

“IMAGINARY LINES”: CROSSING BORDERS IN LESLIE MARMON SILKO’S *ALMANAC OF THE DEAD* AND *GARDENS IN THE DUNES*

by

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July, 2020

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Abstract

Applying Gloria Anzaldua’s Borderlands Theory to Leslie Marmon Silko’s novels *Almanac of the Dead* and *Gardens in the Dunes* shows how Silko’s inclusion of borders and border crossings in her writing highlights the history of oppression in the United States, and the lingering effects of colonialism that marginalized peoples still face today. With border crossings in her novels, Silko also honors indigenous survival and resistance. Despite the constant dislocation and unnatural borders that are imposed upon them throughout history, Native Americans continue to challenge and cross them as a way to survive by resistance; always honoring their traditional cultures and relationships with the ancestral lands they love.

“IMAGINARY LINES”: CROSSING BORDERS IN LESLIE MARMON SILKO’S *ALMANAC
OF THE DEAD AND GARDENS IN THE DUNES*

A Thesis

Presented To the Faculty of the Department of English

East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in English

by

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July, 2020

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Chapter One: Leslie Marmon Silko, Gloria Anzaldua, and Borderlands Theory

Leslie Marmon Silko

Leslie Marmon Silko is a multicultural American author who grew up on the Laguna Pueblo reservation in New Mexico. Silko embraces her varied multicultural heritage (which includes Native American and Mexican, in addition to white/European), and she explores issues surrounding multiculturalism in the United States in her writings. Silko's writing highlights her Laguna heritage by focusing on connections with the natural world, and especially the land. Silko often includes the reservation setting in her work to contrast the preserved Native American way of life (on the reservation) with the dominant Eurocentric culture (off the reservation). For example, in her well-known short story "The Man to Send Rain Clouds," Silko uses the reservation setting to show how Native American groups balance assimilation with resistance of the Catholic religion that has been historically imposed upon them; thereby creating their own hybridized bricolage of religion that combines some Catholic beliefs with their own traditional spiritual beliefs about death and the required accompanying rituals.

In her essay "Fences Against Freedom," Silko discusses racism in the U.S. and her own awareness of it: "As a person of mixed ancestry, I have always been very sensitive to the prevailing attitudes toward people of color" (77). Silko encountered these attitudes "as a person of mixed ancestry growing up in the United States in the late 1950s" (78). In this same essay, Silko goes on to call racism a "terrible irrational force" (88) that is "a constant factor in the United States; it is always in the picture even if it only forms the background" (81). Silko's mixed heritage meant she was "othered" and outcast by everyone, even those people within the borders of the reservation, because her "appearance reminded them of the outside world, where racism was thriving" (80). This sense of not belonging is a common sentiment among people of

mixed ancestry. They are not accepted as fully belonging to any group by virtue of their hybrid, amalgamated identities; so, they are perpetually facing a border they must cross, with the hope that they will be accepted by whomever is on the other side. They are Gloria Anzaldua's "third space" personified:

Anzaldua argues that living in the borderlands creates a third space between cultures and social systems. The word "borderlands" denotes that space in which antithetical elements mix, neither to obliterate each other nor to be subsumed by a larger whole, but rather to combine in unique and unexpected ways. (Cantu and Hurtado 6)

Rather than belonging fully to one or the other of their partial identities, a new identity is created at the border, "where two worlds merge creating . . . a frontline, a war zone. The convergence has created a shock culture, a border culture, a third country, a closed country" (Anzaldua 33). This may be one reason why Silko includes different iterations of borders (physical, cultural, racial, political, social, and sexual) in her writing, and she describes her characters as constantly encountering and crossing them.

Silko has explored the idea of borders (and crossing borders) more in depth as she has moved through her literary career. In her first novel, *Ceremony* (1977), the literal (physical) borders are limited to those of the reservation setting and relating to the issues of war and combat zones. In her second novel, *Almanac of the Dead* (1991), borders take on a central role, and the characters make careers out of crossing them (especially the U.S.-Mexico border) to smuggle both goods and people considered "illegal." Silko also crossed many literary borders herself in

the writing of this massive novel, which resulted in it receiving very mixed reviews. In Silko's most recent novel, *Gardens in the Dunes* (1999), the characters spend the entire novel traveling across various borders, both within and outside of the United States, all while performing social commentary on the cultural clash between the U.S. and the Native American groups it has historically oppressed, as well as the borders or limits imposed upon women of every background. Through settings and characters in these novels, Silko's borders highlight the ongoing struggle and resistance resulting from the colonial history of the United States and the oppression of Native Americans and other minorities by the dominant, Eurocentric culture that remains in power today.

Gloria Anzaldua's Borderlands Theory

Gloria Anzaldua is another multicultural American author who has analyzed borders in her writing. Anzaldua is perhaps best known for her groundbreaking work *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987). As a Chicana member of the LGBTQ+ community, Anzaldua discussed the many borders that she encountered and crossed as a multi-layered minority. Her status as a minority was complex and multi-layered because she was an American living within the borders of the U.S. while being a female, lesbian, and a person of Mexican descent. In the Preface to the First Edition of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldua says:

I am a border woman. I grew up between two cultures, the Mexican (with a heavy Indian influence) and the Anglo (as a member of a colonized people in our own territory). I have been straddling that tejas-Mexican border, and others, all my life. It's not a comfortable territory to live in, this place of contradictions.

(Anzaldua, *Preface*)

Gloria Anzaldua was treated as a minority because of her sex, her sexual orientation, and her ethnicity. In *Borderlands*, Anzaldua describes being treated as what she calls a deviant who is “neither one nor the other but a strange doubling, a deviation of nature that horrified, a work of nature inverted” (41), and this is a perception that can be extended to anyone treated as a minority in the United States, and especially to persons of mixed ancestry like herself, Silko, and many of Silko’s literary characters.

In *Borderlands*, Anzaldua provides multiple definitions for the concept of a border and borderland: "A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge . . . a borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary" (25). She also ponders the purposes for which these borders are constructed: "Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them" (25). The idea of the border as a line of demarcation, providing classification for people depending on which side of the border they occupy, relates to Anzaldua’s analysis of the people who live in what she calls the borderlands: "the prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants . . . those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the 'normal'" (25). Anzaldua thus points out that anyone considered an “other” is a representation of the concept of the border, because they show where the limits lie (and they push them with their very existence). This also demonstrates the relativity of the concept of “other,” because what is considered “other” varies depending upon the time, people, and place involved in making that particular distinction.

As discussed in the Introduction to the Fourth Edition of *Borderlands*, “Anzaldua establishes the border between [the U.S. and Mexico] as a metaphor for all types of crossings—between geopolitical boundaries, sexual transgressions, social dislocations, and the crossings

necessary to exist in multiple linguistic and cultural contexts” (Cantu and Hurtado 6).

Anzaldua’s work focuses on the U.S.-Mexico border (and the non-white populations occupying the area on both sides of it), but her borderlands theory can also be applied to Native American literature and life in the United States: “although Anzaldua developed Borderlands Theory by examining her experiences as the daughter of farmworkers living in extreme poverty in South Texas, the theory also applies to any kind of social, economic, sexual, and political dislocation” (Cantu and Hurtado 7). Borderlands theory may be useful in examining any sort of border imposed on any group of people, whether it be a physical, social, sexual, or spiritual border; and often, any marginalized and/or minority group is subjected to multiple forms of oppression that they often (if not always) resist: “within Borderlands Theory, oppressions . . . are recognized as fluid systems that take on different forms and nuances depending on the context” (Cantu and Hurtado 7).

Borderlands theory applies to Native American populations as well as Mexican American (and other marginalized) populations because both groups occupy the area around the U.S.-Mexico border, and because both groups have had borders imposed upon them by the U.S. government: “according to Anzaldua, the history of conquest, which basically layered another country [the U.S.] over a preexisting nation [Mexico], created a political line dividing the United States from Mexico that did not correspond to the experiential existence on the border” (Cantu and Hurtado 6). After the U.S.-Mexican War, the U.S.-Mexico border that we know today was established, and what is now the state of Texas (most of which was formerly a part of Mexico) became part of the United States. Much like the Native American experience, Mexican Americans were also taken advantage of via treaties and other official government authoritarian tactics:

The border fence that divides the Mexican people was born on February 2, 1848 with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. It left 100,000 Mexican citizens on this side, annexed by conquest along with the land. The land established by the treaty as belonging to Mexicans was soon swindled away from its owners. The treaty was never honored and restitution, to this day, has never been made. (Anzaldua 29)

The Mexican populations living in Texas became “refugees in a homeland that does not want them” (Anzaldua 34). According to Anzaldua, “The Battle of the Alamo . . . became (and still is) a symbol that legitimized the white imperialist takeover” (28). This Mexican American historical experience is like that of Native Americans in the United States, who were similarly stripped of their land (and their freedom to travel upon it) by the U.S. government and confined to government-created reservations (which were a small portion of the land areas the groups traditionally lived on and relied upon for their subsistence, and usually did not include fertile farmland). Both Native Americans and Mexican Americans have had borders imposed upon them by the U.S. government, and both were stripped of and/or excluded from their ancestral homelands; and, both still resist domination to preserve their culture. As Elizabeth Archuleta points out in “Securing Our Nation’s Roads and Borders or Re-Circling the Wagons? Leslie Marmon Silko’s Destabilization of ‘Borders,’” Native Americans and Mexican Americans also share the trait of “non-whiteness” and are thus treated as walking, personified borders to be scrutinized: “the border is always near because their brown or ambiguous bodies represent a border they always carry with them” (120). In other words, “nonwhite bodies near the border are in a state of permanent visibility” (Archuleta 127). This idea is present in the lived experiences of Leslie Marmon Silko, Gloria Anzaldua, their writings and characters, and the many other

minority/multicultural people who are treated as permanently visible borders within and outside of the United States.

Applying Anzaldua's Borderlands Theory to the Borders in Silko's Writing: "The Border Patrol State"

Both Native Americans and Mexican Americans have historically resisted the borders imposed upon them and have been forced to give up their land and re-locate to government defined areas such as reservations. In her writing, Leslie Marmon Silko uses physical settings such as border towns and reservations to give readers a glimpse of life in a liminal space. Native Americans and Mexican Americans are already automatically marginalized groups by nature of their ethnic origins and their roles in American history. Both Native Americans and Mexican Americans are further marginalized by these bordered spaces which they have been forced to occupy, and they are not seen as "belonging" on either side of any border. As Anzaldua describes it, these minority and multicultural individuals are viewed the same way she felt she was viewed, as "neither one nor the other but a strange doubling, a deviation of nature that horrified, a work of nature inverted" (41). This is what Denise K. Cummings refers to as "the 'tragic' fact of mixedblood existence" (74), the multicultural individual can never belong to any of their parts because each group only sees the other.

Elizabeth Archuleta points out the significance of border security in relation to the history between the government and the groups it oppresses: "the border and the border patrol cannot be separated from the history of colonialism as it has continued to operate in the Southwest" (125). The creation of the border and the security measures used to maintain it share a common historical core: "the United States created the border in violence and has maintained and regulated it through violence" (Archuleta 130). The tactics used by the Border Patrol are often

questionable at best: “Racial profiling along the southwest border has turned the region into a site of intense conflict over race, identity, citizenship, and the right to move freely” (Archuleta 125). At a minimum, border patrol tactics are questionable; in the most extreme (but not exactly rare) cases, they are deadly. There have been multiple instances of border patrol agents killing immigrants, with one of the most recent cases going all the way to the United States Supreme Court (*See Williams*). Silko considers these issues regarding border security in her essays “Fences Against Freedom” and “The Border Patrol State.”

In her essay “The Border Patrol State,” which was published in 1996 as part of her collection titled *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit*, Silko explores the continuous, heightened racial discrimination that Native Americans and Mexican Americans face because of their proximity to certain borders. Silko wrote this essay to recount an experience she had with the Border Patrol while traveling to promote the publication of her second novel, *Almanac of the Dead*. Her essay (and the experiences it recalls) brings to life the fictional account of the U.S.-Mexico border contained in *Almanac*. In this essay, Silko recounts her own experience with being racially profiled by the Border Patrol. She also points out that: “Unfortunately, what happened to [her] is an everyday occurrence” (91). Because of her non-white appearance, Silko has been questioned and/or detained by Border Patrol on more than one occasion. She also points out just how far the “border” seems to be stretched now, pointing out one particular Border Patrol checkpoint that is located “ninety-five miles north of the U.S.-Mexico border” (92). The connection between Native Americans and Mexican Americans is also made when Silko points out that many people crossing the border are political refugees, and many of those refugees are indigenous groups from various countries: “Most of the political refugees from Guatemala and El Salvador are Native American or mestizo because the indigenous people of the

Americas have continued to resist efforts by invaders to displace them from their ancestral lands” (93). She provides her readers with the connection that all indigenous groups in North and Central America have in common: they are all forced to cross borders imposed upon them as they are continually displaced by groups in power.

The implementation of the border itself and the ever-increasing border security provide the government with the opportunity to further exercise oppression on any marginalized group. Silko takes note of the racial profiling when she notices that “While [she and her companion] were stopped, [they] watched as other vehicles—whose occupants were white—were waved through the checkpoint” (92). The profiling performed by the Border Patrol is not only applied to those people appearing to be of Mexican or Native American heritage. Silko points out in “The Border Patrol State” the many different phenotypes that may be viewed suspiciously by the Border Patrol:

White people who appear to be clergy, those who wear ethnic clothing or jewelry, and women with very long or very short hair (they could be nuns) are also frequently detained; white men with beards or men with long hair are likely to be detained, too, because Border Patrol agents have profiles of ‘those sorts’ of white people who may help political refugees. (92-93)

Anyone who may be acting to help people cross the border are automatically included as part of the group of “other” to be inspected more closely; they are othered by association.

Silko’s consideration of borders and border crossings from more than twenty years ago is still relevant in today’s political climate. Borders have been a hotly debated topic in the U.S. recently. The U.S.-Mexico border has taken a central role in politics in the U.S. since the 2016

presidential campaign, and it is still a popular topic for discussion. Donald Trump won the 2016 presidential election in the U.S. with the phrase “build that wall” as one of his popular campaign slogans, which his supporters chant in support of building a wall along the entire U.S.-Mexico border to stop the illegal entry of immigrants. In what may be seen as perhaps a prophetic and ironic twist, Silko said in her 1996 essay “Fences Against Freedom” that: “Racism is now a *trump* card, to be played again and again shamelessly by both major political parties” (82, emphasis added). Recently, Native American issues have been included in the debate surrounding the border, as the border wall construction team is poised to destroy part of a sacred Native American site in Arizona that straddles the U.S.-Mexico border (*See Carranza*).

Leslie Marmon Silko’s inclusion of borders and border crossings in her writing highlights the history of oppression in the United States, and the lingering effects of colonialism that marginalized peoples still face today. With border crossings in her novels, Silko also honors indigenous survival and resistance. Despite the constant dislocation and “unnatural” (Anzaldua 25) borders that are imposed upon them throughout history, Native Americans continue to challenge and cross them as a way to survive by resistance; always honoring their traditional cultures and relationships with the ancestral lands they love

Chapter Two: *Almanac of the Dead*: Crossing the U.S.-Mexico Border

Almanac of the Dead is Leslie Marmon Silko's second and most complex novel to date. In *Leslie Marmon Silko: A Literary Companion*, author Mary Ellen Snodgrass refers to *Almanac of the Dead* as "a speculative chronicle. . .an anti-Western, anti-Christian, anti-capitalist diatribe" (47). Snodgrass also points out that in the novel "interconnections focus on the disempowerment of indigenous people during the shaping of the New World into a global power" (48). Through these many "interconnections" between characters in *Almanac*, Silko shows that oppression of Indigenous peoples and other minorities has been—and still is—a universal truth in every place that has been touched by colonialism.

In the article "Trespassing the U.S-Mexico Border in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* and Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*," Francisco Delgado considers "matters of mobility" (149) and the connection between Asian American Studies and Native American studies through the "mutual theme of trespassing" (149). Delgado's argument for this connection between the experiences of two different minority groups similarly applies to my comparison between Native American and Mexican American experiences in the borderlands of the United States. All these minority groups can be considered displaced in the United States. In addition to their physical displacement, they are culturally displaced regardless of location, because they are not fully accepted as either "us" or "them." Limited mobility is another common experience. Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Mexican Americans may experience limited mobility because of their non-white physical appearance; and this may be even more prevalent near a border. Delgado points out that "matters of mobility . . . are still largely determined by one's racial background" (149), and Silko points out in her essays "Fences Against Freedom" and "The Border Patrol State" that this has definitely been her own

experience, and that of many other non-white peoples—many of them Mexican American and indigenous peoples from both sides of the border—living or traveling near the U.S.-Mexico border under constantly heightened scrutiny. Delgado argues that the characters “disregard the U.S.-Mexico border and the western colonialist ideology that enforces it” (149) as a means of “un-writing colonialism” (149), echoing the sentiments of Silko and Anzaldua. These indigenous peoples disregard the border because they disregard the authority of the government that has historically oppressed and exploited them. This trespassing is another means of indigenous resistance on every side of the border.

Geographic Organization: Mapping the Novel

Borders play a central role in every part of this gargantuan work. Before the text even begins, Silko orients her readers with the geographically themed layout of the novel by including a map titled the “Five Hundred Year Map” displayed just after the table of contents (*See* Appendix A). Tucson, Arizona and the U.S.-Mexico border are at the center of this map. The map’s title includes the caption: “Through the decipherment of ancient tribal texts of the Americas the Almanac of the Dead foretells the future of all the Americas. The future is encoded in arcane symbols and old narratives” (Silko). This caption highlights the Native American belief in a cyclical concept of time, where the past will tell the future. The map also includes a description for the city of Tucson, Arizona: “Home to an assortment of speculators, confidence men, embezzlers, lawyers, judges, police and other criminals, as well as addicts and pushers, since the 1880s and the Apache Wars” (Silko). This description of Tucson’s inhabitants recalls Anzaldua’s description of borderland inhabitants as deviants (*See* Anzaldua). Silko’s “Five Hundred Year Map” also includes a prophecy: “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” (Silko). In addition to this prophecy, the map also contains text explaining “The Indian Connection: 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). These notations on the Five Hundred Year Map give readers a preview of Silko’s focus in *Almanac of the Dead*: the importance of history and storytelling as a way to remember the past and prepare for the future, ongoing “defiance and resistance,” and the prophecy for the future disappearance of the dominant Eurocentric way of life. In the same vein as the Five Hundred Year Map, the novel is divided into six parts, each of which is given the name of a region, country, continent, or spiritual realm (The United States of America, Mexico, Africa, The Americas, The Fifth World, and One World, Many Tribes). This geographical organization focuses the reader’s attention on the location and movement of characters and settings, and the similarities that they share despite separation by time and distance.

Archuleta states that in *Almanac of the Dead*, Silko “reclaimed the past and chronicled the injustices that the Southwest’s indigenous peoples experienced with United States imperialism” (Archuleta 121). The novel highlights that “indigenous peoples’ refusal to always recognize the international borders, boundaries, and definitions set by the colonizing powers is indicative of indigenous peoples’ efforts toward decolonization” (Archuleta 123). Borders in the novel represent the history of oppression; and the refusal to abide by the borders and their legal ramifications show that Indigenous populations have always resisted this oppression (and that they will continue to do so).

Archuleta also points out the connections between the Native American and Mexican/Mexican American populations concerning the border: “Indigenous peoples on both sides of the border recognize that the United States and Mexico divided their homelands, their communities, and their families without their knowledge, much less their consent, and Silko reframes this knowledge to resist the categories in which the border region has placed her and others like her” (Archuleta 130). The historical division of land also disrupted trade routes (as the character Calabazas reminds readers in *Almanac*—see below), and further threatened the indigenous way of life, much like the implementation of reservations prevented Native Americans from traveling and using different land areas at different times: “Characters in Silko’s novel recognize that the border, a barrier dividing nation-states, divided roads that indigenous peoples have used and shared as trade routes for thousands of years” (Archuleta 131). The United States government imposed borders, boundaries, and laws upon indigenous peoples on both sides of the border who had been living in harmony with nature since “time immemorial” as Silko says (*see Storyteller*), disrupting their way of life and creating an “intracultural split” (Anzaldua 108). As Silko points out through Zeta and other characters who smuggle goods across the border in *Almanac*: “The people had been free to go traveling north and south for a thousand years, traveling as they pleased, then suddenly white priests had announced smuggling as a mortal sin because smuggling was stealing from the government” (133). Her character Zeta finds this ironically comical, asking “How could one steal if the government itself was the worst thief?” (133).

Silko uses her characters in this novel to point out the hypocrisy of the system in power: “There was not, and there never had been, a legal government by Europeans anywhere in the Americas. Not by any definition, not even by the Europeans’ own definitions and laws. Because

no legal government could be established on stolen land. Because stolen land never had clear title” (133). Silko uses her legal knowledge to point out the flawed foundation for laws in the U.S. concerning land taken from Native Americans. Perhaps this was the foundation for the legal principle known as adverse possession: a doctrine by which someone may acquire legal title to property as a result of continuous possession that excludes the true owner. Silko’s characters disregard borders and laws because of this complicated history of conflict between the groups: “All the laws of the illicit governments had to be blasted away. Every waking hour Zeta spent scheming and planning to break as many of their laws as she could” (133). This is the basis for the Indigenous resistance, what Silko refers to as a war: “War had been declared the first day the Spaniards set foot on Native American soil, and the same war had been going on ever since: the war for the continents called the Americas” (133). This echoes Anzaldua’s assertion that “This land was Mexican once / was Indian always / and is. / And will be again” (113).

This idea reflects Silko’s recurrent theme of what Mary Ellen Snodgrass calls “the impermanence of earthly life, particularly for the oppressed and downtrodden” (93). With the inclusion of multiple generations of multiple genealogies in multiple locations, Silko reminds her readers of “the cyclical nature of human generations” (93) and their interconnections. The interconnections between the generations are maintained through storytelling and the preservation of history. Tribal histories are passed from one generation to the next, and they often fill in the gaps that are left when the U.S. omits parts that paint the government in a less-than-favorable light (many of those stories are often more significant to Indigenous groups as well, because they highlight an important loss or victory for them). The importance of history and storytelling is also a part of the survival of Native American culture. Snodgrass also points

out, “More fearful to Amerindians is the erasure of a people, a cultural demise that ends an indigenous tradition” (93). Without storytelling and the remembrance of history, Native Americans risk losing their cultural practices and tribal histories. Native Americans must remember their history to maintain their culture, and if they do not do this, they will have finally and completely fallen victim to the European conquest that began in the Americas centuries ago.

Calabazas: Indigenous Resistance

Silko uses the characters in her novels to represent and voice the concerns of Indigenous peoples and other minorities in their ongoing struggle against oppression. In *Almanac of the Dead*, the Yaqui character Calabazas is the most explicit in his direct address of the issue of borders and the disregard for them. Calabazas says:

We don't believe in boundaries. Borders. Nothing like that. We are here thousands of years before the first whites. We are here before maps or quit claims. We know where we belong on this earth. We have always moved freely. North-south. East-west. We pay no attention to what isn't real. Imaginary lines. Imaginary minutes and hours. Written law. We recognize none of that. And we carry a great many things back and forth. We don't see any border. We have been here and this has continued for thousands of years. We don't stop. No one stops us. (*Almanac* 216)

Calabazas discusses borders, time, and laws that have been put in place by the white/European groups that have dominated throughout history in the United States as something inconsequential to Indigenous groups because they are abstract concepts rather than something “real” (*Almanac* 216). He is speaking both in his capacity as someone who works to illegally smuggle goods

across the border, and as a member of the Yaqui tribe. His ideas apply to Native Americans and Mexican Americans in general as they continuously resist the white or Eurocentric rule in place since colonialism began in the Americas. Indigenous groups on both sides of the border can relate to what Calabazas says, and both Silko and Anzaldua keep this same idea at the heart of their work: the ongoing fight for the land, as seen in the quote above from Calabazas, and in Anzaldua's poetic closing of the essay portion of *Borderlands/La Frontera*: "This land was Mexican once / was Indian always / and is. / And will be again" (113). Both authors focus on the constant, continuous resistance of indigenous peoples and their rightful land ownership that was taken from this under this façade of a proper rule of law, which Silko refers to as an "illegal government" (*Almanac* 133).

Zeta and Lecha: Duality

The characters Zeta and Lecha are also significant in *Almanac of the Dead*. As a pair of twins, Zeta and Lecha represent the duality Anzaldua points out as experienced by minorities and multicultural individuals like Mexican Americans in the United States:

Chicanos and other people of color suffer economically for not acculturating.

This voluntary (yet forced) alienation makes for psychological conflict, a kind of dual identity—we don't identify with the Anglo-American cultural values and we don't totally identify with the Mexican cultural values. (Anzaldua 85)

Anzaldua goes on to call this "inner struggle" a "struggle of identities . . . the struggle of borders" (85) which—like the indigenous fight to reclaim the land—is continuous. Zeta and Lecha represent that dual identity as they are two versions of one person. They both struggle with their identities as women and as Native Americans. Both also resist the rule of law,

facilitating and participating in illegal and illicit activities such as smuggling goods, selling and using drugs, having affairs, and digging up graves.

Zeta and Lecha also provide a look at the duality of history and the rule of law in the United States. They point out the hypocrisy of the government, who took land from Native Americans and Mexicans, imposed borders and laws, and punished people who did not then abide by those laws that the government had itself violated. It can be argued that the government was guilty of trespassing, theft, kidnapping, murder, neglect, and other crimes. As Zeta says in the novel “There was not, and there never had been, a legal government by Europeans anywhere in the Americas. Not by any definition, not even by the Europeans’ own definitions and laws” (*Almanac* 133). Or, as Archuleta explains it, “Through Zeta, [Silko] has censured the presumed legitimacy of Western law and the recognized authority of the colonial governments and institutions that wrote those laws” (123). The activity of the twins and other characters involving crossing the border to make a living for themselves leads the reader to question the authority that seeks to punish that behavior: “Silko repeatedly forces her readers to question Western notions of criminality by juxtaposing white theft of indigenous lands with Zeta’s history of enriching herself by transporting drugs and guns across the border” (Archuleta 131). Both Zeta and Lecha inherited these considerations and “legal arguments” (133) from Yoeme, along with her *Almanac*.

The twin sisters serve as the historians in the novel, the keepers of the novel’s titular *Almanac* that was left with them by Yoeme. They are a reminder of the importance of storytelling and remembering history; and they relay their well-kept records to the reader as though they are passing the information along to the next generation of their own family or community. The reader steps into this position, receiving the stories of the histories in a meta-

cognitive experience that may or may not have been Silko's intention as the author. Regardless of intention, it is accomplished. Silko imparts a wealth of historically accurate information to the reader through her characters, successfully preserving tribal histories and the true accounts that the U.S. government would rather erase from collective memory (what Archuleta refers to as "historical amnesia"): "Through Zeta, Silko acknowledged a fact that historical amnesia erased from the American conscience, namely, that the southwestern United States sits on stolen land" (123).

Mary Ellen Snodgrass points out the duality that occurs in Indigenous culture and in Silko's writing as well:

Silko resurrects a pre-Colombian literary convention by double-voicing her works. Until colonization by Europeans, Indians produced no equivalent to the individual ego of Western tradition. In obedience to indigenous philosophy, they pursued a double consciousness, a rhetorical technique identified and labeled by anthropologists as a bicultural awareness of the role of self within the tribe. (99)

W.E.B. DuBois's concept of double consciousness (*See DuBois*) extends outward from the African American experience in the United States and similarly applies to Native Americans, Mexican Americans, and other minority groups in the U.S. who must keep one foot each in their traditional culture and in the "American" culture that they must assimilate into.

Zeta, Lecha, and other characters' border crossing activities come full circle because they connect with their ancestors and ancestral lands by taking the same routes that were used as trade routes between indigenous peoples on both sides of the border (before the border was established): "Silko's conclusion creates a path to healing because indigenous peoples reestablish

and reclaim the ancient roads their ancestors traveled, and they are roads without borders” (Archuleta 132). The disregard for borders is an act of survival and resistance, providing a timeless cyclical connection between the generations and between the people and the land: “[Silko’s] erasure of borders and her creation of an indigenous network affirm the significance of relationships with peoples south of the border and with the environment” (Archuleta 132). An act of rebellion against what Silko and her characters view as an illegitimate government simultaneously resists the imperialist oppression and domination of Native Americans that has been in place since colonialism began, and honors and preserves Native American cultural beliefs and practices.

Chapter Three: Traveling Across Borders in *Gardens in the Dunes*

Mary Ellen Snodgrass refers to Silko's most recent novel, *Gardens in the Dunes*, as "an elegiac tour de force set in the 1890s" that is "both historical novel and a reverse of the captivity narrative and assimilation fiction of the American West" (130). In *Gardens*, Silko takes her readers on a journey along with the protagonist Indigo, a young Sand Lizard girl who is removed from her home with her family in Arizona and taken to a boarding school in California. Indigo escapes the school and finds her way into a young family's home via their garden. She then travels with the young couple, Hattie and Edward Palmer, across the U.S., the Atlantic Ocean, and to various places in Europe. Both Indigo and Hattie (as well as other female characters) cross both physical and cultural borders in this novel. They cross physical borders between states and nations, and they cross cultural and social borders by accepting each other as family and challenging the many social borders that are the roles and expectations imposed upon women of every background.

Mobility, Travel, and Displacement

In the article "Gardening Ideas Across Borders: Mobilities and Sustainability in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Gardens in the Dunes*," Chi-Szu Chen describes the novel as "an exemplar revisionist travel narrative . . . [where] the stories of the transnational and cross-cultural traveling of the white and indigenous mixed-blood characters across national and cultural borders chronicle the scenarios of diverse and uneven production of mobility" (163). This idea of uneven mobility can be seen in comparing the different travels of the two Sand Lizard sisters, which Chen refers to as "diasporic experiences" (165). Sister Salt is more limited in her mobility because of living under control of the reservation system. Because Indigo escapes the boarding school and becomes part of a wealthy white family, she is given the opportunity to travel as a

leisure activity rather than just out of necessity. Chen describes these two different forms of mobility as a “dominating mobility” (170) enjoyed by the privileged (such as the Palmers), which is “motivated by desire of domination over natural environment and exploitation of natural resources and lands, places, and social space of the disadvantaged race, class and gender” (170), versus the “resistant mobility” (170) Sister Salt experiences, which is “motivated by the need for survival through gathering and sharing resources, knowledge and spirit across different places” (170). There is also a difference in the levels of freedom enjoyed by the sisters. Sister Salt may not have the financial backing that Indigo enjoys with the Palmers, but she has her own personal freedom once she leaves with the Chemehuevi sisters to live in their own community together. Conversely, Indigo has many things at her disposal that Sister Salt does not, such as the means to travel by multiple modes of transport across multiple countries. Indigo is ultimately under Hattie’s control. Indigo’s heightened level of mobility as an adopted member of the Palmer family comes at the price of her personal freedom.

As Chen points out, traveling occurs throughout *Gardens in the Dunes*, involving and impacting every character by exposing them to new people, new places, and new experiences; that expands their understanding and tolerance of the many diversities and differences that are prevalent within and outside the United States. The travel contrasts with the experience of the Native Americans throughout history in this country, reminding readers that Native Americans were in fact forcibly removed from their homes and placed on reservations or sent to boarding schools where they could be stripped of their cultural identity. Indigo’s journey with the Palmers reverses the route taken by European explorers and settlers during colonial expansion. The novel sees Indigo travel from the westernmost state in the U.S. (California) to the east coast, across the Atlantic Ocean, and to various points in Europe (whereas the settlers traveled east to west),

thereby “survey[ing] colonial expansionism by displacing characters” (Snodgrass 131). Indigo and her family are all displaced when they are taken from their home in the desert. Indigo is then doubly displaced as she travels because she has been removed physically and culturally and must both adapt and resist to return to both her physical and cultural home.

The animals kept by the white characters as exotic pets (Linnaeus the monkey and Rainbow the parrot) are also displaced and literally kept in cages. The animals present a parallel to Indigo, who is similarly treated as a sort of exotic human pet by the Palmers. Indigo simultaneously has the desire to both free the pets from their cages, and still maintain a sort of control over them. Her desire to keep them close seems to be motivated more by a search for kinship and belonging than a selfish need to be dominant. In the same way that Hattie acts as a mother figure to Indigo, Indigo acts as a sort of mother figure to the two pets, assuming responsibility for keeping them safe. As the caring mother figure, Indigo cannot help but notice how the animals long for their own homes among their own families, which is especially evident when Rainbow encounters a cage full of parrots—which is described as an “upsetting encounter with the cage of new captives” (*Gardens* 276)—and the “cries of his own kind were more than [he] could endure; he called back and flapped his wings frantically” (276). Rainbow and Linnaeus remind Indigo that she is not alone in her loneliness. The pets keep her connected to nature (and thereby connected to her tribal roots) and she feels as though they are kindred spirits, as three traveling pets of the Palmers who are each very different, but all treated somewhat the same, and who all long to be among their own kind in their natural homes.

Indigo: Duality, Resistance, and Survival

The novel’s main character, Indigo, spends the entire novel crossing borders. She crosses physical borders within the U.S. and abroad as she travels with Hattie and Edward, while also

crossing social and cultural borders, moving from her native culture into the elite world occupied by her white foster family. Indigo herself is also a walking border. As a dark-skinned Native American girl, Indigo's difference is on full display as she travels with the white couple Hattie and Edward, bringing to mind Archuleta's argument that, for non-white people, "the border is always near because their brown or ambiguous bodies represent a border they always carry with them" (120). When Indigo is traveling with the Palmers by train across the United States, Silko describes the other passengers, who "stared at the child, then stared at Hattie before returning to the child" (118) as whispering their assumption that Hattie must be "a missionary" (*Gardens* 118). Racial differences lead to assumptions surrounding the ideas of oppression and dominance. People assume that the only possible reason Hattie would help Indigo is out of a sense of religious duty and an underlying belief of white superiority, rather than the motherly connection that Hattie forms with Indigo.

When she is removed from her family's home in the desert of Arizona, Indigo begins her journey by traveling across state borders. Indigo is taken against her will from Arizona to California, where she is placed in an Indian Boarding School. Silko highlights some of the oft forgotten history of the United States by reminding her readers that Native American children were forcibly removed from their family homes by the United States government and placed into boarding schools where they were forbidden from using their own native languages. In these schools, Native American children were stripped of their various unique native cultures and indoctrinated into the dominant belief system of the United States.

Indigo's dual identity as a Native American girl living and traveling in the white world of Hattie and Edward relates back to Gloria Anzaldúa's discussion of the identity struggle that takes place in the borderlands. Indigo can be described as "having entry into both worlds" (Anzaldúa

41). Indigo is assimilated into Hattie's culture, and "to avoid rejection, [she] conform[s] to the values of the culture" (Anzaldua 42). Indigo also seems to embody what Anzaldua describes as a "fear of going home. And of not being taken in" (42). Because of her time living with Hattie, Indigo must conform to the societal expectations that the Palmers impress upon her, so she may have lost some of her family and tribal tradition along the way, which we see manifested by Indigo's failure to escape when the train passes through Needles. Indigo performs a delicate balancing act that allows her to both conform to the cultural ways that Hattie and Edward impose upon her, while maintaining her sense of self and her Sand Lizard identity. Indigo maintains her connection to her home in the dunes and to her Sand Lizard culture through her relationships with her animal companions, and her constant quest to collect seeds to take back home to the gardens in the dunes.

Two types of travel are contrasted in this novel: voluntary and involuntary. Indigo is involuntarily removed from her family, and then she voluntarily escapes. This underscores Mary Ellen Snodgrass's description of the novel as a "reverse of the captivity narrative" (130). After she begins living with Hattie and Edward, Indigo involuntarily begins a journey which she intends to use as a cover for her intended escape at Needles (which ends as a failed attempt). Indigo participates in both the involuntary and voluntary travel in the novel while always keeping her secret mission of returning home to her family. Eventually, Hattie decides to help Indigo return to her family when she determines "what was most important was to reunite the child with her family" (*Gardens* 327).

Hattie: Crossing Borders of Societal Expectation

If we view social norms as the boundaries or borders of what is and is not socially acceptable, then like Indigo, Hattie also crosses those borders (in addition to the physical borders

she crosses as she travels). Just as Indigo is out of place in white society, Hattie is portrayed as a woman out of place in time and cultural context. She is ahead of her time, and she challenges her prescribed gender roles. As a graduate student (a rare feat for a woman to undertake at the time), Hattie surpassed the academic expectations for women at the time, and went against her mother's wishes: "Mrs. Abbott [Hattie's mother] did not trust Hattie or Hattie's father; after all, they conspired to enroll Hattie in graduate school at Harvard without her knowledge" (*Gardens* 79). Rather than being proud of her daughter for attending graduate school at one of the most prestigious universities in the United States, Hattie's mother seems to be embarrassed by this accomplishment, and she reminds her daughter that "no man wanted a professor for a wife" (*Gardens* 73). Hattie further crossed the border of socially acceptable academic study with her "failed thesis with its scandalous view of early church history" (*Gardens* 77). Hattie's thesis topic was considered controversial because it argued for more female-centered ideas, which her mother blames for her social shortcomings: "To hear her mother talk, Hattie's entire life was ruined by her assertions that Jesus had women disciples and Mary Magdalene wrote a Gospel suppressed by the church" (*Gardens* 77). Hattie herself also resists her prescribed role as a woman and finds that she is unhappy and unfulfilled in her marriage, which she determines "was doomed from the start" (*Gardens* 330). This again crosses the borders of the prevalent social norms at the time because, as a woman, she is expected to find her life's purpose and be completely satisfied with being a wife and a mother. It is arguable that these same limited expectations for women are still in place today, although modern women enjoy greater freedom to cross these boundaries. Hattie does end up fulfilling the role of a mother to Indigo, and the strength of her connection with Indigo reveals the weakness of her marital relationship by comparison.

In her role as a mother figure to Indigo, Hattie is subject to the many additional expectations that come along with motherhood. She is automatically assumed to be Indigo's primary caretaker and is placed in charge of her care and education. Edward expects Hattie to limit Indigo's education to learning to be servile: "Edward was satisfied Hattie was teaching the child geography and reading and writing on their journey, but a docile willingness to serve must also be cultivated" (*Gardens* 307). Edward expects Hattie to place limits on Indigo in the same way that Hattie's own mother wanted her daughter limited. Hattie's mother wanted to adhere to social expectation, while Hattie's father "admired the theories of John Stuart Mill on the education of women and he was proud of his precocious child" (*Gardens* 74). Hattie seems to struggle with balancing the expectations for Indigo as a Native American female, while also wanting Indigo to enjoy a more expansive education in the same way she did: "Hattie agreed, they must help the child adjust to the world she was in now" (*Gardens* 302). Hattie admits that "it was their duty to educate the child to enable her to survive in the white man's world" (*Gardens* 307). To Edward, that means preparing her for a life of being treated as a second-class citizen, to work as a non-white servant to wealthy white people. To Hattie, that means teaching Indigo to think for herself.

As Hattie crosses many borders traveling with Indigo and Edward, she finds herself further removed from the constraints of societal expectations in the United States. Traveling to visit strong and independent women like Aunt Bronwyn overseas allows Hattie to see that she is not left with an inescapable life sentence to serve as Edward's wife. She realizes that there are people in the world like Aunt Bronwyn who throw convention and expectation to the wind to live as they please, maintain gardens as they want, and have guests to enjoy each other's company. Aunt Bronwyn is described as "such an interesting woman—not only a scholar and

collector of Old European artifacts, she also hybridized gladiolus” (*Gardens* 285). Hattie admires her aunt for her differences, her qualities that are considered eccentricities by others because of her nonconformist way of life. Hattie enjoys a freedom visiting with her Aunt that allows her to make choices, which possibly leads to her eventual decision to ask for a divorce from Edward because of his deceit and disregard for Hattie and Indigo being treated as accomplices to his illegal plant smuggling operation.

At the novel’s end, Hattie is dragged away from her new life with Indigo’s family. Her crossing of social and cultural borders as a white woman living with a group of Native American women is not socially acceptable, and she is forcibly removed by her father, a white man. This vision of Hattie being forcibly taken by a white man brings her full circle in her and Indigo’s shared experiences. Indigo, like so many Native Americans, was forcibly removed from her ancestral home and taken to a boarding school, then she was further moved by Hattie through their travels together. Hattie is similarly taken and moved against her will, showing that this is an experience that women of all backgrounds share in being controlled by men.

Walled Gardens: Bordered Sources of Strength and Survival

As the title of the novel implies, gardens are a major part of *Gardens in the Dunes*. The Sand Lizard people pride themselves on the fact that they have survived because of their ability to adapt and learn to grow food in the harsh desert environment. Indigo finds refuge in Hattie’s walled garden after escaping the boarding school. There, she can hide under plants and behind stone walls from anyone out searching for her. Hattie and Indigo visit many gardens together while on their travels. They visit Edward’s sister, Susan, who has many elaborate gardens that she goes to great lengths to renovate in preparation for her party, the Masque of the Blue Garden. Susan seems to also find refuge in her own gardens the way that Indigo did in Hattie’s, and

Indigo notes that the gardens are “so secure from intrusion” (*Gardens* 190). In her gardens, Susan can hide away and carry on a passionate affair with her Scottish gardener. When Indigo spies on Susan and the gardener, she remarks “no wonder Susan wanted the English gardens with all the shady shrubs and groves of sheltering trees where two lovers might hide” (*Gardens* 191). Susan uses her gardens to exert control, manipulating nature in unnatural ways to conceal her activities, and to fit her design for a single night where every flower must appear blue for something so trivial as a party. Hattie and Indigo continue traveling to visit her Aunt Bronwyn in England. Both Indigo and Hattie spend time in Aunt Bronwyn’s gardens, which feature many stone and water features. Aunt Bronwyn’s gardens have a healing effect upon both visitors, and Hattie especially finds relief from her marriage and her inner turmoil regarding her school controversy.

Walled gardens are found throughout the novel, representing another sort of border. Like the people who have had borders imposed upon them, the gardens and plants themselves also do not totally respect those unnatural limits, as the garden walls are often described as being “overgrown” (*Gardens* 242) with various plant varieties. Within the walled gardens, the characters (and especially the women) always feel safe, empowered, and sheltered from the rest of the world. They are all able to let their guard down because they are guarded by the garden walls, allowing for relaxation, introspection, and self-discovery. The people (and plants) within the gardens’ borders are protected by them, which proponents of stricter border control may point to as the reason borders must exist. Simultaneously, the people who find themselves outside of those walls may feel excluded; and, it may even be possible that those within the walls feel contained or limited. This again points to the controversial nature of borders, whereby their perception varies depending upon which side you find yourself on.

Hattie and Indigo use their travels as a “wonderful opportunity for gardening ideas” (240) and Indigo collects seeds from each of the gardens they visit. Indigo observes that “seeds must be among the greatest travelers of all” (*Gardens* 291) as she becomes interested in hybridizing procedures that she plans to replicate when she returns to her home in the desert. Indigo herself reflects hybridity in her seed collection. By collecting seeds from many different locations with the intention to bring them back to her home to grow, Indigo is simultaneously exercising both dominating and resistant mobility as described by Chen (170). She is exercising dominating mobility by attempting to exert dominion and control over the seeds as natural resources, and she is exercising resistant mobility because her collection of the seeds is “motivated by the need for survival through gathering and sharing resources” (Chen 170). By collecting seeds and returning to her homelands to grow them and hybridize plants, Indigo is helping further the survival of her Native American culture by perpetuating the continued Sand Lizard existence in the Arizona desert.

Hattie also reveals that her visit with Aunt Bronwyn renews her own desire for gardening when she says she “plan[s] to show the neglected gardens they [are] loved again” (*Gardens* 240). Hattie realizes she needs to take care of the gardens, but she is really realizing she needs to take better care of herself; because, as Aunt Bronwyn says, “if a garden wasn’t loved it could not properly grow” (*Gardens* 240), and the same idea applies to both plants and people. Hattie’s travels and visits with other women (including Indigo and Aunt Bronwyn, then Sister Salt and the Chemehuevi sisters) help foster more self-love in her, because she allows herself to escape from the social expectations placed upon her.

Sisterhood and Motherhood

Themes of sisterhood and motherhood can also be found throughout the novel. The experiences that Indigo and Hattie (as well as Sister Salt and the Chemehuevi sisters) share while traveling bind the women in the novel together as they realize their similar experiences across any division by location, culture, or race/ethnicity. Hattie slowly comes to the realization that she values her relationship with Indigo (and later with Sister Salt, Maytha, and Vedna) much more than she values her marriage. This crosses a border of societal expectation, because women were (and largely still are) expected to aspire to marriage over any other role or achievement in life. Hattie also crosses the boundaries of societal, racial/ethnic, and class expectations and divisions because she (a white woman) leaves her family and goes to live in a family-like community with a group of Native American women. Hattie values the home and sisterhood that she finds with these women and feels as though she has a sense of belonging and purpose with them much more than with her own family. By crossing both physical and social borders, characters find connections, and each finds their individual way home.

Motherhood is also an important part of cultural preservation. Through matrilineal transmission and social structure, the women in the novel ensure that their unique cultural backgrounds and histories are preserved in their individual communities. The best example of this in *Gardens in the Dunes* is that community established by Indigo, Sister Salt, and her baby at the novel's end. The sisters are perpetuating the Sand Lizard way of life by teaching Sister Salt's baby their culture, and by returning to live in their original home again to continue to cultivate the land as their Grandma Fleet taught them.

Chapter Four: Comparing *Almanac of the Dead* and *Gardens in the Dunes*

In Anzaldua's *Borderlands* and in Silko's novels *Almanac* and *Gardens*, similar experiences can be seen: distrust and negative experiences with authority figures, the sense of not belonging with any group because of a hybrid identity, and a journey or search for the self that incorporates some form of travel across different types of borders. Anzaldua as well as Silko and her characters must cross borders that are forced upon them, including the borders of convention and labels. The writings of both Silko and Anzaldua mirror the multicultural identities of the authors. Both combine multiple genres in their writings and employ nonlinear narratives, defying "structural limits" (Cummings 77) and "Western ideas of form and interpretation" (74). Silko and Anzaldua resist these conventions in the same way that their ancestors and characters resist and defy man-made borders, and their work can be "othered" in the same way that they are.

Being labeled an "other" by the society in which you live means you are the walking border that Elizabeth Archuleta describes, constantly met with enhanced scrutiny. These women and other people labeled as minorities do not choose those labels, they are just another constraint imposed by the hegemonic structure. They are the embodiment of the limit of what is considered "normal" or acceptable, i.e., they are not white/European heterosexuals that adhere to the established gender binary and other social norms; they cross the border of what an "American" should be. Archuleta points out the significance of Silko's writing as a means of decolonizing the border:

When examined in this historical and political context, the writing of New

Mexico, Laguna Pueblo author Leslie Marmon Silko becomes an exercise in the

decolonization of America's roads and borders as well as an 'American' identity, because she makes visible the power relations embedded in roads as well as in the concept of 'Americanness' and the unequal relations that continue to play out in the legal treatment of nonwhites. (Archuleta 115)

Silko uses her writing to scrutinize “white” society/the established rules and norms in the same way that non-whites are scrutinized. By disregarding the unnatural borders enacted by the government authorities, minority characters challenge the rules and norms (and their validity), questioning the history that displaced Native American and other groups and labeled them as the other.

The characters in Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead* and *Gardens in the Dunes* echo the author’s own borderlands experiences that she discusses in her essays “Fences Against Freedom” and “The Border Patrol State.” The characters often choose to go rogue and totally disregard the rule of law represented by both international and domestic borders. The illegal smuggling of goods, plants, and people can be seen in both novels. In *Almanac*, many of the characters participate in smuggling as their means of survival, which Calabazas justifies with a first in time, first in right argument (*See* chapter two above): because his Native American ancestors were “here before . . . the first whites” (*Almanac* 216), they do not believe in borders that impede their movement. In *Gardens*, Edward Palmer similarly depends on smuggling of plant and seed materials as his source of gainful employment. Indigo also participates in smuggling activities by collecting seeds from each of the places she visits to take back to her ancestral homeland and add to her desert gardens. Several characters in both novels (including Menardo and others in *Almanac*, and Edward and his associates in *Gardens*) depend on the income generated by

smuggling to live, and obeying the borders would mean the end of their livelihood. This can be seen as a parallel to the situation that many Native Americans found themselves in when they were removed from their vast landscapes of their ancestral homelands and forced to live on limited areas known as reservations, which Indigo considers in *Gardens*:

Before the government drew reservation lines, there was plenty for everyone to eat because the people used to roam up and down the river for hundreds of miles to give the plants and animals a chance to recover. But now the people were restricted to the reservations, so everyone foraged those same few miles of river.

(*Gardens* 414)

This history has taught Native American populations that in order to survive, they must collectively resist the borders, boundaries, rules, norms, and laws that they face, because, perhaps, at least some of those concepts were implemented with their annihilation in mind.

Transnational Crossings

Gerald Vizenor's concept of survivance is present throughout the work of Silko and Anzaldua: "Native survivance is an active sense of presence over historical absence, the dominance of cultural simulations, and manifest manners. Native survivance is a continuance of stories" (Vizenor 1). Just by recording their narratives, Silko and Anzaldua are practicing survivance because they continue the stories (and histories) of their ancestors and cultures. Survival and resistance operate through transnational crossings in both *Almanac of the Dead* and *Gardens in the Dunes*. In both novels, characters reject the victimization that they are subjected to, and travel to find and/or maintain their sense of self and purpose. In *Almanac*, Seese travels to seek out information about her kidnapped child and ends up finding a family-like support

system in a new home with Zeta, Lecha, and their extended group living together in a private community. Sterling also travels on a journey of self-discovery and self-preservation after being banned from his home on a reservation, which (like Indigo) he eventually returns to. In *Gardens*, Indigo and Hattie rebel and return to a community among Sister Salt and the Chemehuevi sisters Maytha and Vedna, while Edward operates in search of a constant adventure, which eventually leads to his untimely death. All of the characters seem to be in search of a community to which they can belong, where they are welcomed despite their heritage or past actions and experiences. All are in search of healing.

In *Almanac*, the smuggling of goods is undertaken by Calabazas, Zeta and Lecha, and Menardo (among others). This smuggling takes place at the smallest, individual and small group level (such as that done by Calabazas and the twin sisters with the help of their accomplices), as well as at an organized, business level with Menardo's multiple ventures and corporate like structure. Alegria is another character in *Almanac* who completes multiple transnational crossings and works to smuggle something across the U.S.-Mexico border: she eventually smuggles herself (with the botched help of a business which promises to aid people in illegally crossing the border) into the United States and barely survives the journey. She is also another example of a woman not fitting or not conforming to her prescribed gender roles. She is college educated and traveled from her home in Venezuela to Spain to study in the male-dominated profession of architectural design. Alegria then continues her journey, traveling to Mexico to begin her career, and ultimately designing the extravagant home that she later shares with Menardo. Alegria challenges gender roles personally as well as professionally. She also crosses borders of social norms because she participates in an extramarital affair as Menardo's mistress while he is still married to his first wife. After Menardo dies leaving his second wife Alegria

widowed, she feels she must escape to the United States to survive and cast off this prescribed widow role that she is expected to fill in Mexico.

In *Almanac*, the hypocrisy of the authority structure is also called into question by the border crossings undertaken by Judge Arne when he travels to Mexico to patronize prostitutes. These literal crossings are paralleled by his crossing of social norms. He and many other prominent figures participate in a club that allows them to openly practice voyeurism and have homosexual encounters that are kept secret from the world outside the men's club. But perhaps the most shocking social crossing occurs between Judge Arne and his "beloved basset hounds," (See *Almanac* 655), whom he regularly engages in bestiality with. As an elected official with significant power in the government, Judge Arne is held to a higher standard of conduct, and like many people similarly situated in real life, he shows that he is not the perfect upstanding citizen he is expected to be. He is also not the only government/authority figure shown to be participating in illicit activities, as many members of the private men's club are also members of law enforcement.

In *Gardens in the Dunes*, Indigo and the Palmers also make many transnational crossings. Indigo begins her journey before joining the Palmers, because she is taken from her home in the desert of Arizona and sent to a boarding school in another state (California). So, she has already crossed some domestic borders before running away and finding herself in the Palmers' gardens. The group then crosses many more domestic borders moving from state to state across the country, before crossing the Atlantic Ocean and continuing into Europe. The journey undertaken by Indigo and Hattie are both individual and collective journeys of self-discovery. Indigo travels because she has to, but also because she sees this as her chance to return to her home (even though her initial plan to jump off the train at Needles falls through). Hattie also seems to be

searching for her purpose and desire, as she navigates life as the wife that she never wanted to be. This journey is a means of survival for both Indigo and Hattie. Indigo is able to return home with the help of Hattie, and Hattie finds a renewed purpose in her desire to help reunite Indigo with her family. It also helps Hattie realize that she is unhappy and ready to end her marriage.

Like the multiple smugglers in *Almanac of the Dead*, Edward is also engaged in smuggling plant materials from multiple international locations back to the United States. This is Edward's own journey to survive, because he has always needed the adventure of exploring new places to maintain his happiness. He was so dependent upon his need to travel that he left on a "Bahamas-Key West expedition . . . soon after their wedding" (*Gardens* 73). Edward's involvement smuggling plant material also aids in the survival of plant species in the same way that travel and resistance enable the survival of Native Americans and their culture.

Duality and Hybridity

Duality and hybridity are explored in both *Almanac of the Dead* and *Gardens in the Dunes*. There are many multicultural characters in both novels who explore their own identities. There are also characters who lead dual lives, appearing as privileged and powerful in public, while carrying on activities and business dealings in secret that often break the law (such as Judge Arne's questionable deals and social activities in *Almanac*, and Edward's plant smuggling in *Gardens*). Duality is also represented in each novel's set of twins. Zeta and Lecha in *Almanac* and Maytha and Vedna in *Gardens* represent a sense of duality that provides a connection for other characters, providing community through sisterhood and a connection to the sacred. Zeta and Lecha provide that connection to Seese, and Maytha and Vedna provide that connection to Sister Salt. Both sets of twins help to see Seese and Sister Salt through their difficult journeys. As Seese grapples with her past on her journey to heal herself, she finds a

home with the twins. The same can be said for Sister Salt, who travels together with Maytha and Vedna on her literal journey away from the reservation in search of her home.

Hybridity is another concept that is common across all the writings considered here. Anzaldua and Silko are both hybridizations of multiple ethnicities and cultures. They each have their own personal experiences to draw upon in their work, where they can explore the feeling that they do not fully belong among any of the individual parts of their hybrid identities. Anzaldua's *Borderlands* is nonfiction and shares many of her own experiences through prose and poetry. Both Silko's fiction and nonfiction also draw upon the author's personal experience, and she creates characters that have multi-layered and complex hybrid identities.

There are many hybrid characters in Silko's novels which share similar experiences in their treatment as outcasts. They all share a sense of not belonging to any of the individual component cultures that make up their hybrid identities. In *Gardens in the Dunes*, Sister Salt (Indigo's Sand Lizard sister) has a child with Big Candy (a black man). Their child is another example of the hybrid individual who must find his own family support group to belong to, and that sentiment is shared by all of the individuals (Sister Salt, Indigo, Hattie, and the Chemehuevi sisters) who end up coming together in their own hybridized community. The forcible removal of Hattie from this all-female sisterhood of various cultures by her family represents just how unacceptable that idea was at the time (late 1800s), and how it is still not accepted by many people today who may lean towards (or completely embrace) racist tendencies.

The hybridization of various plant species, which is considered throughout *Gardens in the Dunes*, is a way to make plants stronger and more adaptable to changing environments. It is no coincidence that Silko considers hybridization as a way to improve rather than a detriment to any living thing—plant or animal—and reverses the ideas and beliefs espoused by white

supremacists that hybridization or racial mixing of people (or what proponents of slavery and segregation called miscegenation) was a damaging factor. Silko presents a contrary image of hybridity, where those hybrid characters are smarter, stronger, or otherwise benefit from their mixed blood. They are able to cross those social and cultural borders and adapt wherever they go. Silko also presents what Snodgrass calls “racial blending” (249) as a means of perpetuating and surviving, rather than as a threat to one specific group. In *Gardens*, Silko presents the Sand Lizard peoples as a community that welcomes and embraces “wild sexual practices” (Gardens 202) that create these hybrid identities and increase connections between different groups: “Sex with strangers was valued for alliances and friendships that might be made” (Gardens 202). The Sand Lizards use racial mixing as a way to create a network to help protect their culture and ensure it survives through hybrid offspring.

Manipulation of Nature

The hybridization of plants discussed above can be considered as part of the broader concept of manipulation of nature that is also seen in both *Almanac of the Dead* and *Gardens in the Dunes*. In both novels, Native American characters are depicted as having a positive, sustainable relationship with nature, and white characters are depicted as having a negative, exploitative relationship with nature where landscapes and other natural elements are commercialized. The idea of manipulating the natural world for individualized personal gain is “antithetical to tribal thought” (Ryan, *quoting* Allen 117). By comparing these different uses of nature, Silko “reaffirms Native authority and constructs an eloquent foil for the extravagant practices of the [novels’] Euroamerican [characters]” (Ryan 119). Through their interaction with the environment around them, the Euroamerican characters appear to be morally bankrupt, while

the Native American characters—despite any bending or breaking of laws—are shown to be of good and strong moral character by comparison.

As the novel's title indicates, nature is manipulated via various forms of gardening throughout *Gardens in the Dunes*. Terre Ryan compares these various gardening practices and the motivations behind them. The Native American characters in the novel practice “subsistence agriculture” (Ryan 118) to provide them with the food they need to survive: “The subsistence gardens are essential to the Indians’ survival; to seize their land is to hasten their extermination” (Ryan 120). Subsistence and survival were the reasons that Grandma Fleet decides to hide in the desert with Sister Salt and Indigo; they can survive by subsistence gardening in the desert, surviving off land that no one else wants because of the harsh conditions.

Ryan goes on to show the stark contrast between the subsistence gardening of the Sand Lizard women and the landscape gardening undertaken by Edward's sister, Susan: “In *Gardens* nature is grossly manipulated by Euroamericans in landscapes that are designed to bolster the egos of their owners” (Ryan 123). Susan manipulates her garden to always stay in fashion, dismantling her Italian gardens to create English gardens, and making an entire area appear blue for a single night's grand event, the Masque of the Blue Garden. At the time when the novel takes place (the 1890's), “landscape gardening had achieved the status of a fine art” (Ryan 121). The spirit of the conqueror lived on through gardening after the west was won:

“With the continent entirely conquered and settled and its Native peoples more or less incarcerated on reservations, the American landscape garden provided a blank canvas on which the gardener could impose control and exercise his or her fine art, all in the service of a higher spiritual authority” (Ryan 122).

The garden is one place where Susan has control and power, which may not have been available to her otherwise because she is a woman. She uses that power to constantly change her gardens while disregarding the damage and waste that she is creating in the process.

Silko has observed that the natural elements of the world “need only to be left as they are” (*Yellow Woman* 27). As Ryan points out, Susan never considers leaving anything as it is, but must exert control over every aspect of her garden property (*See* Ryan 123-124). The landscape gardening in *Gardens in the Dunes* can be seen as a small-scale reproduction of the conquest of the Americas, where different European explorers found and claimed the New World, and later manipulated the landscapes for personal, individual gain by the groups in power. Just as the settlers conquered the continent, gardeners like Susan likewise discard the natural appearance and cycles of their environments, conquering their property so it will appear however they wish at any given time.

The smuggling of plant materials undertaken by both Edward and Indigo offer another example of Native American versus Euroamerican motivations. Edward travels to various locations to stealthily acquire exotic plants and bring them home to the U.S. for his employer. Edward smuggles plant material for financial gain, regardless of any scientific curiosity that may be genuine. Indigo collects and is given seeds as she travels with Hattie and Edward, which she stores in the hope that she can return to the gardens in the dunes and plant them. Indigo’s motivation is not at all driven by greed, but as a sincere way to add to and improve her home gardening community that she hopes to restore. Edward eventually meets his death as he allows money to rule him, while Indigo does eventually return to her ancestral homelands to grow her own gardens.

The construction of the dam at Parker Canyon is another example of extremely exploitative manipulation of nature in *Gardens in the Dunes*. Through Sister Salt, Silko vividly describes the dam construction as damage: “Sister was shocked at the destruction she saw below: the earth was blasted open, the soil moist and red as flesh . . . The river had been forced from her bed into deep diversion ditches, where her water ran angry red” (*Gardens* 211). The earth and the river are personified here, described as injured and angry. The damage being done to construct this dam is two-fold: that incurred building the dam itself, and that incurred by altering the natural course of a river. In addition to the damage at the construction site, Sister Salt also notices “after the river’s course was diverted” (*Gardens* 211) that the fish and plants that depended on the river’s former presence are dying. This is just another example of the Euroamerican actor Ryan describes as exerting power over nature for their own personal gain, without consideration to the harmful effects their actions may have.

The major example of this Euroamerican manipulation of nature for commercial purposes in *Almanac of the Dead* is the real estate development undertaken by Leah Blue. Ryan compares this with Susan in *Gardens*: “Susan’s manipulations of the earth around her home are mild compared to those of realtor Leah Blue, who plans a version of Venice, Italy, complete with lakes and canals, for late twentieth-century Arizona in *Almanac*” (Ryan 123). Leah’s plan to build a replica of Venice—a city famous for its connection with the sea via its interior canals—in the desert of Arizona—a place devoid of natural water features—is Silko’s hyperbolic expression of the Europeans’ insatiable conquest of the U.S. and other places. Leah’s unfettered ideas, and the shady dealings that she employs to accomplish her goals, reflect the settler’s arrogance in thinking that they can claim and manipulate any land they encounter, regardless of any current inhabitants or potential consequences.

This concept of the manipulation of nature relates to the idea of borders because enacting a border can also be considered an oppressive manipulation of nature. These borders are often arbitrarily created. Sometimes they incorporate natural features, but the motivation and design behind a government-created border is usually political. This explains the reasoning of the character Calabazas in *Almanac of the Dead* when he describes borders as “[not] real. Imaginary lines” (*Almanac* 216). Enacting borders manipulates nature by determining who can and cannot occupy an area, and by limiting travel of those people with artificial barriers. Calabazas explains that he and his ancestors “have always moved freely” (*Almanac* 216), and that by disregarding man-made borders, the Native Americans can continue to resist and ensure that their culture survives.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Borders are reflections of power and domination. Borders are put in place to show that there is someone exerting control over an area, a people, a geographical feature, and everything within those limits. The history of the United States has seen many groups be dominated and controlled by those in power: women, people of color, and anyone considered “foreign” to name a few. It is no surprise, then, that Leslie Marmon Silko—an author who is a woman and can be considered a person of color or minority—includes borders and border crossings in her writing. Her ancestors have had a deep connection and reverence for the natural world for hundreds of years, and that relationship has continued both before and after white settlers usurped and forcibly removed both her Native American and Mexican ancestors.

Silko’s foundation in legal education makes her unable to ignore the hypocrisies of the rule of law and its establishment in this country. She points out the unpopular (but not untrue) observation that in establishing the country and government of the United States, those in power broke their own laws that they now point to as the rules that should govern us all. Land and possessions were stolen, people were kidnapped, assaulted, raped, and killed. Deceitful and fraudulent dealings and contracts (treaties) were knowingly and purposefully executed and breached with malicious intent aforethought. The government also used (and abused) its power to make and change the rule of law to take advantage of marginalized groups. As just one of many examples: “As Gary Paul Nabhan observes, ‘Between 1887 and 1934, 60 percent of all tribal trust and treaty lands . . . passed out of Native American hands as a result of the Dawes Act, a bill designed to promote the assimilation of Indians into the dominant society’” (Ryan, *quoting* Nabhan 120). Additionally, Native peoples were stripped of their original names and cultures, and instructed which language and religion to hold as their own. And this is only in

consideration of the many Native American tribes and their experience with the founding of the U.S.; it does not even begin to consider the history of the African American experience enduring and overcoming slavery.

There are many minority groups that have had less than favorable experiences with white supremacy, patriarchy, and heteronormativity throughout the history of the United States. Both Leslie Marmon Silko and Gloria Anzaldua have used considerations of borders and border crossings to explore their own experiences as female minorities, as well as others who occupy the many social and geopolitical borderlands that surround us all.

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Appendix A: The Five Hundred Year Map (from *Almanac of the Dead*)



