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Hybridity in Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony (1977)

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Abstract

Hybridity refers to the mixture of races between two communities or cultures. This paper deals with the hybridity in the Native American literature presented in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*. The novel presents the mixture between the Native Laguna community and the Euro-American, the White one, about mixed origin's hybrid characters. It discusses that hybridity is a significant theme in Native American literature. It also shows the effects of the Euro-American culture on the Native one. Moreover, it presents the individual differences among the Natives themselves that some Natives submit to the Euro-American culture. In contrast, some others keep their Native culture of their tribe in which they are raised and learned its traditions.

1. Introduction

In literature, it is referred to hybridity as a mixture of races and cultures. Generally, when a community borrows ideas, customs, and other concepts, hybridity exists there. Thus, hybridity is a combination of different cultures to form that of its own. It also influences the identity of people who have hybrid origins and try to adapt to the two cultures' traditions while maintaining their native principles and beliefs.[1]

Leslie Marmon Silko, who had a hybrid ancestry of the Laguna and the Whites, was born in west-central New Mexico, USA, in 1948 and raised among the Laguna Pueblo people tribe. Silko is one of the most famous Native American writers who revive Native American culture and literature and indicates a deep understanding of Native Americans. Her mixed ancestry influenced her literary works a lot.[2] In her childhood, Silko used to listen to the stories told by her aunts in a Laguna house, expressing that: Silko's writing focuses on the Native Americans, the minorities, who live in the Euro- American community, the Whites, and are oppressed by them. The Natives feel that they lose

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their identities amid the Whites. Silko tries to show how the oral traditions help the Natives keep their identities with another predominant culture. She presents her personal experiences by telling stories in her writing. Her way of fusing storytelling with the written form is paralleled with the relationship between the Natives and their outside world of the Whites. Oral traditions and myths are significant for the Natives to maintain their identities, spiritual traditions and support them to survive. As consequences, the Natives regain their strength and identities that are lost by the American control.[4]

Like the Laguna people, Silko identified herself with nature and land. She found comfort and relief in her contact with nature and land. On the contrary, Silko felt uncomfortable when she was treated badly by the White teachers at schools out of Laguna land during her studying years. These teachers prevented the Indian, the Native pupils from speaking their language, the Keresan.[5] So, the Laguna people felt lonely among the Whites; Silko mentioned: "we move through the city, we talk with the people, but there's an extreme amount of tension that one feels and it can only be described as strangeness."[6]

Silko uses writing to remedy to help herself and other Native people search for their lost identities. Therefore, she: "…. decided to be a writer."[7] Her works are characterized by the loneliness of Native Americans in a White community and the significance of Native traditions to adapt the Natives to the new life. Besides, she argues that: " I realized that one thing was keeping me going at all was writing."[8] In this way, Silko expresses her ideas and personal experiences. She declares the Natives' extermination or destruction sufferings and offers them to the Whites to understand. Moreover, she says: "My old folks who raised me saw themselves as citizens of the world. We see no borders. When I write, I am writing to the world, not to the United States alone."[9]

Silko's writing sheds light on the hybridity that makes people confused. Hybrid or mixed-blood people belong to neither the White community nor to Laguna one. Silko says: "I suppose at the core of my writing is an attempt to identify what it is to be a half-breed or mixed blooded person; what it is neither White nor fully traditional Indian."[10] In this respect, Silko presents her novel *Ceremony* (1977) described as: "the greatest Native American novel."[11] *Ceremony* is one of the most significant novels of the twentieth century. In this novel, Silko uses storytelling, which plays a significant role in the Indian culture. It also shows that the Whites try to destroy the Indians' culture of ceremonies and myths. Besides, it is proof of the Native American heritage as the actual and original one.[12]

2. Materials and Methods

The current research is a kind of literature scientific research that discuss the Hybridity in Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony (1977). The researcher conducted a deep reading, and then he described the phenomena related to the topic discussed.

3. Results and Discussions

Ceremony deals with the protagonist Tayo, who has mixed ancestry of the Laguna and Whites. When returning from WWII, Tayo is controlled by the bad memories and atrocities of the war and his cousin Rocky's memories, whose death causes spiritual illness for him. To escape this difficult reality, Tayo begins drinking alcohol. Moreover, the conflicts with his surroundings to recover from his illness. Tayo's experience in WWII tortures him and consumes his will to exist. In addition to that, the Native traditions of the Indians intensify his feeling of loneliness.13

Tayo, a hybrid character of "part White" and "half breed"14, is lost between his ancestry's two cultures. Accordingly, Gretchen Ronnow mentions that Tayo: "is Fragmented confused and disowned, alienated from self, family, land and tribal traditions."15 So, Tayo loses his self-

confidence and identity; he realizes that: "… his identity is bound with Laguna's identity, with something larger than his psyche."16

Ceremony deals with the hybridity of the Euro-American society and the Native American one. There is a misunderstanding between the two cultures. Each culture has its traditions, values, and lifestyle. Loss of identity, alcoholism, and mental illness affect the Euro-American culture superior to the Native American one. Tayo's illness, war veterans' alcoholism, and Rocky's disrespectful attitude toward Native American traditions are examples of that superiority. Therefore, to ensure the Native American culture, Silko uses the storytelling style of myths, poems, and prose which is a significant part of the culture and the traditional form to the reader's perception. By presenting stories, the Natives can retain their past and culture as Silko expresses: "I tell you something about stories,/ (he said)/ they aren't just entertainment./ Don't be fooled./ They are all we have, you see,/ all we have to fight off/ illness and death" (C, 2).

Silko also focuses on the significance of the change that the Native Americans should understand to survive. The Natives have to survive in two different cultures. They try to retain their ancestral heritage and have to submit to the dominant Euro-American culture as well.17 Tayo's mental illness is a consequence of his memories that pursue him. He feels restless because of his cousin's death, Rocky, that Tayo: "… could get no rest as long as the memories were tangled with the present…" (C, 6). Louis Owens points out that it is impossible to separate Tayo from his Laguna community. He: "has an identity and a coherent self only insofar as he is an integral part of the larger community."18 When speaking with his psychiatrist in the hospital, Tayo uses third person pronoun and says: "He can't talk to you. He is invisible. His words are formed with his invisible tongue, they have no sounds" (C, 15). This shows Tayo's alienation from the dominant white community.

In school, White teachers try to remove traditions from the Native children. The Natives are different in their relationships with the Whites. Tayo is like other children who ignore their cultural traditions. He: "had believed in the stories for a long time, until the teachers at school taught him not believe in that kind of nonsense" (C, 19). In this respect, John Dean remarks that: "Tayo has no coherent meaning outside the meaning generated by him by Pueblo stories."19 Unlike Tayo, Rocky loses his Native American identity easily. Through his relationship with the Whites, Rocky prefers the Euro-American identity to his Native one that his teachers encourage him to go on or keep his conduct, saying: "Nothing can stop you now except one thing: don't let the people at home hold you back" (C, 51). It is also realized that Rocky feels ashamed of his ancestral traditions to celebrate the dear in school; Tayo says: "Rocky turned away from them and poured water from the canteen over his bloody hands. He was embarrassed at what they did" (C, 52).

Nature is important for the Natives who find their comfort in their direct association with it. It is a source of spiritual comfort for them. When Josiah, Tayo's uncle, buys cattle, Rocky discourages him by reading some books about raising cattle. Rocky says: "That's the trouble with the way the people around here have always done things-they never knew what they were doing" (C, 76). Besides, Rocky's mother, Auntie, admires the Euo-American culture and encourages her son's behaviour. She shows disrespect for the Native traditions and is satisfied with Rocky's expression of "superstition" about his ancestral traditions, Auntie: "… never scolded him, and she never let Robert or Josiah talk to him either. She wanted him to be a success" (C, 51). The Euro-American culture influences auntie to the extent that she forgets her Native one. She discourages Robert and Josiah as they try to remind Rocky of his real identity.

Moreover, she is influenced by the Christian religion. She dresses a Christian suit; John Emory Dean comments, saying that Auntie is in direct contact with "Western discourse because it is the story of success."20 Auntie also expresses feelings of shame or embarrassment for Tayo's hybrid origin. She breeds him among her family, but he is unwelcomed and: "he had known Auntie's shame for what his mother had done, and Auntie's shame for him" (C, 67)

Laura, Tayo's mother, also loses contact with her Native traditions. She looks: "exactly like the White girls" (C, 69). Her contact with the Whites leads to the loss of her identity. She always feels ashamed of: "what they taught her in school about the deplorable ways of the Indian people" (C, 68). When forgetting her original traditions, Laura is not welcomed by the Native Americans. The latter feel ashamed of her conduct of involving in sexuality with the Whites. The Natives feel that this problem concerns all of her tribe's members and not only her's, saying: "what happened to the girl did not happen to her alone, it happened to all of them" (C, 69). Moreover, Dennis Cutchins argues that: "her rejection of Pueblo life is not simply a personal loss, nor even a familial loss; it represents a loss to the fabric of Laguna society."21

Tayo is spiritually ill and shocked by the negative aspects of WWII. He thinks more about the war in which: "… he watched his uncle fall, and he knew it was Josiah; and even after Rocky started shaking him by the shoulders and telling him to stop crying, it was still Josiah lying there" (C, 8). Tayo also observes that the Whites show their respect to the Native soldiers at the war only as they wear the United States army's uniform. This is clarified in this quotation: "… an old white woman rolled down the window and said. 'God bless you, God bless you,' but it was the uniform not them, she blessed" (C, 41). Tayo is described as a dead person whose soul and mind are separated from each other. He has to be treated by a White doctor, but he loses control over his body and can't talk with the doctor, and: "the words choked him, and he coughed up his tears…" (C, 16).

After the war, the Natives try to be forgetful to heal from the spiritual torture. They begin drinking alcohol in the hope of recovery for a short period. Harley and Leroy, Tayo's friends, convince him to drink alcohol, they say: "we 'll give a cure! … Drink it! It's good for you! you 'll get better!" (C, 158). However, Nicholas Warner states that Tayo's real recovery lies in: "abandoning alcohol and returning to his cultural roots."22 When grandma suggests a Native medicine man, Ku'oosh, to treat Tayo, she says: "He's my grandson. If I send old Ku'oosh, he'll come. Let them talk if they want to. Why do you care what they say?" (C, 33). But Auntie refuses the Native medicine and prefers a White one, and she replies that: "You know what the Army doctor said: 'No Indian medicine', Old Ku'oosh will bring his bag of weeds and dust. The doctor won't like it." (C, 34). In addition to that, Tayo feels that he finds his treatment in his contact with his Native community. Besides, Tayo has to balance himself and the world around him and shouldn't be stick to just one of them.

At Ku'oosh's arrival to treat Tayo: "he spoke softly, using the old dialect full of sentences that were involuted with an explanation of their origins, as if nothing the old man said was his own, but all had been saying before, and he was only three to repeat it" (C, 34). Anyway, Ku'oosh's treatment for Tayo is failed. He can't bring Tayo back to his traditions. Ku'oosh admits that: "There are some things we can't cure like we used to" (C, 38). This means that the White culture is imposed upon the Native one, and there is no independence. Therefore, Ku'oosh can't treat Tayo, but the latter has to be treated in another way or by a different medicine man's way.

Betonie is another medicine man whose treatment method is different from the other Natives as he adds suitable touches to the old traditions of ceremonies. Betonie's way of dressing in ceremonies is doubtful for Tayo. Betonie tells Tayo that: "if you don't trust me, you better get going before dark, you can't be too careful these days… and way, I couldn't help anyone afraid of me" (C, 123). Tayo's discomfort and doubts come from the fact that the White teachers always mock the Natives and their traditions. Tayo mentions: "… I don't know anything about ceremonies or these things you talk about. I don't know how long anything has been going on. I just need help" (C, 123-25). Betonie tries to convince Tayo that ceremonies are important and they change a lot, arguing that: "I have made changes in the rituals. The people mistrust this greatly, but only this growth keeps the ceremonies strong" (C, 126). Hence, Betonie's attempts to change the Native rituals are

due to the Whites' influence upon the Natives. That is why Betonie's ceremonies affect people like Tayo.

When speaking with Betonie, Tayo understands that his illness is physical and psychological as he feels lonely in the White society. So, Betonie criticizes the White doctors' way of treatment. Tayo asks Betonie how can ceremonies treat sick people of the destructive aspects of war, Betonie answers:

> That is the trickery of witchcraft … They want us to believe all evil resides with white people …. They want us to separate ourselves from white people to be ignorant and helpless as we watch our destruction. But white people are only tools and that the witchery manipulates, and I tell you that we can deal with white people, with their machines and beliefs. We can because we invented white people; it was Indian witchery that made white people first (C 132).

Betonie's speech shows that Tayo should make a balance between the two cultures to survive. Tayo trusts Betonie and: "He was thinking about the ceremony medicine man had performed over him, testing it against the old feeling, the sick hollow in his belly formed by the memories of Rocky and Josiah" (C, 152). So, through Betonie's attempts of healing, Tayo recovers gradually from his illness. He is also learned that by contact with nature and land, he can regain his identity. For Tayo, memory is important to remember and understand his Native traditions. When remembering his speech with Josiah in his childhood about raising cattle, Tayo begins searching for Josiah's cattle. Regaining the cattle cheers Tayo, and: "He got up feeling happy and excited. He would take the cattle home again, and they could follow the plan Josiah has made and raise a new breed of cattle could live despite drought and hard weather" (C, 187).

When finding the cattle, Tayo feels that the Whites steal them. Though the Whites always teach Tayo that they never steal, he tries to recover from this belief and: "He knew then he had learned the lie by heart- the lie which they had wanted him to learn: only brown-skinned people were thieves; white people didn't steal, because they always had the money to buy whatever they wanted" (C, 191). So, he becomes aware of the Whites' hatred for the Natives. Tayo also realizes that the Whites steal not only the cattle but the land as well, asserting that: "The spotted cattle wouldn't be lost anymore, scattered through his dreams, driven by his hesitation to admit they had been stolen, that the land-all of it- had been stolen from them. (C, 191). Tayo expresses that even the cattle are sick spiritually and physically when they are removed from their land and traditions, saying: "Cattle are like any living thing. If you separate them from the land for too long, keep them in barns and corrals, they lose something… they are scared because the land is unfamiliar, they are lost" (C, 74).

Tayo's love relationship with a woman called Ts'eh helps him to recover spiritually. They walk and talk about Josiah's cattle. Next, He eased himself deeper with her and felt the warmth close around him like river sand, softly giving way underfoot, then closing firmly around the ankle in cloudy, warm water … He dreamed about the cattle that night. It was a continuous dream that was not interrupted … and he smiled. Being alive was all right then: He had not breathed like that for a long time (C, 180-81).

Ts'eh also tells Tayo that the Whites destroy the identification between man and nature by witchery: "The destroyers: they work to see how much can be lost, how much can be forgotten. They destroy the feeling people have for each other …. They are all around now" (C, 229-30). She also warns him that by witchery, they want to destroy his new recovered identity, saying: "They 'll call to you. Friendly voices. If you quietly, they 'll hunt you down, and take you any way they can. Because this is the only ending they understand" (C, 232). Ts'eh adds that the Whites are like Emo, Tayo's old friend, try to oppress the Natives, mentioning:

There are only a few others with Emo. The rest have been fooled: they are being used. Tools. The Army people don't know. They don't know about stories or the struggle for the ending to the story. White people are always busy. They will ask themselves: what is one Indian veteran living in a cave in the middle of some reservation? They won't have much time for you. The only reason they came is that Emo called them (C, 232).

Tayo feels comfortable when he recovers completely. Betonie, Tse'h, nature, and land help him to regain his original identity of the Natives. He acquires love by his relationship with Ts'eh, and: "He thought of her then, she had always loved him, she had never left him; she had always been there. He crossed the river at sunrise" (C, 255). So, Tayo returns to Laguna as a recovered man.

When meeting his old friends Leroy and Harley, Tayo knows that they are destroyed by the Whites and involved in drinking alcohol. Emo and his friends don't like the change that Tayo understands by Betonie. They abuse him by calling him "half breed". Besides, Emo tries to harm Harley to show Tayo that Harley is under his control. Emo deliberately says to Harley: "Scream loud as he can hear you" (C, 251). This arouses the bad memories in Tayo's mind and reminds him of the spiritual and physical torture by living amid the Whites. Emo tries to approve that Tayo is unable to dismiss the White culture that oppresses the Native one, saying that: " 'Look at this, you half-breed!… You can't hide from this! Your buddy, Harley' "(C, 252).

By calling Tayo a "half breed", Emo illustrates that Tayo is of a mixed origin while he and his friends are pure Indians. The irony is that Tayo tries to protect and keep the Native traditions while Emo and his friends prefer the White culture to the Native one. Though Tayo notices the torture of Emo to Harley and becomes angry, he regains his control over himself. His self-control is the consequence of his recovery at Betonie's hand. He thinks that if he acts violently against Emo, he will be the tool of witchery for the Whites. Tayo also criticizes Harley and Leroy and realizes that they are not faithful friends, leaving him alone and unconscious. Though Tayo spends most of the time with them, they betray him, and: "… he knew then that they were not true friends but turned against him, and the knowledge left him hollow and dry inside, like the locust's shell. He was not sure he was crying, for the betrayal or because they were lost" (C, 272).

After recovery, Tayo feels that he is away from his friends' behaviours. He mentions:

> Harley and Leroy were his buddies. His friends. But he was feeling something terrible inside, and his heart was beating now, from what Leroy had said ' driving around all night; they come from the direction he had come, behind him, following him. He gripped the can tight, trying to squeeze away the shaking in his hands (C, 240).

Tayo decides to challenge his friends by drinking alcohol with them and keeping his new identity simultaneously. In this way, he approves that he becomes normal and not crazy, and: "…They wouldn't be suspicious; they wouldn't think he was crazy. He'd just be another drunk Indian, that's all" (C, 241). For Tayo's friends, it is difficult to understand that Tayo is recovered and can return to his Native traditions.

When returning to Laguna, Tayo gets rid of his illness. Some Laguna people invite him to convey his message to his people. His message shows that: "Tayo has indeed come home; no longer alienated, or schizophrenic, he can tell his story and thus articulate his fragmented self."23 So, through his storytelling, Tayo can keep the traditions and culture of the Natives. As consequences, Tayo gets love, respect, and true identity.

4. Conclusion

A hybrid man of mixed races of the Laguna and Whites belongs to neither the Laguna nor the Whites. So, he feels restless and depressed as he cannot communicate with others closely. The Natives have their traditions of stories, myths, and ceremonies; therefore, they can understand and keep their lost identities amid the Euro-Americans or Whites through storytelling.

Nature and land are also important factors for the Natives. They support the Natives, providing them with the strength to the extent that they feel comfortable and understand their true identities. But loneliness exists in the Natives, controls and disturbs them. The gap between the Natives and the Whites make them feel lonely. The Whites mistreat the Natives, misunderstand and ignore their feelings. They also prevent the Natives from practising their traditions. That's why the Natives feel that they lose their identities.

The Ceremony serves as an outstanding example of the Native American novels in the twentieth century. It concentrates on the behaviours of the mixed-blood Tayo and others concerning the effects of the White culture on the Native one. Tayo, raised among the Laguna people, is confused and loses his identity after his horrible experiences in WWII. Mixing with the Whites, Tayo has to submit to their culture while keeping his Native one. He has to balance the two cultures to survive and recover spiritually from the bad effects of the Whites' oppression of the Natives.

Tayo is proud of his Native traditions and tries to elevate them. In the *Ceremony*, the Natives are divided into Tayo, Betonie, Josiah, and Ts'eh, who prefer the Native culture to the Euro-American one. Simultaneously, the other group of Auntie, Rocky, Laura, Emo, Harley, and Leroy submit to the Euro-American culture and lose their identities.

On the one hand, Tayo follows the medicine of Betonie, who modifies the Native ceremonies to be understood by other people. He also remembers what Josiah teaches him, as his love for the land and nature. For Tayo, the true love relationship with Ts'eh leads him to the right way of healing. So, Betonie, Josiah, and Ts'eh form the highest point in Tayo's process of recovery from his illness. On the other hand, the other group lose their identities and consider the White culture as superior to the Native one. Besides, though they are full-blood Indians, they deny their Native culture. They are unable to understand that Tayo is recovered and regains his true identity.

Tayo always resists Auntie's attempts to separate him from his real shameful identity, like his mother's origin as a Laguna woman and his tribe. Tayo is recovered completely by forming a hybrid culture of the Natives and the Whites. He feels self-confident, becomes strong enough to revive his Native traditions through storytelling and communication with the Natives of the Laguna tribe.

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Notes

[1] Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race*, (NewYork: Routledge, 1995), 9.

[2] Mary Ellen Snodgrass, *Leslie Marmon Silko: A Literary Companion*, (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2011), 6.

[3] Quoted in Leslie Marmon Silko, *Storyteller*, (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1981), 227.

[4] Robert M. Nelson, *Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony: The Recovery of Tradition*, (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008), 4.

[5] Snodgrass,13.

[6]Quoted in Per Seyersted, "Interview with Leslie Marmon Silko", in *Conversation with Leslie Marmon Silko*, ed. Ellen L. Arnold (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 1.

[7] Quoted in Benjamin Olivo, " Author Silko isn't concerned about time," -Silko- <http://www.mysanantonio.com/entertainment/books/article/Author>(accessed February 9, 2019).

[8] Quoted in Dexter Fisher, "Stories and Their Tellers- A Conversation with Leslie Marmon Silko," *Conversation with Leslie Marmon Silko*, ed. Ellen L. Arnold (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 24.

[9] Quoted in Thomas Irmer and Matthias Schmidt, " An Interview with Leslie Marmon Silko," in *Conversations with Leslie Marmon Silko*, ed. Ellen L. Arnold (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2000), 161.

[10] Quoted in Leslie Marmon Silko, *Laguna Woman*, (Greenfield; NY: Greenfield Review Press, 1974), 35.

[11] Quoted in Sherman Alexi, " Root Juice," *American Poet* 31 (Fall 2006): 32.

[12] Beena Yadav, "The Survival of Native American Identity in the Writings of Leslie Marmon Silko", < http://researchfront.in/11_July_Sept%202015_3_3/2.pdf> (accessed February 10, 2019).

[13] Dr Arun Kumar Yadav, "The Survival of Native American Identity in the Writings of Leslie Marmon Silko", <http://www.ijelr.in/2.4.15/106-111%20Dr.%20ARUN%20KUMAR%20YADAV.pdf> (accessed February 10, 2019).

[14] Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 57. All the subsequent quotations references to the novel are taken from this edition, with the abbreviation (*C*) and the page number (s).

[15] Quoted in Gretchen Ronnow, " Tayo, Death, and Desire," in *Narrative Chance: Postmodern Discourse on Native American Indian Literatures*, ed. Gerald Vizenor (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1989), 70.

[16] Quoted in James Ruppert, " No Boundaries, Only Transition", in *Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony*, ed. Allen Chavkin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 179.

[17] Quoted in Louis Owens, "Leslie Marmon Silko's Webs of Identity," in *Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony: A Casebook*, ed. Allan Chavkin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 95.

[18] Quoted in Louis Owens, *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 172-73.

[19] Quoted in John Emory Dean, *Travel Narrative from New Mexico: Reconstructing Identity and Truth*, (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2009), 147.

[20] Quoted in Ibid, 165.

[21] Quoted in Dennis Cutchins, " So that the Nations May Become Genuine Indian: Nativism and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*," *Journal of American Culture* 22.4 (1999): 79.

[22] Quoted in Nicholas O. Warner, "Images of Drinking in Woman Singing, *Ceremony*, and *House Made of Dawn*," *MELUS*11.4 (1984): 16.

[23] Quoted in Owens, " Leslie Silko's Webs of Identity," 113.

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