

## TRANS-HISTORICAL TRAUMA AND HEALING VIA MAPPING OF HISTORY/(-IES) IN LESLIE SILKO'S *ALMANAC OF THE DEAD*

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### Abstract

*Almanac of the Dead* is concerned with Native American identity politics as an act of “survivance” (Vizenor). Based on a fourth (and fictional) ancient Indian prophecy, the novel opens with a “five hundred year map” showing how space shapes and is shaped by subjects. The novel, like the map prefacing it, is a critique of Euro-American colonialist/capitalist view of space (as disconnected from people) and time (as linear, with a mandate to achieve progress). Maps are “ideological statements” (Anderson) in that they are representations of reality. Colonial maps and politics represent Indian land as *terra incognita*, to be discovered and brought into existence, with the “natural” sequence of the attempted cultural, as well as physical, erasure of Indians. The post-encounter experience of the first nations in the Americas is a traumatic one. Rather than an occurrence outside the norm, for the American Indian the norm itself is a “site of multiple traumas” (N. Van Styvendale). The identity quest in *Almanac of the Dead* unfolds along with reclaiming land in textual space, by rewriting history as (hi)story(-ies).

**Keywords:** *American Indian, trauma, land, healing, story*

In Article II of the *Proposed Convention on Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* (Ward Churchill, *A Little Matter* 433), cultural genocide is described as:

The destruction of the specific character of the targeted group(s) through destruction or expropriation of its means of economic perpetuation; prohibition or curtailment of its language; suppression of its religious, social or political practices; destruction or denial of access to its religious or other sites [...]; forced dislocation, expulsion or dispersal of its members; forced transfer or removal of its children or any other means (433).

In line with Churchill's definition, the experience of the encounter with the white Euro-American colonist, be it named an “overwhelming experience” (Caruth 11), or “dispossession of home” (Rainwater 105), or even “invisibility”

(Leslie Silko's term in *Ceremony*), the "accident", the "out of ordinary" event that "befalls" the indigenous people in the Americas, is fundamentally an experience of genocide.

Jeffrey Alexander contends that "cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (1). According to Alexander's theory, events are not "inherently traumatic", trauma is "a socially mediated attribution" (8), the "result of an exercise of human agency, of the successful imposition of a new system of cultural classification" (10), a "cultural process" which is "deeply affected by power structures" (10). He maintains that this process is similar to the one involved in the creation of "imagined communities": "in the course of defining national identity, national histories are constructed around injuries that cry out for revenge" (8).

In Kai Erikson's view, collective trauma translates as "a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality; [...] it is a form of shock all the same, a gradual realization that the community no longer exists as an effective source of support and that an important part of the self has disappeared. 'We' no longer exist as a connected pair or as linked cells in a larger communal body" (Erikson 187).

According to Alexander's theory again,

For traumas to emerge at the level of the collectivity, social crises must become cultural crises. Events are one thing, representations of these events quite another. Trauma is not the result of a group experiencing pain. It is the result of the acute discomfort entering into the core of the collectivity's sense of its own identity (10).

With trauma as a cultural process, "[w]hat is at stake [...] is the collectivity's identity, its stability in terms of meaning, not action" (Alexander 10). The response to trauma, the revising of the collective identity via a "remembering of the collective past" (Alexander 22), is operated through the agency of "carrier groups", those who "make meaning in the public sphere" (Weber in Alexander 11). Kenneth Thompson employs the concept of "spiral of signification" (qtd. in Alexander 12), which translates as "telling a new story, a new master narrative" (Alexander 12).

American Indian authors have cautioned that it is ethically correct, when speaking about cultural trauma, to identify the specific trauma to which one culture is the victim. To support this thesis, I would like to quote Lilian Friedberg who says that "[u]prooteness, homelessness, exile – these are the maladies forced upon Native North American populations by the invading Europeans" (371). Friedberg's endeavor, as apparent in the title of her article

*Dare to Compare. Americanizing the Holocaust*, is to establish, through a thorough analysis of various historical documents, as well as of scholarly literature, the term “genocide” as the correct definition to label the indigenous people’s colonial experience in the Americas. Friedberg, an author of German-Jewish-Ojibwe background, advocates for the recognition of the Indian Holocaust, by saying that “[t]he appearance of euphemisms such as ‘ethnocide’ and ‘depopulation’ applied to the genocide committed against Native populations is just one index of the continued resistance to the notion that this devastation involves a human tragedy” (364). Her theory is that the avoidance of the real name indicates a reaction of denial on the part of the perpetrator, which is an integral part of the genocidal phenomenon. In Friedberg’s theory, which I will later link to Levinas’s, the white Western frame of mind, which refuses to consider the Indian’s humanity, is responsible for this genocide. She links Indians and Jews as the recipients, or rather victims, of a treatment based on the assumption that they are both sub-human and therefore erasable.

To the extent that, as Nancy Van Styvendale observes, the American indigenous peoples’ trauma is not an occurrence outside the norm but, on the contrary, the norm itself is “a site of multiple traumas” (206), Leslie Silko’s novel *Almanac of the Dead* is, arguably, a “carrier” agent, a meaning-maker in the public sphere, thus seeking to heal, through the power of literature as a form of action, the American Indian’s trans-historical trauma.

Silko designs her novel in line with the Indian oral tradition of intertwined stories, while also employing the Euro-American narrative strategy of fragmentation, in an effort to make her text “ring true”, as Louise Erdrich would say, to a pan-Indian audience, “to people from lots of different tribes” (Coltelli in Chavkin & Chavkin 25) and, at the same time, recognizable by the mainstream reader. This, as well as her choice of an internationalist approach to her endeavor of “re-membering the past”, brought her both praise for her nationalist standpoint, and criticism, from Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, for example, for having allegedly “moved away from nationalist concerns in order to gain the interest of mainstream readers” (Cook-Lynn 80). To my mind, Silko’s “moving away” is, rather, a strategy of mediation—as James Ruppert might say—between the two cultures, in an effort to enable the non-Indian readers to understand or, at least secure their willingness to listen and not turn away, which is a *sine qua non* condition of any trauma testimonial.

Of the spiderweb-like structure of the novel, at whose center lies a (fictional) almanac of ancient prophecies, stories “radiate outward” (Schacht 56) spanning the width and length of the two American continents along 500 years of colonialism. Characters are “organized” in two groups. One set of characters like grandmother Yoeme, an old Yaqui woman, the twin sisters Lecha and Zeta, Seese, Lecha’s secretary, the Marxist revolutionary Angelita la Escapía, Clinton, a black Vietnam veteran and Rambo Roy, the leaders of a group of

disenfranchised people organized as the Army of the Homeless, the twin brothers Tacho and El Feo, the leaders of the Army of Justice and Redistribution, the Barefoot Hopi, poet Wilson Weasel Tail, Awa Gee, a computer genius, and a group of environmentalists are connected around the almanac of prophecies. The other group, in opposition and conflict with the first one and referred to as the Destroyers, is formed of Max and Leah Blue (a retired Mafioso and his real estate tycoon wife), Menardo (a wealthy Mexican Indian who disconnected himself from his family), Trigg, a wheelchair-bound investor in medical technology and organ transplants, Serlo and Beaufrey, two friends involved in drug dealing, and others.

I will argue that, in the *Almanac of the Dead*, Silko embarks on a project of healing the trans-historical trauma and providing a solution for the indigenous people's "survivance" (Vizenor) through reconnecting, in textual space, people across time and with the land via rewriting history as (hi-)story(-ies).

In his discussion of "ideoscapes", described as "concatenations of images ... often directly political and frequently hav[ing] to do with the ideologies of states and the counterideologies of movements explicitly oriented to capturing state power or a piece of it" (36), Appadurai argues that cultures organize themselves around certain keywords. Along these lines, it seems that in Silko's *Almanac* one can identify several related sets of key-concepts in binary opposition at the level of the attitudes they translate: expansion vs. expansiveness, citizenship vs. kinship, knowledge vs. understanding (perhaps also translatable as thinking vs. reflection), and progress vs. growth. These oppositions would correspond to the two groups of characters mentioned above and are implicit in their respective attitudes toward land, community, and history.

*Almanac of the Dead* opens with a map of Silko's own design, one that is drawn "not on precise calculations of longitudes and latitudes" (Powers in Barnett & Thorson 263), but a map as a process, rendering geography as inscribed with struggle, since, as David Harvey notes, space and time are cultural constructs, while Don Mitchell discusses landscape not as a stand-alone framework for human activity and an object of observation, but as peopled, insisting that maps are "constructed out of the struggles, compromises, and temporarily settled relations of competing and cooperating social actors", a "social process" which is "ever changing" (Mitchell 163). This "five hundred year map" defines geography "as a story of chronology", where dotted lines, known to indicate state borders, become, on Silko's map, "plot story lines" (Brigham 304), such as: "Sterling accidentally goes to Tucson", "cocaine to finance arms", "The Twin Brothers walk north with hundreds of thousands of people". Anderson notes that "maps are ideological statements" (36). Silko's ideological statements on the map opening the *Almanac of the Dead* read as follows:

When Europeans arrived, the Maya, Azteca, Inca cultures had already built great cities and vast networks of roads. Ancient prophecies foretold the arrival of Europeans in the Americas. The ancient prophecies also foretell the disappearance of all things European.

Then it reads:

Sixty million Native Americans died between 1500 and 1600. The defiance and resistance to things European continue unabated. The Indian Wars have never ended in the Americas. Native Americans acknowledge no borders; they seek nothing less than the return of all tribal lands.

Silko's map is a representation of the Indian understanding of space as inhabited by people with their stories and of time always in the present. She operates a remapping of the land in opposition with the colonial mapping, which is an instrument of dividing and ordering. As Gerald Vizenor comments, "[m]aps are pictures, and some native pictures are stories, visual memories, the source of directions, and a virtual sense of presence" (170). The production of space is ideologically inscribed. The colonial view of space derives, according to Levinas, from Western "thought and practice", driven by "a desire for totalization" (Peperzak 4).

As it is known, the Enlightenment projected the image of the Noble Savage as the inhabitant of an ahistorical, paradisiacal world, and lived in harmony with nature. For the Westerner, time flows in a linear manner, with a mandate to achieve progress. Von Humboldt's theory maintained that there were laws of historical development, and the historian's task was to identify those laws. Otherness could then be subjected to "objective and impartial study" via a complete separation of subject and object; the objectification of the Other was supported by the "laws" of history. This allowed for the "happy revelation" that causes that "arrested" some peoples' "progress" could be identified scientifically, so that the Other could be understood and improved as part of a metanarrative of progress (Russo 43). In his dissertation titled *Healing Landscapes: An Historical Perspective*, Kurt Russo discusses the Native American Other from the standpoint of the European cultural subject position and comments that "[t]he Other was a fact, an event, a part of the grand historical metanarrative of progress and change, civilization and moral agency, Westernization and the emergency of autonomous identity" (44). Russo's discussion, in an historical perspective, mentions earliest European accounts of the indigenous people perceived as both "outside history and unsettled" and Thomas Pownall, governor of Massachusetts, to describe the Indians as "not landowners, but hunters, not settlers, but wanderers, with no idea of property in land" (40). The land was therefore understood as undeveloped and the Indian as

subhuman; the Indian was there to be domesticated (or exterminated, unless one option was not equivalent to the other). America was perceived as in an “arrested state of development”, the fauna and humanity not evolved, humans not matured into “civil” beings. The primitive languages they spoke and the absence of a written culture were signs that these Others were not rational men (Russo 41). Also, for Calvinists, for example, property rights and sovereignty derived from God’s grace, “not from God’s law [for] no non-Christian and no “ungodly” Christian could be the bearer of rights” (Russo 41), conveniently forgetting that it was a God’s command in the Old Testament that “the pasture land could not be sold” (Wiersbe 416). The foreseeable results of having situated the “savage” outside history were the occupation and settlement of the “empty lands” or *terra incognita/ terra nullius*, which was there to be discovered and inserted into history. This is probably one reason why a character in *Almanac of the Dead* comments that Europeans left their God behind when coming to America.

The Western-European understanding of the land as an object to be taken into property resulted in placing borders on the land. Borders became demarcations of the nation-states (in the case of the *Almanac of the Dead*, the U.S. and Mexico), dividing and ordering the land and binding the identities “around which control is exerted and contested” (Smith 101).

Colonialism designed “spaces of emplacement” (Foucault 22), imposing on the Indian Other the trauma of redefinition in terms foreign to the Indian’s frame of mind (land as object, therefore property and rational man required to work toward progress). To quote Levinas, “real violence does not consist so much in injuring and annihilating persons as in interrupting their continuity, making them play roles in which they no longer recognize themselves, making them betray not only commitments but their own substance, making them carry out actions that will destroy every possibility for action” (21).

The nation-state imposes borders and creates a *panoptikon* system to guard them, while also designing a citizen vs. alien relationship, where the alien is constructed racially. The border racializes space and plays an exclusionary role, protecting whiteness (innocence) against the illegal “brown invasion” (equated with criminal activity) that takes place in *Almanac of the Dead* as Indian groups cross the U.S. – Mexico border in both directions. Seen through this lens of protecting the border against the indigenous alien, the Manifest Destiny becomes an expression of containment rather than expansion, as well as of freedom without justice.

According to Foucault, the border is a *heterotopia*, “a site of juxtaposition in which there is contestation and struggle”, which “exists in opposition to the empty space, ... that maintains its neutrality by evading opportunities for conflict” (Dumm 42). Therefore, “[h]eterotopias act as counters to the purity of those spaces that would operate as sacred spaces or as their

secular substitutes” (Dumm 43). In line with Foucault’s definition, the border is what the Pentagon called a site of low-intensity conflict. Foucault believes that “[o]ne source of the unsettling power of heterotopias is its challenge to the sanctity of space in both its sacred and secular constructions” (Dumm 43). Therefore the *heterotopia* is closely linked to the idea of transgression.

A site of contestation in relation to the concept of border is, in *Almanac of the Dead*, precisely the notion of Americanness. Silko’s project is one of rewriting history and reclaiming American identity. She claims an American identity “that has its foundation in time spent on a landscape, respect, and a freedom extended to everyone” (Archuleta 125). Calabazas, the drug and artifacts smuggler, challenges the borders’ authority (which also constructs and protects Americanness): “We don’t believe in boundaries. Borders... We are here before maps and quit claims. We know where we belong on this earth. We pay no attention to what isn’t real” (*Almanac* 216). Similarly, Zeta, a weapon dealer with activity across the U.S./Mexican border, “wondered if the priests who told the people smuggling was stealing had also told them how they were to feed themselves now that all the fertile land along the rivers had been stolen by white men” (*Almanac* 133). Zeta is simply challenging the authority of the law protecting the borders and bordering process, by criminal activity in response to criminal activity. The result is making the authority of the border void. She performs an act of denial of borders that interrupt continuity and disrupt community. Or, as A. Baker noted about African-Americans’ struggle for liberation, the “white-controlled space of criminality and incarceration was transformed into a[n] ... arena for ... justice and freedom” (Black Public Sphere Collective 18-19).

Zeta and her group’s activity can, I think, be understood, in Michel de Certeau’s terms, as a “tactic” of undermining the authority exerted through “strategies” of emplacement and domination. In de Certeau’s definition, strategy needs a “proper place”, which can be isolated from an “environment”, while seeking to produce a surface of objectivity (de Certeau *xix*). He defines a strategy as “... the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power ... can be isolated. It postulates a *place* that can be delimited as its *own* and serve as a base from which relations with an *exteriority* composed of targets or threats [...] can be managed” (36).

Bordering, with its exclusionary function, serves to bring into existence a “totalitarian topography”, and creates a space where “geography becomes secondary” (Mendieta 96), but where the undermining of panopticism constantly exists. This undermining process is visible in the *Almanac* in Zeta and her group’s tactics. As de Certeau puts it, “[t]he space of the tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power. ... it is a maneuver ... within enemy territory” (36-37).

In transgressing borders which they refuse to recognize, Zeta, Calabasas and the other drug and weapon dealers (re)create space, which, in their act, is shaped, enunciated, actualized through their choice of routes through the desert—cracks and niches in the authority of nation-state borders.

In connection with the concept of border, we find that in *Almanac of the Dead* there is frenetic movement in all directions, back and forth, north and south, by a variety of people: revolutionaries, environmentalists, smugglers, homeless people and many others cross the U.S./Mexican border both ways, to carry out their activities. For example, the Barefoot Hopi “had no permanent location but kept moving. ... The Hopi traveled the world to raise political and financial support for the return of the land to indigenous Americans” (*Almanac* 616). Through his “footsteps”, to borrow from de Certeau again, who understands footsteps as “pedestrian speech acts”, the Barefoot Hopi performs space. Silko carefully mentions that he has no permanent location. De Certeau comments that “[t]o walk is to lack a place. It is the indefinite process of being absent” (de Certeau 103). But, while footsteps connect here to there, being absent is also being present, footsteps “weave places together”, so the walker, instead of “localized” becomes “spatialized”. The Barefoot Hopi, as well as the others in their continuous flow of motion, become a revolutionary “war machine” and practice a “nomadism” that transforms—along their “lines of flight”—the “striated” space of fixed functions into a “smooth” space that “composes, occupies and propagates” (Deleuze and Guattari).

In the meantime, the land is returned to indigenous Americans in textual space, precisely by stories of walking on it. In the Indian tradition, all that is not in motion is dead. As Santa Clara author Tessie Naranjo explains, “Movement ... is necessary for the perpetuation of life. Movement, clouds, wind, and rain are one. Movement must be emulated by the people” (Naranjo 248). The importance of movement stays in the fact that it happens, it is performed, and through it the human being reconnects with the land as part of the landscape. At the beginning of the novel itself, life is equated with movement: “It wasn’t the years that aged a person but the miles that had been traveled in this world” (*Almanac* 20).

Silko says that “our stories cannot be separated from their geographical location” (*Yellow Woman* 58). In movement—moving through their lives—people connect themselves with the land through their stories. Consistent with her purpose of making her story “recognizable” by mainstream readers and with her internationalist approach, Silko reinterprets Marxist theory in the light of the American Indian frame of mind, which recognizes the power of stories to create and to heal. In an interview, she even calls – explicitly – the novel as her “tribute to Marx” (Arnold 193). Revolutionary Angelita La Escapia interprets Marx as one European who correctly understood the power of the stories of the oppressed to provide an impulse for their quest for social justice.

I will briefly discuss Silko's critique of imperialist, globalizing capitalism, the natural sequel of colonialism, from the standpoint of Deleuze and Guattari's, as well as Negri's theory/approach to the capital-state structure. In his analysis of Deleuze, Guattari and Negri as theorists of "crisis along marxist ... lines", Kenneth Surin comments that, "through its command over the logic of social cooperation", capital "envelops society and thus becomes social", with the corollary that, "[i]f capitalist command becomes universal, then antagonism becomes correspondingly ubiquitous" (Surin 608). "Today's capitalism is no longer a capitalism for production, but for the product, which is to say, for being sold or marketed" (Deleuze 141). Production itself is relegated to the Third World. It is the Third World that Silko understands as the international community of the oppressed and disempowered: the poor, the dark-skinned, including indigenous populations everywhere, the homeless, etc.

Deleuze and Guattari rely on Marx saying that it is "necessary for society, in this case the state, to exist before capital can receive its condition of possibility." (Surin 614) The state gives capital its "models of realization" (Deleuze & Guattari 434).

In the age of integrated capitalism, the function of the state is still dominative. But the dominative power of the state is no longer mediatory, inasmuch as the state is no longer needed to create and maintain classes. Rather, in the current dispensation, the function of the state is to engage in the work of disaggregation, to segment through administrative procedures, the countervailing powers that the proletariat has developed (Surin 615).

For Deleuze and Guattari, "capitalism's 'ruse' is to get us to believe that its limits are coextensive with those of 'the Universe'" (Surin 619).

In *Almanac of the Dead*, Silko's critique operates through a representation of capitalism as continuing colonialism's "extractive" drive to its ultimate state: mining the body. Neil Smith speaks of the body as "the primary site of personal identity" that "marks the boundary between self and other in a social as much as physical sense" (Smith in Bird et al. 102). The body becomes, in *Almanac of the Dead*, a site of contestation through a redefinition of the bodily boundaries. Trigg, the owner of an organ transplant center, is actually in the business of human organ trafficking. His use of corporate marketing language speaks for itself: "organ harvesting", "fresh-frozen biomaterials", "bioproducts", which stand for kidneys, cornea, lungs and blood plasma. His "resource" for organ harvesting consists in fact of homeless, poor people, who either offer their organs for money or are kidnapped and "harvested". The bodies of the disenfranchised are re-included in the capitalist production process as products. The colonization of the body continues the colonization of the space/land of these bodies. As Angelita la Escapia says, "European colonials ... had been sent by their capitalist slave-masters to secure the raw materials of

capitalism—human flesh and blood” (*Almanac* 315). The trauma is one of the commodification of the Other’s body, where the Others are both the dark-skinned and the poor. And, because the “secular substitutes” of “sacred spaces” seek to protect themselves against conflict, there’s a Judge Arne character in the *Almanac* who observes that the border regions are “littered with human refuse”, and refugees are “thick as flies.” Trigg insists that “[n]obody ever notices they are gone. They were human debris. Human refuse” (*Almanac* 444). These people are society’s non-producers until their bodies are put to good use. This reminds of the “final solution” against Jews, where the “Arbeit macht Frei” sentence can now read as “consume or be consumed”. However, as one may notice, the subversion is there, since the bodies of the wealthy whites receiving transplant organs from the dark-skinned no longer preserve their whiteness. As one character, Clinton, notes in his radio broadcast, the slave sacrificially recovers his condition of humanity and in sacrifice becomes the master, regaining his “full faciality” and thus being “deterritorialized”.

All these, together with the massive exploitation and pollution of the land seen as a resource for progress signify, in T.V. Reed’s terms, a “toxic colonialism” or, as one of the characters in the *Almanac* puts it, we live under the reign of the Death-Eye Dog. One character, Serlo, even says, pushing everything to the limit, that when the Earth’s resources are consumed, the wealthy who possess state-of-the-art technology should fly away to other planets, continuing colonization. This reminds one of Hannah Arendt’s remark at the launch of the Sputnik. In her view, the public’s enthusiasm at the satellite launch and their hope of leaving the Earth denoted the incapacity of modern men to act in the world, “to find a way to express themselves compatible with the prerequisites of worldliness” (Dumm 31).

Silko’s subversive rewriting of history provides a solution and a way of action. One of the characters says that, in fact, Europeans were created by a secret clan of Destroyers, formed of evil Indian witches. This way, Silko does not locate the evil with Euro-Americans only, but acknowledges evil as a part of human nature. The mode of expression of the Destroyers’ clan is violence, the “anti-humanism” and “hatred of the other man”, as Levinas would put it. A character in the novel observes: “No wonder Cortes and Montezuma had hit it off together when they met; both had been members of the same secret clan” (*Almanac* 760)—that of the anti-humanists, and therefore were meant for one another.

The fictional almanac prophesizes the disappearance of all things European. To Silko, it does not mean a racialized view of possible action, she does not envision a destruction/ denial of the white Other as part of a new master narrative, but a critique of the respective attitude toward the land and toward the non-Euro-American Other:

Wacah and El Feo must not ride in automobiles or helicopters. The spirits required that the people walk. ... 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. ... but the reward would be peace and harmony with all living beings. All they had to do was return to Mother Earth. No more blasting, digging or blowing (710).

The solution the *Almanac of the Dead* proposes, through the final gathering in Room 1212, where the International Holistic Healers Convention in Tucson takes place, is a "network of tribal coalitions":

Wacah had proclaimed all human beings were welcome to live in harmony together. People from tribes farther south, peasants without land, *mestizos*, the homeless from the cities and even a busload of Europeans, had come to hear the spirit macaws speak through Wacah (*Almanac* 709).

"Tribal" does not seek to legislate an exclusionary regionalism, or a reversed master narrative where the master narrator would be the tribal nations and/or the poor, but the inclusion of all the oppressed in a peaceful resistance movement, which would eventually achieve justice for all. The "network" includes "a busload of Europeans", in a Levinasian attempt to acknowledge the face of the Other. The peaceful protest that Tacho and El Feo lead is a response to violence with non-violence, thus discontinuing the cycles of conflict and killing.

To this end, I believe the *Almanac of the Dead* proposes a solution that Chamberlin would call the use of "ceremonies of belief". He remarks: "There is no single answer; but one thing that will help us get beyond the melodrama of Them and Us is a shared sense of the importance of the question, and of the act of faith that any currency calls for ...", and continues: "We need to understand that in the act of believing in these stories and ceremonies rather than in the particular belief itself that we come together, and that this act of believing can provide the common ground across cultures that we long for." (Chamberlin 198)

In *Almanac of the Dead*, it is the poet Wilson Weasel Tail who speaks of the importance of poetry as meaning maker in a new story, beyond the "melodrama of Them and Us": "The people didn't need more lawyers, the lawyers were the disease not the cure. ... The people needed poetry; poetry would set the people free; poetry would speak to the dreams and to the spirits, and the people would understand what they must do" (*Almanac* 713).

The message of the two leaders of the peaceful revolutionaries is similar: "The followers of the spirit macaws believed they must not shed blood or the destruction would continue to accompany them. ... Wacah believed that one night the people would all dream the same dream, a dream sent by the spirits

of the continent. The dream could not be sent until the people were ready to awaken with new hearts” (*Almanac* 712).

In connection to Silko’s definition of lawyers as “the disease not the cure”, I quote Agamben who remarks, in his comment on the state of exception, that in the current “global state of exception”, the legal system, connected to the political, “becomes a machine which may at any moment turn lethal” (86); he notes that constituted violence (the one that supports state functioning) maintains the law. As Clinton and the Barefoot Hopi in *Almanac* so well understand, “the authorities would call the military and police units ... to protect the government from the people” (747). As a solution, Agamben calls for a “real state of exception”, which is proposed as liberating. His concept of “profanation” can be understood as a way of desacralizing this establishment of the political linked with the legal, which is not inherently sacred, but which allows for a state sovereignty that is free to impose and perpetuate the state of exception as a norm, or as a “paralegal universe that goes by the name of law” (Butler 61). Agamben believes that “politics has suffered a lasting eclipse because it has become so contaminated by law” (88) and that “to show law in its non-relation to life and, consequently, life in its non-relation to law, means to open between the two terms a space for human action.”

I think Silko, in the *Almanac of the Dead*, proposes exactly this – a liberating “profanation” of an order established as sacred, a solution to return “free usage” to mankind. As Angelita la Escapia makes clear in her musings on revolution, “... the earth belonged to no one. No human, individuals or corporations, no cartel of nations, could ‘own’ the earth; it was the earth who possessed the humans and it was the earth who disposed of them” (749).

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