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"The gaping cut in the wire": Transvaluing and Transgressing the Territory in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*

Pauline Boisgerault♦

Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* traces the healing journey that ex-war veteran Tayo must go through in the hope of coping with his alienation and trauma. The novel addresses the post-traumatic stress disorder inherent to war experience and that the main protagonist suffers from. While espousing the Native non-linear view of time, the narrative's flashbacks are also symptomatic of the erratic experience of time when one deals with trauma. This inherent fragmentation results from a broader traumatic frame that the novel also relates to, that of settler colonialism. As such, one can read this fragmented yet interwoven narrative as representative of multiple forms of both collective and individual trauma. As Tayo struggles with the many losses he had to face during World War II, his return to his Laguna Pueblo does not bring the comfort of a home. His aunt's reaction to his presence is one tinged with guilt and embarrassment at his being the son of an unnamed white man that his mother knew back when she was a prostitute in Gallup. Caught in the impossibility to reconcile his Laguna identity with that of the settler's, Tayo's trauma alludes to a collective quest to own up to their mixed ancestry. It also maps out the journey that Tayo sets out on to attempt to heal his own individual traumatic experience of the war and the deaths of both his uncle and cousin.

This paper aims at showing how this quest pertains to a larger political paradigm around the notion of territory. As such, the notion of territory is related to a form or authority and power. Gottmann notes:

♦ Pauline Boisgerault, *Université de Rennes 2.*

> The concept of territory, though geographical, because it involves accessibility and therefore location, must not be classified with physical, inanimate phenomena. Although its Latin root, *terra*, means 'land' or 'earth,' the word territory conveys the notion of an area around a place; it connotes an organization with an element of centrality, which ought to be the authority exercising sovereignty over the people occupying or using that place and the space around it. (Gottmann 5)

Gottmann's definition emphasizes the idea of organization that is inherent to the term, but it also alludes to the idea of power, through the sovereignty that this notion is supposed to entail. Leslie Marmon Silko's novel plays with the notion of land as territory—which is typically Western and is not in line with Native American views on land—by showing the multi-layered possibilities that a deconstruction of that vision can prompt thanks to language and a newfound relation to the environment.

In *Ceremony*, healing is only possible through the emergence of lines of flight and acts of spatial transgression which are inherent to the subversion of the Eurocentric vision of territory that the novel first maps out before subverting. By doing so, the novel itself shows it is heir to and part of the American canon, one that sees the frontier as a leitmotif for storytelling but it also inflects its definition by subverting the very notion of territory that tends to permeate the political delineation of the West.

The heritage of the Western archetype of the captivity narrative and its rewriting: "You don't write off the white people"

The myth of the West plots out an invisible frontier which bears political power. As part of the settler colonialism, the movement towards the West becomes a rationale for the displacement of the "other", who becomes an impediment to the settlers' colonization beyond the Appalachian Mountains. As Edwin Fussell notes, the Western myth became deeply interconnected with the movement inherent to it and the building of the nation, the myth of the Frontier itself deriving from the broader Westward movement:

> Interpenetration of the Western myth with the actual events comprising the expansion of the United States from a strip of Atlantic colonies to a continental nation, produced not only American civilization but the complex phenomenon known to historians (though not very clearly understood) as the Westward Movement. For the period between the Revolution and the

> Civil War, these two phenomena—American civilization and the Westward Movement—are to all intents and purposes interchangeable. The Westward Movement is also the inclusive term within which the more limited term the West must always be approached, as the West, so defined, is the inclusive term containing the still more restricted term the frontier. (Fussell, 6)

Mostly remembered as glorifying the settlement West of the Mississippi River, the terminology employed by colonizers glosses over the underlying Indian removal that is at the heart of the Westward Movement.[1] Even if the Laguna pueblo of Silko's *Ceremony* was never removed, it still could witness the forced displacement of other close tribes, such as the Navajo, or Diné, who were relocated from their land in what is now Arizona, to a military fort in New Mexico in Bosque Redondo during the "Long Walk" in 1864.[2]

Richard Slotkin delves into the influence of this Westward expansion through the inherited anxieties of European settlers, who ironically wish to escape from what they see as the tyrannical hold of the British crown. *Regeneration Though Violence* shows how the Western archetype of North American literature both partakes in and fuels this nation building around territorial expansion, which is itself imbued with violence:

> The process by which we came to feel an emotional title to the land was charged with a passionate and aspiring violence, and the "deed of gift was many deeds of war." Because of the nature of myth and the myth-making process, it is a significant comment on our characteristic attitudes toward ourselves, our culture, our racial subgroupings, and our land that tales of strife between native Americans and interlopers, between dark races and light, became the basis of our mythology and that the Indian fighter and hunter emerged as the first of our national heroes. (Slotkin, 18)

Because they stage a violent encounter between a defenseless young woman and exoticized others—namely Native Americans—Slotkin's book also shows how captivity narratives, for instance, stem from the Western myth. The many captivity narratives at the onset of American writing, such as Mary Rowlandson's, have fueled fictional works such as James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking*

1 "After the War of 1812, the federal government expanded its policy of removal and aggressively pressured eastern tribes to relocate west of the Mississippi River to 'Indian territory' (which became the state of Oklahoma in 1907, further disenfranchising many Indians). […] Despite efforts, the Indian Removal Act was passed in 1830 with Andrew Jackson's full support." (Coulombe, 22-23)

2 Luci Tapahonso addresses this touchstone to Diné history in her poem "In 1864."

Tales. Both the non-fictional captivity narratives and Cooper's fictional works are emblematic of this angst towards a form of otherness, which transpire in most of the Native characters of the novels. In *The Last of the Mohicans*, the capture of female protagonists, such as Cora and Alice Munro, pertains to the archetype of the captivity narrative, but other forms of capture even predate Cooper's novels, and could be said to already foreshadow a sense of angst towards what is seen as "other".

This leitmotif of the capture permeates many of the first American novels, but Leslie Marmon Silko has adapted it to better suit Native American preoccupations. Indeed, if many critics have emphasized how the encounter of the Indian has haunted American novels and shows through the denial of their presence and ensuing annihilation of their cultures, the Laguna author's writing shows it is necessary for every Native writer to come to terms with the existence and contiguity of cultures, even with that of the colonizer. Standing for Silko's alter ego, Navajo medicine-man Betonie is substantial in epitomizing this cultural coexistence and his following assertion can be read as a metafictional comment: "you don't write off all the white people, just like you don't trust all the Indians." (Silko,118) Even if the captivity narrative often partakes in the archetype of American literature, epitomizing a Manichean encounter between the white and the "savage" Indian, as is the case with Cooper's *Leatherstocking tales*, Native writers also abundantly use captivity narratives to offer their own version of what it is to be held captive. Not only do they dwell on the capture endured by Natives by hegemonic cultural institutions, but they also explore how the land is held captive, the characters' fate becoming interdependent on that of the land or the reservation. Sara Spurgeon dwells on the captivity narrative motif in *Ceremony* and highlights how this theme is also anchored in Native texts such as Silko's. One could say that the trauma resulting from the capture is the haunting trace of a collective past in which many were forced from their homes. One of these references to captivity narratives is an anecdote provided by the Navajo/Diné medicine-man. Betonie relates the story of his alleged grandmother, a Mexican girl who was captured by Navajo hunters, but his comments seem to shed a metafictional light on the way captivity narratives are usually told[3]:

> They boosted a man up to the big branch to bring her down. He moved toward her cautiously, expecting her to fight, but she came

3 Silko's novel is fraught with metafictional devices. She thus also relies heavily on the double function of Thought-Woman, the spider which is the creation figure in Pueblo and Navajo creation myths and which creates the world but also, the text itself: "Thought-Woman, the spider / named things and / as she named them / they appeared // She is sitting in her room / thinking of a story now / I'm telling you the story / she is thinking." (1) The spider's voice is performative and seems to create the story of the novel. Her voice also interweaves events and living beings together, which also shows how Navajo cosmogony relies on the interdependence of all things.

> down on her own, dropping softly into the dry needles under the tree. She did not cry like captives did, or jabber in her own language with tears running down her face. She held her mouth tight, teeth clenched under her thin lips, and she stared at them with hazel green eyes that had a peculiar night shine of a wolf or bobcat. The wind came out of the trees and blew her loose hair wildly around her wide brown face. Their confidence was caught in the wind; they were chilled as they looked at her. (Silko, 136)

This passage depicts the Mexican girl as unafraid; she stands her ground and shows a resolute expression, almost that of defiance, her description thus sharply contrasting with that of the usual female captive: "She did not cry like captives did, or jabber in her own language with tears running down her face." By alluding to the captive archetype while deconstructing it, the author tries to both acknowledge the heritage of captivity narratives and deviate from them. Instead of the girl being terrorized by Native Americans—as the usual captivity narrative goes—the passage pits a Mexican girl against Navajo men who get jittery at the sight of her own fearlessness.

This tale foreshadows the rewriting of the captivity narrative but also echoes the captivity of the land:

> 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. The logging companies hired full-time hunters who fed entire logging camps, taking ten or fifteen deer each week and fifty wild turkeys in a single month. The loggers shot the bears and mountain lions for sport. And it was then that the Laguna 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. (Silko, 172)

The passage highlights how loggers stripped the land both of its trees and animals for unnecessary purposes. Similarly, even if on a different level, Tayo is also forced from a house in which he does not feel at home. His alienation stems from a sense of displacement that both separates him from the present time, but also from his environment. Despite his being on the Laguna reservation, he still does not fit in and hopes he will be able to return, "returning" being a spatial and a psychological transformation: "He looked back at the bridge, and he made a wish. The same wish Rocky made that night in San Diego: a safe return." (Silko, 106) It is worth noting that, in addition to referring to a mental state, the etymology of

the term "alienation" refers to land grab.[4] It is no surprise then that Silko's main character is traumatized even when he comes back home, as this home bears the signs of colonization and of the dispossession that many Natives had to cope with.

Betonie's words resonate in Tayo's consciousness as he relates how the White man's occupation of land echoes the trope of the machine in the garden, the land being held captive by the settlers' culture:[5]

> But there was something else now, as Betonie said: it was everything they had seen—the cities, the tall buildings, the noise and the lights, the power of their weapons and machines. They were never the same after that: they had seen what the white people had made from the stolen land. (Silko,156)

Loss of land and the correlative displacement is what entails the collective trauma of the Native tribes, who are doomed to relive the loss and pass it down to their descendants in a form of blood memory:[6]

4 1. a turning away; estrangement –2. the state of being an outsider or the feeling of being isolated, as from society –3. psychology: a state in which a person's feelings are inhibited so that eventually both the self and the external world seem unreal –4. law -a. the transfer of property, as by conveyance or will, into the ownership of another -b. the right of an owner to dispose of his or her property (Collins dictionary). As one can see by the definition of the Collins Dictionary, alienation is multifaceted but the novel could be said to hinge upon this constellation of meanings and even interweaves them, whether it be the feeling of isolation, a sense of self and the world which verges on the blurring of what's real and unreal and the act of owning or losing what is considered as one's property.

5 I am alluding to Leo Marx's *The machine in the Garden,* which can also provide an insight into the depiction of white culture as disrupting the garden, even if this stance is toned down and much more complex than a clear-cut dichotomy between Whites and Native Americans: "Within the lifetime of a single generation, a rustic and in large part wild landscape was transformed into the site of the world's most productive industrial machine. It would be difficult to imagine more profound contradictions of value or meaning than those made manifest by this circumstance. Its influence upon our literature is suggested by the recurrent image of the machine's sudden entrance onto the landscape." (Marx, 343) The concept of blood memory is also a subversive trope when it comes to deconstructing the notion of blood quantum introduced by the U.S. government which attempts to "systematize and regulate Indian identities." (Allen 177)

6 When relating his relationship with Josiah and Rocky, the text's inner focalization on Tayo enables to glimpse their closeness and the terms « blood memory » are used to evoke their close relationship beyond the loss, thanks to the preservation of rituals and stories that bond them: "They loved him that way; he could still feel the love they had for him. The damage that had been done had never reached this feeling. This feeling was their life, vitality locked deep in blood memory, and the people were strong, and the fifth world endured, and nothing was ever lost as long as the love remained." (204) The notion of "Blood memory" was first coined by N. Scott Momaday in *House Made of Dawn*, when Tosamah, the Priest of the Sun, relates his Kiowa grandmother's knowledge of her people's storytelling traditions: "Though she lived out her long life in the shadow of Rainy Mountain, the immense landscape of the continental interior—all of its seasons

> Every day they had to look at the land, from horizon to horizon, and every day the loss was with them; it was the dead unburied, and the mourning of the lost going on forever. So they tried to sink the loss in booze, and silence their grief with war stories about their courage, defending the land they had already lost. (Silko, 157).

In order to deal with the loss of their ancestors and still attempt to provide a form of Native American legacy, Silko interrelates land grab with individual trauma. As such, the trope used by Chadwick Allen is useful to explore the deep and indissociable connection between Native American identity, land and memory:

> What we call the blood/land/memory complex is an expansion of Momaday's controversial trope of blood memory that makes explicit the central role that land plays both in the specific project of defining indigenous minority personal, familial, and communal identities (blood) and in the larger project of reclaiming and reimagining indigenous minority histories (memory). Like Momaday's trope, the blood/land/memory complex articulates acts of indigenous minority recuperation that attempt to seize control of the symbolic and metaphorical meanings of indigenous "blood," "land," and "memory" and that seeks to liberate indigenous minority identities from definition of authenticity imposed by dominant settler cultures, including those definitions imposed by well-meaning academics. (Allen 2002, 16)

In *Ceremony,* the complex web of interconnections between "blood", "land" and "memory" shows through Tayo's inability to face his fuzzy memories of war as well as the loss of both his uncle and cousin. Indeed, as shown by the aforementioned quote from the novel, the land bears the memory of the ancestors but also alludes to the loss of this same land. This land grab also in turn impacts the tales that are passed down to the next generations.

and its sounds—lay like memory in her blood. She could tell of the Crows, whom she had never seen, and of the Black Hills, where she had never been." (129). In his book *Blood Narrative*, Chadwich Allen explores how Momaday's trope "achieves tropic power by blurring distinctions between racial identity (blood) and narrative (memory)." (Allen, 1)

Mapping the territory with barbed wire: the inherited trauma of displacement and alienation

Betonie's ability to speak about the past contrasts with Tayo's mutism and helps construe the latter's own trauma, which is triggered by the war but also, on a collective and historical level, by the arrival of the Whites. In her book on trauma, Cathy Caruth notes: "The story of trauma, then, as the narrative of a belated experience, far from telling of an escape from reality—the escape from a death, or from its referential force—rather attests to its endless impact on a life." (Caruth, 7) Thus, it seems like Tayo has to relive the events in a non-linear manner and the story is that of an "oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival." (Caruth, 7-8) One can see this oscillation through Tayo's guilt at being alive while his cousin is not. Though he came out physically untouched by the horrors of the war, he still feels dead inside and has to live with survivor's guilt:

> Rocky was the one who was alive, buying Grandma her heater with the round dial on the front; Rocky was there on the journal game scores on the sports page of the Albuquerque Journal. It was him, Tayo, who had died, but somehow there had been a mistake with the corpses, and somehow his was still unburied." (25)

In *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*, Laurie Vickroy mentions how trauma often shows through wandering and displaced people who cannot cope with the aftermath: "Wandering, displaced characters […] are haunting reminders of dead memories or bleak realities […]." (Vickroy, 4)

In addition to the trauma of the war, Tayo's sense of displacement stems from another kind of trauma, which seems to have been passed down to him by his ancestors, and which has to do with the legacy of colonization. Marianne Hirsch's concept of post-memory helps shed light on the underlying traumatic experience that may be passed down from one generation to the next. In her essay entitled *The Generation of Postmemory*, Hirsch describes postmemory as "the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up." (Hirsch, 107) Tayo suffers from both forms of trauma, one induced by his years as a soldier during World War II and, to a lesser extent, his childhood memories in Gallup, and a form of collective trauma which originates from his being Native American and dispossessed of his ancestral land, and his being both Laguna and White.

This multifold trauma sets in motion a legacy of social displacement. Indeed, despite Betonie's hogan being "[b]uilt long before the white people ever came." (Silko, 109), he also relates the displacement endured by the Navajos at the Whites' arrival:

> "You know, at one time when my great-grandfather was young, Navajos lived in all these-hills." He pointed to the hills and ridges south of the tracks where the white people had built their houses. He nodded at the arroyo cut by the river. "They had little farms along the river. When the railroaders came and the white people began to build their town, the Navajos had to move." (Silko, 108)

Displacement is what entails the collective trauma of the Native tribes, but other forms of removal, such as the one which takes Tayo from Laguna pueblo to the battlefield, also play a part in his traumatic state and adds another layer to his experience as both a war veteran and a biracial individual. This multi-layered narrative thus plays on flashbacks to hint at past events, and shows the separation between the character's sense of identity and his environment:

> Narrative dissociation is portrayed in several scenes by altering the narrative structure to create a disjunction in the protagonist's coherence of identity and perception of the external world. The narrative shifts abruptly between past and present to demonstrate the alteration of the protagonist's sense of self and relation to others as he remembers his experience as a soldier fighting a war that he doesn't understand. (Balaev, 60)

These disjunctions between the sense of self and the external world show through the inner focalization on Tayo, which allows the reader to immediately feel the confusion that the flashbacks induce. The flashbacks are disruptive fragments that are triggered by sounds or images as, for example, when the "crushing" sound, which signals Rocky's death resurfaces later on, in any situation:

> The tall soldier looked at him curiously. He pushed Tayo out of the wat, into the ditch running full of muddy water. He pulled the blanket over Rocky as if he were already dead, and then he jabbed the rifle butt into the muddy blanket. Tayo never heard the sound, because he was screaming. Later on, he regretted that he had not listened, because it became an uncertainty, loose inside his head, wandering into his imagination, so that any hollow crushing sound he heard—children smashing gourds along the irrigation ditch or a truck tire running over a piece of dry wood—any of these sounds took him back to that moment. (40)

This sound permeates the novel as one of the triggers that harks the story back to an earlier moment in life. Even though the sound itself does not signal danger or death, its association with the traumatic event propels Tayo to relive the event itself: "There are a number of 'triggers' or associative conditions that cause returns to traumatic events." (Vickroy, 12)

This grappling with both collective and individual traumas run through many Native American novels of the Native American Renaissance.[7] Critics have already shown how trauma shows through a disconnected relationship with the environment and that healing is possible through a reconnection with the environment. Michelle Balaev dwells on the importance of the relationship to the environment as a reflection of Tayo's mindset when she notes: "The place in which Tayo remembers reflects his inability to understand his traumatic past: the darkness of the room clouds his vision, the water terrifies him, and he vulnerably falls onto the ground." (Balaev, 62) Throughout the novel, Tayo's alienation stems from his feeling "invisible", which suggests a form of erasure that highlights the threat of annihilation of Native communities: "'They sent me to this place after the war. It was white. Everything in that place was white. Except for me. I was invisible. But I wasn't afraid there. I didn't feel things sneaking up behind me. I didn't cry for Rocky or Josiah. There were no voices and no dreams.'" (Silko, 113) The hospital's whiteness partakes in a sense of assimilation by obliteration that permeates these sentences thanks to the negative adverbs. As a white institution, the hospital that is supposed to help Tayo heal is another demonstration of the power it has over Native Americans' bodies.[8] Emo voices the internalized racism towards the man he considers as neither Native or White, and calls Tayo a "half-breed". (52) Contrary to Tayo, who does not take part in the conversation, the other Laguna men echo and sometimes mirror each other in a call-and-response as when they are at the bar: "'But they [whites]'ve got *everything*. And we don't got shit, do we? Huh?' They all shouted 'Hell no' loudly and they drank the beer faster […]" (Silko, 51). Tayo needs to navigate between his sense of inadequacy among the Whites and his fellow Indians' rejection of him as a "half-breed", epitomized by Emo's scorn towards him. However, as the plot unfolds and Tayo regains some sense of self, he also manages to locate himself more clearly and he thus feels more visible:

> Contact with the environment allows for a clearer perception and a sense of coherency. Through the experience of the environment,

7 The term was coined by Kenneth Lincoln in his 1983 book *Native American Renaissance*. Among other novels which relate this double trauma, one may think of James Welch's *Winter in the Blood* or *House Made of Dawn* by N.Scott Momaday.

8 Michel Foucault uses the term "biopolitics", in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison,* to define the shift from one form of power to another, which would be exerted on people's lives and bodies rather than their status as citizens.

> he is attached to a particular place and feels 'visible' now rather than 'white smoke'. The protagonist locates himself physically just as he begins to locate his trauma in terms of an internal emotional landscape that corresponds with a broader knowledge of his identity situated in a southwestern landscape and reservation community. (Balaev, 62)

The consideration of land as territory is inherent to nation-building and to a form of power, exercised at the expense of Native tribes. It is substantial to see how Silko both explores landscapes as a way to suggest the political grip that they can have when morphed into devices to delineate and separate. As such, territory can be seen as a social product, as Soja asserts in *Posmodern Geographies*. Relying on French philosopher Henri Lefebvre's book *La production de l'espace*, Soja notes: "The generative source for a materialist interpretation of spatiality is the recognition that spatiality is socially produced and, like society itself, exists in both substantial forms (concrete spatialities) and as a set of relations between individuals and groups, an 'embodiment' and medium of social life itself. (Soja, 120) Expanding its territory is particularly important to the American identity and economic development as its first colonies result from an economic endeavor, being the purchase of land by the British Crown. While the settlers gradually wish to free themselves from the British Empire's economic grasp, they retain this consideration of land as a commodity to be purchased and/or consumed. Contrasting with this view, Silko's novel relies on the construction of a space which favors a form of rhizomatic network and depicts space as a form of mediation and reflection of society itself. I would argue that the idea of space as a social product could be correlated to the definition of "territory" for most of the novel as it is in line with Louis Owens' definition:

> Whereas frontier is always unstable, multidirectional, hybridized, characterized by heteroglossia, and indeterminate, territory is clearly mapped, fully imagined as a place of containment, invented to control and subdue the dangerous potentialities of imagined Indians. Territory is conceived and designed to exclude the dangerous presence of that trickster at the heart of the Native American imagination, for the ultimate logic of territory is appropriation and occupation, and trickster defies appropriation and resists colonization. (Owens, 26)

Owens' definition throws light on the contrasting cultural views on space, one that is Eurocentric and promotes land as parcels used for economic and political purposes and another, which is based on interconnectedness. Silko's novel seems to first depict the Southwestern space as part of a process of expropriation and

colonization before reconnecting Tayo to land and infuse the space with spatial crossings to deconstruct the Eurocentric view. Only when Tayo fully embraces the idea of a hybridized space can he also approach his own identity as hybrid or "cross-breed".[9]

If Tayo's estrangement from his environment reflects his detachment from his community, I would like to contend that the rupture at stake is symptomatic of a territorialization of the North American continent which harks back to the creation of parcels through barbed wire. Indeed, one of the methods used to territorialize the Southwest was to delineate it thanks to barbed wire and fences. Barbed wire helps form parcels and map a cartography based on exclusion and otherness:

> En premier lieu, le barbelé révèle une radicalisation sans précédent des délimitations de l'espace. Exclure, cela implique dorénavant le tracé d'une frontière entre la vie et la mort. Deuxièmement, le barbelé signale que les délimitations modernes ne s'adressent pas tant à des sujets politiques qu'aux éléments d'une population gérée par une biopolitique. Les inclus ne sont pas moins animalisés que les exclus. Troisièmement, le barbelé éclaire le lien entre l'efficacité fonctionnelle des 'hétérotopies' modernes et la hiérarchisation de l'espace. (Razac, 85)

Once again, the idea of a hierarchy prevails in this mapping of space because of the barbed wire: "The Texans who bought the land fenced it and posted signs in English and Spanish warning trespassers to keep out. But the people from the land grants and the people from Laguna and Acoma ignored the signs and hunted deer; occasionally the Mexicans took a cow." (Silko, 174) While what is within the fenced land is supposedly protected, it especially signals property and entrapment while excluding who or what remains outside. It also signals death to anyone who would try to trespass, whether this transgression comes from inside or outside:

> The barbed wire fence paralleled the rim, and he could see bits of belly hair the deer left on the barbed wire where their trails crossed the fence. […] He rode miles across dry lake flats and over rocky *cerros* until he came to a high fence of heavy-gauge steel mesh with three strands of barbed wire across the top. It was a fence that could hold the spotted cattle. The white man, Floyd Lee, called it a wolf-

9 The term "cross-breed" enables one to draw parallels between Josiah's cattle—which is a mix of two breeds—and its ability to subvert the enclosure. This crossing of boundaries illustrates Tayo's further stage in his healing process and this dual identity, White and Laguna, which can be seen as inclusive and complementary instead of having to choose one at the expense of the other.

> proof fence; but he had poisoned and shot all the wolves in the hills, and the people knew what the fence was for: a thousand dollars a mile to keep Indians and Mexicans out; a thousand dollars a mile to lock the mountain in steel wire, to make the land his. (Silko, 174)

The height and thickness of the steel used by Floyd Lee bespeak the white man's willingness to build a kind of prison to keep his cattle in. As the quote suggests, the rancher has got rid of the wolves but what he is most afraid of now is the presence of Natives and Mexicans. He thus would like to keep Indians and Mexicans out of what he considers "his" and the only way to physically delineate what he sees as his property is through the fence on which he is ready to spend thousands of dollars.

The idea of barbed wire itself runs counter to Native American cultures who used to hunt in these open spaces, and the presence of this deadly barrier signals the wish to culturally and socially annihilate them:

> As for the effect of fencing, Indians very much disliked the idea of enclosure even under peaceful conditions, and when they saw how barbed wire threatened to surround their camps and cut off their hunting grounds, they wanted no part of it. Furthermore, barbed wire completely disrupted the Indians' moonlight raids; their swift ponies went berserk when slashed by the vicious barbs, and the Indians' usual mode of warfare by sudden attack and close combat was made impossible. (McCallum, 204)

Barbed wire thus bears a deadly connotation in the novel, as it betokens a different relation to land, imbuing it with authority and a sense of property, which likens land to "territory". As such, it partakes in the subdivision and fragmentation of space, which entails a form of containment for Native Americans. Barbed wire not only signals the historical cultural erasure but also the annihilation of Native Americans, whose connection to land is physically and culturally severed by this device.

"Cut[ting] into the wire": transgression and deterritorialization

Even if Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* deploys space as territorialized by a white culture which relies on barbed wire, the author especially highlights how it can also be deterritorialized. She not only offers another reading of space through Tayo's incremental healing journey but opens up layers of interpretation which allow for syncretism to form a hybridized in-between. Doing so, her work

strives to provide another reading of the Frontier, one that is in line with Louis Owens' aforementioned definition. Multiple strategies blur the epistemological boundaries and the landscape depicted is an interesting starting point to stress the constant transition and transformations at stake. Betonie's role as a Diné medicine-man may implicitly refer to the interconnections between the Native tribes present in New Mexico but also alludes to his being at the intersection between the material and the spiritual worlds, which are considered as constantly overlapping with one another. The position of his hogan is telling of his in-between position between different worlds but is also evocative of his mixed ancestry. Indeed, his hogan is tucked in the hills, at the rim of the city of Gallup, overlooking the city: "Old Betonie's place looked down on all of it; from the yellow sandrock foothills the whole town spread out below." (Silko, 107) His mixed heritage is a feature he shares with Tayo, but also allows him to mediate between two races. As such, the tales he relates about witchery complicate the Whites' responsibility in the colonization process which is seen as a process put in motion by a Native witch whose words have a performative effect:

Caves across the ocean
in caves of dark hills
white skin people
like the belly of a fish
covered with hair.

Then they grow away from the earth
then they grow away from the sun
then they grow away from the plants and animals.
They see no life
When they look
they see only objects.
The world is a dead thing for them
the trees and rivers are not alive
the mountains and stones are not alive.
The deer and bear are objects
They see no life.

They fear
They fear the world.
They destroy what they fear.
They fear themselves.
The wind will blow them across the ocean
thousands of them in giant boats
swarming like larva
out of a crushed ant hill.

They will carry objects
which can shoot death
faster than the eye can see.
[…]
Entire villages will be wiped out
They will slaughter entire tribes. (Silko,125-126)

The poem being a performative one, the witch emphasizes that he or she cannot call it back: "*It's already turned loose. / It's already coming. / It can't be called back.*" (Silko, 128) The author intersperses Tayo's journey with poems which bespeak Laguna's mythopoetic cosmogony. She includes a poem relating the invention of the White people, which would stem from witchery,[10] but whose purpose is also to highlight the performative power of language. This juxtaposition of the narrative with the stories-within-stories permeates the writing process of the whole novel by offering a mise en abyme which allows the Laguna mythopoetic embedding to inform both Native and non-Native readers into a form of textual threshold which is reminiscent of Louis Owens' further definition of frontier: "Frontier, I would suggest, is the zone of trickster, a shimmering, always changing zone of multifaceted contact within which every utterance is challenged and interrogated, all referents put into question." (Owens, 26) In her book *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism*, Joni Adamson describes how Silko strives to find "[a common ground]—that contested terrain where interrelated social and environmental problems originate—to work for transformative change."[11] (Adamson, xvii) Adamson explores this common ground in spatial terms, a form of "middle-place" which is accessible thanks to an exploration of Louis Owens' frontier. However, and despite this willingness to tone down the denunciation of white settler colonialism and to be accessible to those unaccustomed to Laguna cosmogony, this poem seems to be an attempt at empowering Pueblo peoples, or at least, at playing down the "victimry" surrounding Native American history in order to foster a sense of resistance rather than yield to a passive state of victim, which would be another cliché internalized by white society.[12]

10 Bernadette Rigal-Cellard draws parallels between this myth of the origin of the White people as an act of evil witchcraft triggered by a Native American witch, and Black Muslims' own tale, which insists on the first man being black and creating a new race, the White race, via Yacub's witchcraft. (132)

11 Yet, the novel ends on another denunciation of the white presence and its disregard for the environment, as it tackles the explosion of the first atomic bomb and the pollution of water: "Maybe the uranium made the water taste that way." (227) The novel alludes at the loss and manipulation of land entailed by this nuclear experiment: "[…] Trinity site, where they exploded the first atomic bomb, was only three hundred miles to the southeast, at White Sands. And the top-secret laboratories where the bomb had been created were deep in the Jemez Mountains, on land the Government took from Cochiti Pueblo: Los Alamos, only a hundred miles northeast of him now, still surrounded by high electric fences and the ponderosa pine and tawny sandrock of the Jemez mountain canyon where the shrine of the twin mountain lions had always been." (228)

12 In line with Vizenor's theory of survivance, Silko's novel could be said to be a tale of survivance: "Survivance is an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories; not a mere reaction, or a survival name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy and victimry." (Manifest vii).

The vision of territory as it is depicted by Owens, contrasts with the Natives' own cultural perspective on land, one that rejects dichotomy and considers human beings as part of a broader cosmos in which they're only a fragment:

> "Another difference between these two ways of perceiving reality lies in the tendency of the American Indian to view space as spherical and time as cyclical, whereas the non-Indian tends to view space as linear and time as sequential. The circular concept requires all 'points' that make up the sphere of being to have a significant identity and function, while the linear model assumes that some "points" are more significant than others." (Gunn Allen, 59)

Paula Gunn Allen's comments summon up a view of space as changing and multidimensional rather than following a hierarchical pattern in which some elements acquire more importance than others. Thus, her version of space wishes to discard the dominant power structure that seems to rule relations and interactions.

In Silko's *Ceremony*, the interwoven tales hint at this blurring of a hierarchical structure and bespeak a textual space which subverts the treelike structure by favoring a multi-layered reading in which none of the layers ever become more significant. Indeed, the novel hinges upon a narrative strategy which provides both flashbacks into Tayo's individual war memories, whose chaotic textual irruption bespeak his trauma and alienation, and the trauma induced by expropriation on the land itself. Prose and poetry are both important in recontextualizing the novel in the Laguna culture while delving into the personal story of an ex-veteran who is shown navigating between different worlds and spaces, thanks to language. One of the most significant illustrations of this exploration of this in-between space shows through the polysemous play on transgression. The novel thus plays on a subversion of dichotomies which allows for multiple lines of flight. Espousing a form of compossibility enables one to explore multiple interpretative strata. So as to show how these interpretative possibilities are deployed within the novel, Tayo's symbolic "cutting" into the wire is both an act of resistance but also a spatial transgression which opens up rather than constricts or reconstructs dichotomies: "He cut into the wire as if cutting away at the lie inside himself. The liars had fooled everyone, white people and Indians alike; as long as people believe the lies, they would never be able to see what had been done to them or what they were doing to each other." (Silko, 177) If the cut is supposed to allow Josiah's cattle to return home, it is also part of Tayo's journey home, which is part of a restoration process: "The cut in the fence was a good twenty feet wide, large enough for the cattle to find." (Silko, 178) It is also an act of resistance which nonetheless avoids systematically blaming White culture, in an attempt

to show all cultures as belonging to something larger and partly beyond their reach.[13] Rather, the novel insists on the interconnection and transitions between all things and could be said to translate a form of becoming-other process which emphasizes the movement and the absence of boundaries: "He cried the relief he felt at finally seeing the pattern, the way all the stories fit together—the old stories, the war stories, their stories—to become the story that was still being told. He was not crazy; he had never been crazy. He had only seen and heard the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions through all distances and time." (Silko, 229) In line with Deleuze and Guattari's essay *Kafka,* Silko's writing wishes to espouse a deterritorializing process, which avoids the establishment of a structured treelike hierarchy and power. Rather, the novel can be read as a palimpsest, a form of polysemous novel, fraught with layered meanings which co-exist and are interwoven. By doing so, the novel epitomizes what the French philosophers considered as an example of "minor literature". Written in English, and playing on the polysemy of both spatial and linguistic deterritorialization and reterritorialization, the novelist may be said to have invented a new language, one that deconstructs English itself, and instead, uses to turn it upside down, to reflect on its own construction and deconstruction: "Une littérature mineure n'est pas celle d'une langue mineure, plutôt celle qu'une minorité fait dans une langue majeure." (Kafka, 29)

Since she writes in English, Leslie Marmon Silko may seem to be partaking in the prevailing settler culture. In fact, she could be said to be performing an act of subversion from a Deleuzian perspective. (Deleuze, 35) Silko's novel interweaves various layers of meaning which associate land, identity and memory thanks to the inner perspective on a mixed-race man who has to grapple with war trauma, but also has to come to terms with the trauma inflicted by the colonizer, through the dispossession of land. Though Silko acknowledges that land is endowed with a Eurocentric perspective which attempts to turn it into a territory, she turns the notion upside down by showing how the presence of barbed wire underlies the idea of transgression. The polymorphous transgressions of the novel transfigure the space of the Southwest, rewriting Western archetypes and blurring epistemological boundaries. The author's constant play on language and the rhizomatic process of the novel, which shies away from a treelike structure, lead to a deeply interlaced and multi-layered reading.

13 It is to be noted that, in light of our previous comments, this willingness to show that Whites and Natives are part of the same world may be directed at a White audience especially. Betonie's assertion that "you don't write off the White people" could thus be read as an indirect way of saying that white people cannot erase Native American presence altogether, whether it be by not writing about Natives or by trying to prevent Native Americans from writing.

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