americans; while Americans view trees as a resource for lumber and cut them down without hesitation, Britons prize these elderly trees as a monument to the past. Through these living trees, they are able to maintain a connection with their ancestors—which is far more valuable to them than lumber.

On multiple occasions, Aunt Bronwyn also reveals her belief in earth as a magical being. While discussing a mysterious incident in which "workmen on the old cloister complained that stones loosened and removed by day were found in their former

locations the following day," Aunt Bronwyn irritates the disbelieving Edward and intrigues Indigo with her explanation that, "this is the land of the stones that dance and walk after midnight" (237). Her belief in magical landscapes and faith in the earth's unexplainable phenomena likens Aunt Bronwyn to Native Americans, who also believe in the magical powers of the earth. Aunt Bronwyn confesses that she has witnessed this magic herself, and tells Indigo that when she was her age, "she observed a black stone the size of a stove move across the road to the south side overnight" (252). She shares with Indigo, whose beliefs mirror hers, that "The best time to visit the stone circles [is] in the autumn or winter, without the commotion of so many sightseers . . . . then it [is] possible to feel a marvelous energy and life from the stones" (265). By attributing energy and life force to what white Americans consider inanimate objects incapable of motion or energy transference, Aunt Bronwyn acknowledges stones as living beings of the earth—and as capable of radiating energy as any plant, animal, or human. This belief recalls Indigo speaking to the sunflowers as if they have the powers of comprehension, reasoning, and free choice like humans. Both cultures attribute qualities that white Americans believe to be exclusively human to earth's other inhabitants. Aunt Bronwyn explains to Hattie, Edward, and Indigo that, "the wars of Europe were the terrible consequences of centuries of crimes against the old stones and the sacred groves of hazel and oak" (252). Like Native Americans, Britons believe not only that plants can be sacred, but also that if Mother Nature is abused, she will punish her abusers by causing disruption or catastrophe on earth. All of these beliefs indicate that English culture is in agreement with Native American culture that earth, its inhabitants, and its resources should be protected, appreciated, and revered.

Like Native Americans, Britons treat other cultures and their beliefs with respect and kindness, as opposed to white Americans, who treat other cultures as dangerous, alien creatures deserving of condescension. Unlike the novel's white Americans, who make negative assumptions about Indigo's intelligence and worth as a human being simply because she is Native American, Aunt Bronwyn is very kind to Indigo—kinder than anyone else in the novel has been—and does not make assumptions based upon her race. When Indigo does not come down for dinner the first night she is a guest at her house, Aunt Bronwyn seeks her out and asks, "[Is] everything all right? [Is] the bed comfortable" (246)? Her kindness prompts Indigo to admit that she secretly pulls the bedding onto the floor—where she is more comfortable—each night and replaces it early in the morning, before anyone could see it. Rather than forcing her to conform to her societal standards, she keeps Indigo's secret from Edward, who does not approve of her behavior. Aunt Bronwyn's concern and kind inquiries demonstrate that she honors Indigo's culture and their customs rather than fears them, and cares more about ensuring Indigo's comfort than indulging Edward's prejudice.

While showing Indigo and Hattie her extensive gardens, Aunt Bronwyn honors Native American culture again, crediting them with the origination of many of her garden's plants: "Your people, the American Indians, gave the world so many vegetables, fruits, and flowers—corn, tomatoes, potatoes, chilies, peanuts, coffee, chocolate, pineapple, bananas, and of course, tobacco" (244). Rather than writing Native Americans off as a threat or a nuisance as the novel's white Americans do, she shows appreciation and admiration for their cultural contributions. Upon recognizing that Indigo loves and reveres plants as much as she does, Aunt Bronwyn gives her "a small silk-

bound notebook where [she had] hand-printed the names (in English and Latin) of medicinal plants and the best conditions and methods to grow them" (Silko, Gardens 267). By recognizing what their cultures have in common rather than how they are different, Aunt Bronwyn encourages the development of a strong, positive relationship between them, and establishes herself as a friend to foreign cultures. In another gesture of respect for Indigo's cultural beliefs, Aunt Bronwyn accepts her belief in the Messiah—Native Americans' own Christ—and engages her in conversation about it. Though Hattie and Edward are appalled at Indigo's belief in the Messiah and constantly attempt to reeducate her with their white American, Christian values, Aunt Bronwyn is excited when Indigo shares that she has seen the Messiah, and tells her a story of her own culture's Celtic mythology: "Here on the remote islands people sometimes heard the sounds of voices and drums in the night; through the fog or rain mist at night people sometimes saw the silhouettes of dancers around fires on the hilltops" (Silko, Gardens 262). She even agrees to take Indigo to the nearby "Christ Church," because Indigo thinks that maybe "The Messiah . . . . stopped at his church in England on his way to the Holy Land" (264). Instead of correcting her and insisting she abandon her cultural beliefs and adopt the beliefs of the English culture, Aunt Bronwyn agrees with Indigo, telling her she is quite right that the Messiah might be nearby. Her support of Indigo's beliefs indicates that, unlike white Americans, she has no interest in controlling or manipulating the spiritual beliefs of other cultures; she simply respects their differences, and views them as an opportunity to broaden her perspective. Additionally, by acknowledging that Indigo's beliefs are equally as valid as her own, Aunt Bronwyn expresses that Indigo's culture itself is as valid as any other, and should be treated with equality.

In addition to treating other cultures with respect, Britons also treat animals with respect. Aunt Bronwyn both demonstrates her love for animals and cites examples of her culture worshiping them as divine creatures—just as the Native Americans do. Aunt Bronwyn is on a "rescue committee" that "[helps] toads cross busy roadways safely," demonstrating her devotion to animals and her willingness to sacrifice her time to help protect them (241). Unlike white Americans, who treat animals with indifference, Aunt Bronwyn makes a concerted effort to keep them safe, indicating her love for them—even when it does not monetarily benefit her. She also shares that, in England, toads were once "worshiped as incarnations of the primordial Mother" (241). Similarly, she also shares that "Cattle and pigs, still highly prized for their milk and meat, were once so important they had been gods; even now it was possible to find old churches with the figures of sows and piglets carved in the stone doorways" (244). Like Native Americans, Britons value animals so much that they have historically viewed them as deities, figures to be respected and worshiped rather than exploited and abused. On the drive from the train station to Aunt Bronwyn's house, she takes a detour so she can stop and pet cows she is very fond of. Though Edward finds it "odd to delay travel-weary guests in order to pet the cattle," Aunt Bronwyn views stopping to express her love for these animals as important enough to inconvenience her guests, despite their irritation (236). She "called the cattle in tones that might have been a song. The calls were lovely and made Indigo think of the old gardens and Grandma Fleet and Mama and Sister Salt" (238). Aunt Bronwyn speaks to the cows in such a loving, beautiful way that Indigo finds it reminiscent of her own culture, thus drawing a close comparison between the two.

In using Aunt Bronwyn to develop and characterize the English culture's relationship to their natural environment in *Gardens*, Silko paints a clear picture of an accepting, kind culture that does not battle for control over other cultures, but is more interested in forming relationships based on their commonalities.

To further illustrate the behavior of white European culture, Silko uses the character of Laura, Aunt Bronwyn's friend who lives in Lucca, Italy. Like the Native American and English cultures, the Italian culture also treats other cultures and their beliefs with respect and kindness rather than superiority and dismissal. The Italian landscape is described as very hilly and green, with plentiful rich, colorful gardens. Laura tells her guests that "the heat made the walled city unbearable in early August, but here in the hills they were cooled by the steady stream of cool air off the mountains" (282). The breezes are perfumed with citrus, as there are seemingly endless groves of bergamot trees, as well as dense, dark forests. The lush greenery and bountiful gardens implies that there is no shortage of available water or fertile land.

Like the Native Americans and Britons, the Italian culture treats their natural environment with care and respect. In Laura's gardens, Indigo spots a remarkable statue of a young centaur whose hindquarters are still buried in the earth. Laura explains that "to free the figure of the centaur from his stronghold of earth-slide debris would [require] the sacrifice of a young chestnut tree and a bower of azaleas and rhododendrons" (289). Though Laura wishes to excavate the valuable statue, the fact that she opts to leave it buried illustrates her belief that the earth's living things are more important to her than inanimate objects, no matter what their value. When, while showing Indigo and Hattie her gardens, Laura comes upon

> . . . chestnut and oak trees and the bowers of laurel and bay choked with brambles and holly that grew between the boulders and big rocks of the earth slide. The deadwood and debris were removed, but she did not have the heart to disturb the rest. The old wood remained as it was; fallen trees were left to nurture the earth for seedlings (289).

Laura's hesitation to clear away the landslide's damage because it "[nurtures] the earth" and encourages new plant growth illustrates her commitment to preserving the earth's natural resources and her faith that the product of Mother Nature's destruction is meant to remain as it fell in order to cultivate new life. Rather than attempting to control her natural environment and manipulate it to meet her own needs, Laura exhibits great respect for the earth by opting to honor nature's will. Her devotion to Mother Earth is further exemplified by Laura's "black garden" (296). Though Edward, a white American, "[assumes] black is symbolic of night and death," she explains that this garden, comprised entirely of black flowers in numerous varieties, is a tribute to Mother Earth: "To the Old Europeans, black was the color of fertility and birth, the color of the Great Mother" (296). By honoring earth with a bountiful garden in the color of rebirth, Laura reveals her cultural belief that earth is an active, decisive being to whom tribute should be paid, lest she dole out retribution for failure to show her appropriate respect. This belief is shared by Native Americans, who also pay tribute to the earth in hopes of pleasing her and preventing natural disaster.

Like Aunt Bronwyn, Laura is very kind and welcoming to Indigo, which is emblematic of how the Italian culture relates to other cultures. In a generous act of friendship, Laura notices how much Indigo treasures her gardens and their beautiful blossoms, and makes her packets of seeds and corms from all of her hybrids. While Indigo is ecstatic at the idea of being able to share these interesting, foreign plants with

her own culture back home, Edward becomes irritated and thinks, "It [seems] a bit ludicrous for Laura to pretend the Indian child would ever plant the corms or seeds, much less perform the pollination process for hybrids . . . . Of course Laura could not be expected to know anything about American Indians" (303). In his judgmental haze of annoyance, Edward generalizes that Indigo could not possibly be capable of cultivating seeds and growing a garden simply because she is Native American. He further makes the assumption that Laura only gave her the seeds because she doesn't "know anything about Native Americans," which is terribly ironic in light of the fact that the Italian culture shares many more commonalities with the Native American culture than the white American culture does. His failure to recognize Indigo as an intelligent, skillful girl who is quite capable of cultivating gardens—and in fact has relied upon this talent for survival most of her life—establishes that he is the one who knows nothing about Native Americans, and does not respect their culture enough to rectify the situation. Conversely, Laura recognizes her own great love for the earth in Indigo, and thus treats her as a kindred spirit. Rather than assuming that Native American culture is so different from her own that she and Indigo could not possibly relate to one another, she chooses to celebrate what they *do* have in common—a deep and abiding respect for the earth.

In a similar circumstance, Laura notices Indigo's notebook of medicinal plant drawings and notes, and is inspired to give her a gift of "dozens of pencils in all colors" and a pencil sharpener so she could draw the flowers with accurate colors (285). The fact that Laura gives Indigo a gift at all is demonstrative of her comfort with and fondness for the girl, but the gift itself—meaningful in its usefulness and thoughtfulness—reveals that she supports Indigo's interests and passions. Rather than dismissing her interest because

she is from a different culture or urging to her adopt the interests of the Italian culture or of her guardians Hattie and Edward, Laura honors Indigo as an intelligent human being capable of determining her own interests. She tells Hattie, "What a sweet child—[you are] fortunate to have adopted her," assuming that Indigo is in their permanent custody (287). She expresses no fear or concern about the fact that Indigo is a Native American, and does not presuppose that because she is an Indian, she must be wild, unintelligent, and reckless. By complimenting Hattie on her good fortune to have found such a wonderful child, Laura reveals her comfort with the Native American culture and willingness to treat Indigo as an equal. Ironically, Edward's refusal to let go of these very assumptions (that she must be wild, unintelligent, and reckless) is the reason Indigo is *not* their adopted daughter. In using Laura to develop and characterize the Italian culture's relationship to their natural environment in *Gardens*, Silko illustrates a respectful, spiritual culture free from judgment and willing to treat other cultures as their equals.

In *Gardens*, the white American culture is on an endless quest to acquire more land and more resources, even destroying the earth and imposing upon other cultures to accomplish this. The Native American culture is struggling to maintain its identity and prevent whites from destroying the natural environment. The white European culture is attempting to honor the earth and other cultures by celebrating their commonalities and not imposing their culture on anyone. However, as in *Ceremony* and *Almanac of the Dead*, Silko makes it clear throughout *Gardens* that ultimately, it is Mother Earth who controls her own destiny and will exact vengeance upon her human abusers by using the forces available to her. While telling Hattie about the paganism of the early residents of Bath, their sacred grove of trees, and the government's discrimination against them, Aunt

Bronwyn says, “Those who cut down the sacred groves doomed themselves and all their descendants!” implying that earth would not tolerate the destruction of a sacred natural environment, and would curse those responsible, as well as their families (262). While they are discussing their cultural wars and the theft of their land by whites, Sister Salt tells Delena, “The Messiah told the people here not to take up weapons but to dance until the great storm winds of heaven scoured the earth of killers” (354). Her comment indicates that earth itself will exact vengeance by generating powerful storms that deliver death to those who have killed indigenous people. When, while living at a campsite whose proprietor generates income by taking a great deal water from the earth to make beer to sell and wash dirty clothes, prostituting women, and exploiting animals for pleasure, Delena reads Sister Salts cards. She comes upon a card that warns, “greed will be punished,” and Sister Salt has a vision that “more heavy rain [would come] and the embankments would weaken and break, and the entire campsite would be washed away in a flood” (356). Prophecy cautions Sister Salt to leave the encampment before earth takes her revenge and washes away her abusers.

When Edward the “plant hunter” travels to Brazil for the sole purpose of stealing rare and valuable orchid specimens to sell to collectors, he does not escape unscathed (128). As a result of his disrespect for the natural environment, he finds himself trapped in a fire—which his fellow crewmember Eliot set to ensure the destruction of every specimen of *Laelia cinnabarina* orchids so no other hunters could gather them—and subsequently falls off of a granite ledge and suffers multiple fractures in his leg. After his crew leaves him for dead, he is rescued and healed by two mestizo brothers, who return the few orchids his shipmates did not take from him. However, “within three days the

ship encountered a violent storm . . . . All the orchid specimens in the remaining two crates were lost" (149). In yet another bad turn, Edward is then arrested for suspicion of smuggling forbidden plants. This series of misfortunes occurs immediately after Edward steals resources from the earth for profit, insinuating that they are punishments doled out by Mother Earth for his crimes against nature. On another orchid smuggling mission, Edward encounters more bad luck: "An early hurricane season in the Caribbean Sea had forced them to cut short their expedition. One after the other, the tropical storms lashed the Bahamas and the Keys. They attempted to wait out the first storm in St. Augustine, but a great gust of wind and ocean surge flung the small boat containing all their supplies against the crushed pier" (84). Once again, earth punishes Edward for his theft by ensuring that he never profits from the resources he stole from the environment.

All of these examples demonstrate that, though humans in *Gardens* are engaged in constant battle for control of land, resources, and one another, it is Mother Earth who ultimately controls the environment and determines the fate of humans who do not honor her.

Chapter V

The Evolution of Silko's Language

The three novels discussed thus far have a great deal in common. They all have similar themes, including colonialism, cultural loss, oral tradition, power, identity, "sovereignty, community, and the vitality and power of a tradition that is constantly evolving."[51] They all depict Native Americans as conscientious stewards of the earth who respect the land and its creatures. They all depict white Americans—to some extent—as abusers of the earth and its inhabitants. Additionally, they all heavily emphasize the role and importance of women in society, though *Ceremony* only addresses the importance of Pueblo women while her subsequent novels include women of other nationalities as well. When Laura Coltelli asked Silko about whether her books are intended to highlight women's role and importance in society, Silko replied, "Certainly, that's part of it, just because women hold such an important position in temporal matters—the land-title, the house, the lineage of the children; the children belong to the mother's line first, and secondarily of course to the father. There is not any of this peculiar Christian, Puritan segregation of the sexes."[52] Mary Ellen Snodgrass writes extensively about this topic, arguing that all three of Silko's novels

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[51] Jace Weaver, "Leslie Marmon Silko," Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony: A Casebook, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 213.

[52] Laura Coltelli, "Leslie Marmon Silko," Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony: A Casebook, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 241.

> highlight female accomplishments—Bronwyn's stewardship of terraced Celtic gardens, Night Swan's devotion to dance, Hattie Abbott Palmer's research of female contributions to Christianity, *la professoressa* Laura's hybridizing of black gladioli, and Yoeme's guardianship of precious Mayan manuscripts, which Seese translates. Silko's sturdy female cast exerts skills at cooking, healing, weaving, art, acculturation, and socialization and prepares the young through wit and example . . . . Through sisterhood and magnanimity, women oppose usurpation, rape, murder, and the ongoing trampling of the land by the greedy.[53]

Snodgrass also notes that Silko's characters in all three novels reflect a level of passion and realism that matches the author's, arguing that:

> [Silko] enriches her writings and speeches with authentic ethnomythography of her blended ancestry and with memories of her sixty-plus years as a teacher, speaker, writer, and activist. [She] stokes her characters with the fervor and mindset of first peoples and with a nativist affinity for the land, water, and sky. . . .Silko contributes realism to themes of pueblo life—accounts of colonial witchery, dispossession, Christian proselytizing, and culture theft by anthropologists and archaeologists. Avoiding sentimentality, she dramatized the lot of the elderly grandmother, the battle-weary combat veteran, estranged husband and wife, the exiled traitor of the tribe, and children living on the edge of poverty and respectability. She reserves her most potent diatribes to counter the demeaning of natives into second-class citizens (3).

These similarities indicate that, even as Silko grew and evolved as a writer, certain topics and themes remained important enough to her to continue discussing in her work.

However, despite their many similarities, the three novels reflect a progressively evolving use of language and environmental settings that reflects Silko's increasing development and daring—and commitment to her culture—as an author. Sonia Dawn Love supports this assertion, reasoning that, "Silko's explorations into writing deepen with the progression of time, and the Laguna influences with their oral tradition and

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[53] Mary Ellen Snodgrass, Leslie Marmon Silko: A Literary Companion (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 2011) 3.

circular nature of existence remain at the center of her conversations because they are at the center of her existence and that of her people as well."[54] Though *Ceremony, Almanac of the Dead*, and *Gardens in the Dunes* all rely upon the language of natural space and culturally idiosyncratic environments to represent both the differences among the novels' featured cultures and the universal human instinct to shape and control nature and other beings, Silko's use of the language and relationship to natural environments has continued to change throughout her writing career.

Two immediately apparent differences between *Ceremony, Almanac*, and *Gardens* include their overarching messages and the language used to establish them. *Ceremony* is relatively short, personal, and focuses intimately on one man's struggle to reclaim himself by reconnecting with his land and his culture. In clear, evenly-paced descriptions, Silko reveals the importance of remaining in harmony with one's natural surroundings, and of performing ceremonies as a way to journey back to one's roots. Silko elaborates, "In Ceremony we have . . . the idea that we human beings are not dependable creatures . . . we get out of balance and out of harmony with our natural surroundings and also we can get out of harmony with one another. And then it is quite difficult and painful but necessary to make a kind of ceremony to find our way back.[55] Silko closes the book on an uplifting note, ending the text with a final reference to the

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[54] Sonia Dawn Love, The rhetoric of community and the establishment of ethos as exhibited in selected interviews and public appearances of Leslie Marmon Silko (Denton: Texas Women's University, Doctor of Philosophy, 2009) 10.

[55] Thomas Irmer, "An Interview with Leslie Marmon Silko," The Write Stuff (Web. 2 July 2011. <http://www.altx.com/interviews/silko.html>): 1-14.

witchery that has plagued Tayo throughout the novel, reading simply, "It is dead for now" (243).

However, in a striking change of direction, *Almanac of the Dead* differs from Ceremony in nearly every way: it is several times longer, boasts a mammoth cast of characters, is eminently more descriptive, concerns whole populations rather than a single person, offers a global perspective, and ends with a near-advocation of violent revolution, rather than the healing and forgiveness found in *Ceremony*. Though Joy Harjo suggests that *Almanac* is "an exploded version of [Ceremony], only now the terrain encompasses all of America," there is far more scholarship that emphasizes the vast distinctions between the novels. As stated by Lawrence Buell, "On the whole, *Almanac* reads like *Ceremony's* counterpoint: a dystopian anatomy of the profane, as if *Ceremony* had been redone so as to make the bars of Gallup or the psychiatric ward of the Los Angeles veterans' hospital the center of the novel."[56] Adam Sol details several of the novel's other distinctions, asserting:

> Readers familiar with Leslie Marmon Silko's novel *Ceremony* are in for a surprise when they encounter *Almanac of the Dead* . . . . Aside from the obvious difference in length (760 pages, to *Ceremony*'s 262), *Almanac* differs radically from *Ceremony* in scope and tone. Whereas Tayo's pilgrimage and thus the vision of *Ceremony* is at first intimate and personal, the vision of *Almanac* is global. . . . *Almanac* tackles the struggles of whole peoples—Native American peoples, women, the poor of all races. And, perhaps most significant, where *Ceremony* uplifts, *Almanac* overturns. *Almanac* similarly calls for a return to native ways of viewing the earth and mankind's place in it, but this is only one aspect of a whole system of change. Instead of invoking the healing ceremony, *Almanac* calls for an upheaval in the world order and a dramatic revision of world history (24).

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[56] Lawrence Buell, The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture (Cambridge: President and Fellows of Harvard College, 1995) 290.

David Mogen concurs, observing that, "[*Almanac]* clearly leaves us poised on the brink of radical upheaval—politically, culturally, and environmentally . . . . The future here is both a warning, an ominous prediction of possible disaster, and, more fundamentally, a mirror that refracts in mythic images contemporary dislocations in values and philosophy.*"*[57] David Moore notes another distinction, adding that, "In terms of chronology, too, *Almanac's* vision is far-reaching and elaborate . . . . [it] spans time even more ambitiously [than *Ceremony*], straddling the present: the novel imagines events in the immediate future but also retells history from the recent past, the last century, and even far into the realm of ancient legend."[58] Perhaps the most clarifying voice of all is that of the author herself. Leslie Marmon Silko speaks to her intentions for the book in several interviews, revealing—at least partially—the intended implications for her audience. When asked in a 1992 interview whether *Almanac of the Dead* was a wish, prediction, exaggeration, or vision, she said:

> Well, I right away can imagine four or five or six answers, and what I try to do in *Almanac* is give you all of those possibilities. I could tell you the one I would hope for—the one I would hope for would be the one in which democracy would actually be practiced, and the disenfranchised would actually be allowed to vote—homeless people could go vote, and the people of color who are so alienated. In the future, it's possible that we could have—by getting rid of professional politicians, and people using and somehow seizing the processes—a gradual, peaceful kind of shift, so that in fifty years you would see women, people of color, and not

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[57] David Mogen, "Native American Visions of Apocalypse: Prophecy and Protest in the Fiction of Leslie Marmon Silko and Gerald Vizenor," American Mythologies: Essays on Contemporary Literature (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005) 160.

[58] David L. Moore, "Silko's Blood Sacrifice: The Circulating Witness in Almanac of the Dead," Leslie Marmon Silko: A Collection of Critical Essays (New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 1999) 150.

> professionals, just ordinary people, not lawyers, in positions of government.[59]

In *Almanac,* Silko uses unprecedented levels of dark, violent—and often shocking—language to illustrate her many controversial characters and their attempts to control their natural environment and the other humans with whom they share it. While mulling over what types of perverse films to provide to his Argentine business partners, racist, misogynistic Beaufrey thinks:

> The demand for films of ritual circumcisions of six-year-old virgins had doubled itself every year. There were waiting lists of creeps who got weak at the mention of hairless twats and tight little buds. Massaged and teased into its first and also its last erection, the little girl's clitoris in close-up looked like a miniature penis. It was a great relief to see the dark, thick fingers of the operator pressing the wet, quivering organ into full extension for the blade of the razor (Silko, Almanac 103).

This horrifying image of a young girl being circumcised—and the more horrifying notion that the event is being recorded for sexual deviants who derive pleasure from witnessing her agony—paints xenophobic Beaufrey, and thus white culture in *Almanac*, as ruthless, sadistic, and mercenary.

In another startling change of pace, the language and message of *Gardens in the Dunes* resembles neither book, and instead seems to occupy a middle ground between the two. As uplifting and hopeful as *Ceremony*, but as detailed and descriptive as *Almanac*, *Gardens* presents an unflinchingly political illustration of the natural environment's centrality to cultural expression. Daniel Moerman agrees with this assertion, and adds: "I know of no other novel in which plants, and peoples' attitudes toward them, play such a

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[59] Linda Neiman and Leslie M. Silko, "Narratives of Survival," The Women's Review of Books 9.10-11 (1992): 10.

central role."[60] William Willard adds, "*Gardens in the Dunes* is not the *Almanac* redux . . . [It] is, ultimately, a revitalization story."[61] Stephenie Li comments on how the novel's language represents a significant departure from that of Silko's previous novels, pointing out that, "[g]iven the narrative complexity of Silko's previous works, at times *Gardens in the Dunes* reads as disarmingly simplistic. The language is plain, and the text lacks the sophisticated metaphors found in Silko's other novels. However, Silko's comments on how the text offers its audience a "way to try to live" suggest that she is deeply invested in influencing the lives of her readers" (Li 21).

Another area in which the novels vary concerns the number of characters represented, the period of time covered, and the cultures illustrated. *Ceremony* is by far the simplest of the three, offering only a handful of main characters, spanning a period of one year after the Second World War, and discussing only four cultures: Native American, Caucasian American, Mexican, and Japanese—though the novel's primary conflicts are between Native Americans, Caucasian Americans, and Mexicans. In *Ceremony*, there are only a handful of multiracial characters, and the cultures remain largely distinct from one another. *Almanac of the Dead* is a far more ambitious work than *Ceremony*, and tells the stories of an enormous cast of characters from an abundance of cultures—many of whom embody multiple races. The epic includes characters of Native American, United States Caucasian, Mexican and Mexican-Indian, Venezuelan, African American, Mayan, Argentinean, Cuban, and Spanish heritage, though not unlike

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[60] Daniel E. Moerman, "Gardens in the Dunes," Economic Botany 54.3 (2000): 102.

[61] William Willard, "Gardens in the Dunes," Wicazo Sa Review 15.2 (2000): 139.

Ceremony, the primary conflicts in the novel concern the relationships between American whites, Native Americans, and Mexicans, both full and partial-blooded. Though Tucson, Arizona, is both the temporal and geographical focal point for the novel's setting, the text spans a period of 500 years. In what appears to be another compromise between the first two works, *Gardens* spans an unspecified length of time (likely a few years) at the turn of the 20th century that is longer than *Ceremony*, but far shorter than *Almanac*. Additionally, it offers several more characters than *Ceremony*, but far fewer than *Almanac.* Like *Ceremony,* the characters are all well-developed, and their relationships are discussed at length, whereas *Almanac* discusses a multitude of less-developed characters and does not always detail their associations. However, like *Almanac*, the book explores a stunning array of natural landscapes including the American Southwest, Long Island, Brazil, England, Italy, and the island of Corsica in the Mediterranean. Also like *Almanac*, the novel details characters from a wide variety of cultures, but with the advent of traitorous Indian police serving the white agenda, and multiple white characters—both American and European—protecting and cultivating positive relationships with Native Americans, Gardens offers unprecedented representations of delicately interwoven races and cultures, as opposed to the more easily identified single races and cultures of past novels. Silko appears to have incorporated successful elements of her first two novels—specifically *Ceremony's* detailed character development and manageable time period, and *Almanac's* adventurous variety of environmental settings—into her third novel, and added an enlightened perspective about the possibilities for cultural collaboration.

Another element of Silko's novels that varies widely from book to book is the extent to which standard fictional limitations—including chronological story

development and chapter divisions—are exchanged for less conventional writing methods. In *Ceremony*, there are no easily identifiable section divisions or chapters, which may be recognized as a physical reflection of the theme of interconnection between all things and cultures throughout the novel. Additionally, the book's characters are often developed through a series of flashbacks to previous times and places, rather than the chronological unfolding of events once considered standard, indicating that her story and characters cannot be bound by such European notions of time and sequence. *Almanac*, however, is divided into many chapters, each of which is individually named in a way that advances the storyline. Interestingly, however, Silko did not originally intend for *Almanac* to have chapter divisions, but instead imagined a single, undivided body of work. She shares:

> You know *Ceremony* is just one piece. When I delivered *Almanac,* yes, it was like a mountain and my editor couldn't bear it. He said, maybe we could have three or four chapter breaks. Then I remembered almanacs, not just the Native American Mayan almanacs but also Western European almanacs or medicine almanacs in the U.S. have many little, many different sections. All of a sudden I became aware of, yes, what needed to be done was many, many chapters so that the chapter headings themselves could tell a story or express something (Irmer 12).

Though *Almanac* was ultimately divided into chapters, it frequently bends time like *Ceremony*, jumping back and forth between eras, cultures, and characters. In another rebellion against standard chronology, Silko includes an unusual map at the beginning of *Almanac* that perfectly conveys the Native American belief that time and borders are fluid: it is wildly out of scale and covered with many character names, pictures, and prophecies. Silko's "map" chronicles the lives of her characters and their spiritual beliefs, and does not concern itself with exact margins and distances. Again, it is demonstrative of the belief that people cannot be divided by land or time. One of the book's indigenous

characters, Calabazas, clarifies this perspective by saying, "We don't believe in boundaries. Borders. Nothing like that." He explains that maps and deeds are inconsequential and the concept of seconds and minutes is imaginary: "We have always moved freely. North-south. East-west. We pay no attention to what isn't real" (Silko, Almanac 222). In a complete departure from her first two novels, *Gardens* is divided neatly into parts—simply labeled with sequential numbers instead of descriptive names—and is largely chronological, with very few character flashbacks.

While all three novels use descriptive metaphor to depict the Native American environment as harsh, severely hot, dry, and prohibitive, only the first two novels describe it primarily as a challenge its residents have adapted to: "[Tayo] set his foot down into the crackling leathery stalks of dead sunflowers. Across the highway . . . there was a big cornfield, but the plants were short and thin, and their leaves were faded yellow like the grasshoppers. There would be only a few cobs on each plant, and the kernels would be small and deformed" (Silko, Ceremony 143). *Gardens* instead depicts this environment largely as a sanctuary for Native Americans, routinely protecting them from hunger, predators, and loneliness: "in a time of emergency, the old gardens could be counted on for sanctuary" (Silko, Gardens 15).

Similarly, the language used to describe the natural environment of whites also changes from novel to novel. Though all three books describe their environment as lush and green with easy access to water—and designate this environment as safe and welcoming only to Caucasians—*Ceremony* offers limited description of the white environment representing a physical danger to other cultures, and instead focuses on describing the attributes of the white environment that offer its residents easier living

than the Native American environment. In *Ceremony*, Gallup, a primarily white town, boasts a free-flowing river that supplies plenty of water to the whites, and is described as being able to sustain "salt-cedar and willow thickets that [grow] along the stream banks," as well as other plant life (Silko, Ceremony 100). Alternatively, *Almanac* clearly establishes the white environment—again described as green and plentiful—as dangerous to other cultures, and frequently relates Caucasian land attributes with predatory behavior. As previously described, while using her psychic powers to solve a murder case for whites, Native American Lecha makes numerous references to foreign foliage and greenery hiding the truth, and even relates the killer to the lush landscape, "seeing" in her mind the way he handled the kidnapped boys as plants: "He realizes they are trees while he is touching them. He fondles the boys between their legs, and a branch sprouts and pushes out. The tips are soft leaf-bud moist with sap. He never means to squeeze too hard or to crush. But they are tender, fragile" (141). When considering where the bodies are buried, Lecha thinks, "They could be buried anywhere. Under all those leaves. The creep was always wandering around in the forest, way back in the trees" (139). Silko equates the forest and thick trees, alien to her as a Native American, with the manipulative qualities of the white killer. Janet St. Clair concurs, pointing out that:

> "Pools" are typically of blood; "waves," of nausea or hatred. Clear ponds of water are the surfaces upon which float the severed heads of diplomats or the tiny bloated corpses of unwanted newborns . . . . When flowers are mentioned, it is almost invariably in connection with grisly death . . . . Water, the source of all life; flowers, the harbingers of renewed harvest; and fruit, the fulfillment of the flowers' promise; are all distorted into sinister images of detached, meaningless death, inevitable legacy of a tradition of isolate, amoral self-absorption.[62]

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[62] Janet St. Clair, "Death of Love/Love of Death: Leslie Marmon Silko's Almanac of the Dead," MELUS 21.2 (1996): 141-156.

In a departure from both earlier novels, *Gardens* offers a far more detailed, less-streamlined characterization of the white environment, which—for the first time—includes European whites as well as American whites. As in the other novels, the white American landscape in *Gardens* is represented as temperate, wet, and crowded, but instead of designating this environment primarily as a threat to other cultures, as she does in *Almanac*, Silko employs the landscape primarily as a commentary on white values and ideals. The white landscapes are riddled with elaborate, perfectly manicured gardens that are cultivated for aesthetic purposes only—not as a source of food or medicine, like Native Americans. The gardens boast numerous varieties of plants, both indigenous to their land and acquired—often as a result of botanical piracy—from the lands of other cultures. As illustrated by Hattie's garden, the many flowering spaces are forcibly controlled rather than allowed to flourish freely, and are shaped into "orderly squares and rectangles, outlined by low walls of stone" and "almost as big as the boarding school" (83). Their pristine arrangement stands in stark contrast to the wild, freely-growing plants in the Native American landscape, and beautifully illustrates the whites' need to control the natural environment.

Another area in which the novels vary is the extent to which mother earth herself has power over human mortality and exacts revenge upon those who abuse her. In *Ceremony*, Silko is very subtle about enabling earth's vengeance, and offers very few instances in which the land directly responds to human behavior. Instead, earth's possible responses to abuse are merely discussed by the novel's Native American characters. For

example, when Betonie tells Tayo about the white ranchers and loggers who stripped the earth's canyons, cut down great forests, and shot thousands of animals for sport, he says that, ". . . the holy men at Laguna and Acoma warned the people that the balance of the world had been disturbed and the people could expect droughts and harder days to come" (172). Conversely, *Almanac* is riddled with references to earth's power, and frequently mentions the imminent destruction of the white race: "In each version [of the prophecies of different tribes] one fact was clear: the world that the whites brought with them would not last. It would be swept away in a giant gust of wind. All they had to do was to wait" (235). As the novel progresses, the earth proceeds to physically punish those who have abused her by causing dangerous storms and terrible drought, striking offenders with lightning, crashing airplanes, and initiating landslides: "even the four-wheel-drive trucks the police drove could not cross the landslides which the mountains had shaken down in previous weeks . . . . the mountain spirits were shaking the earth and would not stop until the white man's cities were destroyed" (710). In *Gardens*, however, Silko once again strikes an interesting balance between her earlier extremes, portraying a more subtly vengeful earth than Almanac, but still allowing earth's anger to directly affect humans: When, while living at a campsite whose proprietor generates income by taking a great deal water from the earth to make beer to sell and wash dirty clothes, prostituting women, and exploiting animals for pleasure, Delena reads Sister Salts cards. She comes upon a card that warns, "greed will be punished," and Sister Salt has a vision that "more heavy rain [would come] and the embankments would weaken and break, and the entire campsite would be washed away in a flood" (356). When Edward the "plant hunter" travels to Brazil for the sole purpose of stealing rare and valuable orchid specimens to

sell to collectors, he is nearly killed for his trouble, and goes on to suffer through multiple violent storms that delay his return to safety and cost him all of his orchid specimens (128).

Finally, the novels vary greatly in the degree to which they depict culture collaboration. In Ceremony, there are subtle instances of cultures combining the best qualities their environments have to offer to create the strongest possible result. For example, Josiah, a Laguna Indian, buys a herd of cattle in Sonora, Mexico from Ulibarri, a cousin of his mixed-race girlfriend Night Swan. He chooses to breed them with traditional Laguna cattle, Herefords. His hope is that the mixed offspring will offer both the Hereford's impressive milk and meat production and the Mexican cattle's resilience to drought. *Almanac*, on the other hand, depicts its many cultures as quite splintered, and in many cases, violently opposed to each other's existence. Though individuals of several nationalities are in agreement about the destruction and damage caused by whites, there is only one example in which a culture extends itself to another for a positive purpose. At the Holistic Healers Convention, twin spiritual leaders Wacah and El Feo invite whites to join indigenous peoples in restoring the earth, announcing that, "All were welcome. It was only necessary to . . . let go of all the greed and the selfishness in one's heart [and] . . . . a great many comforts and all things European; but the reward would be peace and harmony with all living things. All they had to do was return to Mother Earth. No more blasting, digging, or burning" (Silko, Almanac 710). In a significant departure from these two novels, *Gardens* centers almost entirely around the close relationship of a Caucasian American woman, Hattie, and the Native American child she attempts to raise and educate, Indigo. Additionally, there are many instances of other whites—including

British Aunt Bronwyn and Italian *professoressa* Laura—extending goodwill toward Indigo and trying to help and comfort her. The text is brimming with examples of cultures trying to help and understand each other, including an instance of two Brazilian men saving Edward's life when his own crew had abandoned him. *Gardens* represents a far more hopeful, positive perspective on the possibilities of cross-cultural cooperation than *Ceremony* and *Almanac,* and seems to indicate Silko's growing faith in humanity and belief in the possibility of individuals overcoming their cultural biases in favor of a unified, peaceful existence.

Overall, all three of Silko's novels make brilliant use of natural space and earth's power to reflect distinctions and power struggles between the many cultures she chooses to explore. However, the evolution of her language through the course of these books—from brevity, darkness, and fragmentation to thoroughness, hopefulness, and cohesion—suggests an evolution in perspective as well. *Gardens*' inspiring optimism and increased cooperation between cultures suggests that Silko's early condemnation of whites as abusers of the natural world has developed into faith that all cultures can—and someday will—work together to ensure the survival of all.

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