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The Ethnic Implications of Stories, Spirits, and the Land in Native American Pueblo and Aztlán Writing

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Location, or "place," nearly always plays a central role in the Pueblo oral narratives. Indeed, stories are most frequently recalled as people are passing by a specific geographical feature or the exact place where a story takes place.... The Emergence was an emergence into a precise cultural identity.... The eight miles, marked with boulders, mesas, springs, and river crossings, are actually a ritual circuit or path which marks the interior journey the Laguna people made: a journey of awareness and imagination in which they emerged from being within the earth and from everything included in earth to the culture and people, differentiating themselves for the first time from all that had surrounded them, always aware that interior distances cannot be reckoned in physical miles or calendar years.... Thus the journey was an interior process of the imagination, a growing awareness that being human is somehow different from all other life—animal, plant, and inanimate. Yet we are all from the same source: the awareness never deteriorated into Cartesian duality, cutting off the human from the natural world.

—Leslie Marmon Silko

"Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination" (83-94)

There are *cuentos* or folk tales where you get these little stories about people who can fly—so in your mind you think, where does this power come from? Is it the power of imagination that we as a communal group are given by those older, wiser people, or can it actually be?... [We] are animated by the power of the earth—it is in Native American terms our Mother—it nurtures us, it gives us spirit and sustenance, and I guess if we're attuned enough or sensitive enough it can give us different kinds of powers. And so coming out of that kind of complex universe where I grew up thinking of all these places, and the river and the hills, having this life to them, this animation, it was very good

not only for my growing up but for the imagination, getting fed by that very spiritual process that was in the natural world around me.

—Interview with Rudolfo Anaya (Belassi 86)

The land pervades writing of the southwest as both a physical and a figurative reality—an originary place and a living presence. The Native American writers Leslie Marmon Silko and Simon Ortiz and the Chicano writers Rudolfo Anaya and Jimmy Santiago Baca speak of identities inseparable from particular landscapes and of the spiritually and culturally disintegrative impact of the loss of that connection. At the same time, they insist on the primacy of storytelling and the significance that stories give to the land and its people. Silko and Anaya suggest that cultural identity arises on a field that is *both* essential and constructed. Their ethnicity is in part a heightened sensitivity to a homeland as it is learned through stories which attribute meaning to and through the land.

Each of these authors writes about the land or the soil as a place in which one may be rooted and oriented or uprooted and disoriented. Land and community comprise a matrix of kinship relations, individual psychology, spirituality, and history—a “colonial space,” as Anaya puts it (qtd in Balassi 91), on the map of Euro-American western expansion. The land manifests soul: its own, an individual’s, a community’s. Displacement from the land may parallel someone’s psychological disorientation as a drought may mirror a malaise. As Silko asserts in “Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination,” a holistic vision of the human and the natural world precludes a foundationalist’s subject-object duality. The epigraphs above citing Silko and Anaya and the citations below from interviews with Baca and Ortiz imply that both their primordial experiences of homeland (an essential element) and their kinship experiences of storytelling (a constructed element) are aspects of their ethnic identities. The intimacy of land and soul also suggests an analogy that may be read as both essential to Pueblo identity and constructed out of that identity.¹

Silko’s narrator begins *Ceremony* with the assurance that the story she is about to tell, like the “Universe” itself, is being thought into creation by Ts’its’tsi’nako, or “Thought-Woman, the spider”: “Whatever she thinks about/appears” (1). The poems that initiate us into the novel assert the primacy of spirit and storytelling and invoke the authority of traditional oral literatures. By initially emphasizing that stories are the only defense against “illness and death” (2), against an evil in the world that seeks to confuse and destroy the stories and so efface the people, Silko affirms the value of storytelling content to

cultural identity. She elaborates in an interview on the significance of stories to the Laguna Pueblo:

stories give identity to a place.... That's how you know, that's how you belong, that's how you know you belong, if the stories incorporate you into them. There have to be stories. It's the stories that make this a community. People tell those stories about you and your family or about others and they begin to create your identity. In a sense, you are told who you are, or you know who you are by the stories that are told about you. (qtd in Evers 74)

Silko's comments in the epigraph and in this interview suggest a paradigm of her ethnicity, which is comprised in part of a double analogy of spirit and imagination to the land and storytelling: while the spirit inspires imagination that creates a world of spirit, the land inspires stories that create an identity for the land. In *Native American Literature*, Andrew O. Wiget describes a similar construction in Native American oral literature:

the principal figures are a series of mediators who incarnate supernatural power and values in the present moment, thus communicating prototypical realities to each succeeding new world. In this way cultural institutions come to be understood as both created, historical realities and yet images of eternal verities. (3)

There seems to be a problem, however, for literary critics of heretofore marginal American writing, in particular, to accommodate the actuality of spirit without traducing it through the Eurocentric prism of what Stuart Hall calls "a properly materialist theory of culture" (48). In *The Sacred Hoop*, Paula Gunn Allen stresses the importance of spirits to Native Americans in general when she identifies it as her first major theme: "Indians and spirits are always found together" (2). She cautions that an Amerindian worldview and much western critical thinking are not compatible. Similarly, Vine Deloria, Jr. unequivocally rejects Marxism's applicability to Native American concerns: "It accepts uncritically and ahistorically the world view generated by some ancient Western trauma that our species is alienated from nature and then offers but another version of Messianism as a solution to this artificial problem" (135-36). The danger both Gunn and Deloria point to is that a merely western perspective, such as a Eurocentric critique of capitalism, might replicate intellectually the colonial domination which some contemporary writers are struggling against through a reassertion of spirit. Greta Gaard makes a related point when she criticizes as a kind of "cultural imperialism" the

popular resurgence of Native American spirituality among non-Indian ecofeminists: "Native American spirituality is inseparable from Native American cultures, a unity little understood by white Euro-Americans" (308).

Jane Tompkins, in her essay "'Indians': Textualism, Morality, and the Problem of History," confronts yet another aspect of this critical conundrum of western perspectivism approaching non-Western subjectivity. Tompkins re-enacts her own struggles with poststructuralist relativism in researching the scholarly interpretations of the Native and Euro-American encounter in colonial New England: "The problem is that if all accounts of events are determined through and through by the observer's frame of reference, then one will never know, in any given case, what really happened" (60). One of her specific cases involves the debate on the question of "why [northeastern] Indians participated in the fur trade which ultimately led them to the brink of annihilation" (66). Are we to understand their motivation was based, as one scholar suggests, on a "breakdown of the[ir] cosmic world-view"; or as another "insists that the Indians' own beliefs are irrelevant to an explanation of how they acted, which can only be understood...in the terms of a Western materialist economic and political analysis" (66-68)? Tompkins concludes that

arguments about "what happened" have to proceed much as they did before post-structuralism broke in with all its talk about language-based reality and culturally produced knowledge. Reasons must be given, evidence adduced, authorities cited, analogies drawn. (76)

But where do we find and how do we agree on what constitutes "evidence" of someone's or a people's spiritual life? While the theoreticians of ethnicity have always noted the role of religion in ethnogenesis, they have often discounted the spirit life in pursuing a culturally constructed materialist paradigm. In contrast, writers of the southwest affirm that evidence for the experience of spirits abounds, and that it is directly connected to the way they experience themselves, the land and its stories. Before I turn to that evidence, let me elaborate briefly on two concepts underlying my critical discussion, essentialism and constructionism.

Some recent ethnicity theory, like some feminist theories, begins with the antifoundationalist epistemology that also leads to post-structuralism. As Kenneth A. Bruffee notes, a

social constructionist position in any discipline assumes that entities we normally call reality, knowledge, thought, facts, texts, selves, and so on are constructs generated by communities of like-minded

peers...[.] community-generated and community-maintained linguistic entities—or, more broadly speaking, symbolic entities—that define or “constitute” the communities that generate them.... (774)

Because there is a strong conviction of philosophical and critical constructionism in many contemporary thinkers, there is a corresponding tendency to discount so-called “natural” or essentialist elements in their conceptualizations. For instance, antifoundationalism, paradoxically, can both affirm and deny a holistic Native American perspective. The antifoundationalist critique of western science illuminates Silko’s point that the Laguna Pueblo never suffered the Cartesian separation of body and spirit, or saw its self-awareness apart from nature; while an antifoundationalist’s emphasis on the radical malleability of cultural constructions and the legitimate concern with their role in the historical exploitation of women and minorities obscures, even denigrates, what is essential to Pueblo cosmology: the actuality of spirit and the mythically generative site of a particular landscape.

Ethnic essentialism is an uncomfortable theoretical consideration for many academics, because it is often associated with and therefore dismissed out of hand under the discredited nineteenth century pseudo-theory of “scientific racism.” It has become popular to see both racism and ethnicity through the Marxist lens of cultural materialism as a functional development of capitalism and the classificatory systems of the European Enlightenment rather than phenomena that existed prior to but became most visible under the modern industrial state.

In *Theories of Ethnicity: A Critical Appraisal*, Richard H. Thompson discusses two “‘primordialist’ conceptions of ethnicity,” which he divides into “the ‘natural’ school...[and] the ‘social-historical’ school represented by Clifford Geertz” (7). Thompson concludes that no

primordialist view that must ultimately be grounded in a universalist and biological theory of human nature...(e.g., sociobiology) has proved adequate.... On the other hand,...[Geertz’s position] despite its ambiguous references to the nature of primordial sentiments [i.e., “the assumed ‘givens’...of social existence],[...]blood, speech, custom and so on...” (Geertz qtd in Thompson 59)], ties the strength and efficacy of such sentiments to definite sociohistorical conditions (e.g., colonialism). Such a view is much easier to sustain insofar as it is possible to demonstrate the waxing and waning of primordial sentiments according to definite sociohistorical changes, and thus to argue that only under some circumstances do human beings exhibit a primordial nature based on ethnic or racial identifications....

[However, a] major deficiency is in viewing primordial sentiments as mysterious, ineffable, and immutable, as having a certain coerciveness "in and of themselves" that commands the loyalties of men. (67-68)

It is Thompson's view that "the expression of ethnic, racial, cultural or other forms of primordialism reflects deeper, increasingly unmet human needs." Such sentiments are strengthened both in "primordial social structures (eg. kinship societies, precapitalist societies, prestate societies)" because they are efficacious, and under circumstances which threaten such structures (68).

As one would expect, there are far more theories of ethnicity based on some form of social constructionism than there are based on essentialism. Even a theorist of Euro-American ethnicity such as Mary Waters can shed light on Native American or Aztlán ethnicity by contrast. She finds that for so-called white ethnics of mostly European origins ethnicity "has become a subjective identity, invoked at will by the individual" (7)—a virtual symbolic and empty identification. A model of unrestricted optionalism is certainly not intended to describe non-white and non-European ethnics for whom there is no choice about being ethnic. But while other theorists have proposed other models to describe such ethnic people, none have foregrounded the "essential" connection to the land that is asserted by southwestern writers.

Juan Flores and George Yudice counter the "new ethnicity" theories with a "new social movements" theory in which they "explore how Latino identity is mediated and constructed through the struggle over language..." (59). In "Living Borders/Buscando America: Languages of Latino Self-Formation," Flores and Yudice put Spanish and its hybrid dialects at the center of Latinos's experience of ethnicity. Flores and Yudice conceive a theory—based in part on a resistance to linguistic assimilation—that strives to empower Latinos as a socio-political movement. While it may be a problem conceptually to entirely separate some ethnic groups from the generative homeland site of their ethnicity, it is conceptually valid for others who exist for the most part in diaspora, or for those post-emigration ethnic groups which coalesce in a new land as they become "ethnic" for the first time. Flores and Yudice's "paradigmatic shift" to a multicultural "view from the border enables us to apprehend the ultimate arbitrariness of the border itself, of forced separations and inferiorizations" (79-80). While such a shift does illuminate Latino experience in the United States, especially urban Latino experience, it seems less applicable as a model to other ethnic groups, such as Native Ameri-

can Pueblos, for whom a connection to their homeland seems more important than a struggle over their native language.

Writing before Flores and Yudice's article, Charles Keyes anticipated the weakness of their position when he asserted:

any adequate theory of ethnicity must take into account not only the function of ethnicity in the pursuit of social interests but also the cultural formulations of descent from which people derive their ethnic identities. Much confusion in theoretical discussions regarding ethnicity stems, I maintain, from confounding the cultural and social dimensions of ethnicity. (14)

Keyes argues persuasively in "The Dialectics of Ethnic Change" that ethnicity is both "a cultural construal of descent" (5) and "delimit[s]...specific types of social action in the context of intergroup relations" (10). An individual creates "a personal identity" from an "ethnic identity" that he or she "appropriates...from a cultural source, that is, from the public display and traffic in symbols" (10). By balancing the "cultural elaboration" (5) of various descent elements that an individual experiences as essential with "changes in ethnicity...[that] are precipitated...by radical changes in the political-economic contexts in which people live" (27), Keyes suggests an approach that is cognizant of lived experience, historical analysis, and social practice.

In 1987 Gloria Anzaldúa offered yet another reformulation of the dynamics of descent and social practice in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Her thesis is that Aztlán people of "Spanish, Indian, and mestizo" ancestry (5) internalize their borderlands origin into a psychological space in which their identity is realized through cross-cultural tensions. As she analogizes her own lesbian Chicana identity into a multicultural model of ethnicity, Anzaldúa transforms Aztlán geography into a "borderlands" metaphor of ethnic identity—a metaphor which incidentally has come to dominate the academic mindscape. This construction of a personal identity attempts to entirely separate itself from the generative site of the ethnic identity from which it arose. As we shall see below, Rudolfo Anaya tries to further elaborate this etherealization of ethnic identity away from any specific place into a kind of universal paradigm of world citizenry in his essay, "Aztlán: A Homeland Without Boundaries." Silko too, by the end of *Ceremony*, seems to suggest that the healing ritual her protagonist Tayo undergoes in her narrative may have a significance beyond the Laguna Pueblo community, may indeed be the only salvation for an Anglo-American culture that is decimating itself spiri-

tually as it technologically assaults the earth. Thus writers of the southwest themselves are groping for the conceptual possibilities in and limits of their “primordial sentiments”—particularly the experience of being who they are in relation to a specific geographical place. It is to their literature I would like to turn now and to the dynamics of ethnic identities that emerge from their art.

As *Ceremony* begins, Silko’s protagonist Tayo—a Laguna-Mexican—is convinced he is responsible for the reservation’s drought, which had followed the end of the Second World War (just as a similar drought had followed the First World War), because he had cursed the “unending rain” that had afflicted him in the Philippine jungle while he fought the Japanese. Tayo is profoundly disoriented, suffering in a six year malaise of what now is called post-traumatic stress syndrome. As he awakens from a sleep disturbed with dream memories of his experience with his cousin Rocky, Tayo recalls a massacre of Japanese prisoners of war in whose midst he had imagined his Uncle Josiah. Tayo’s grief for Josiah also entails an unconscious grief for the loss of the Native American values his Uncle had taught him as a child in stories. Silko affirms the connection of the individual and community as well as the personal and the political when she associates Tayo’s malaise with his tribe’s cultural decimation. In and out of veteran’s hospitals, Tayo cannot be healed by western medicine—a part of what the old tribal medicine man Betonie calls the white witchery. Only a healing ceremony can restore him to his place and community and reintegrate his individual with his Pueblo cosmic consciousness.

When we first meet Tayo he has disturbing flashes of Laguna insight—the ways of knowing that Josiah taught him. But, confused by the white world, he lacks the strength to organize his experience on the cultural basis of the traditional stories. As a mixed blood, Tayo has internalized the ridicule of the dominant white culture through the hostility of his aunt who raised him and the assimilationist aspirations of his favored cousin Rocky. He will eventually see his own malaise in communal terms as a function of colonialism and Christianity, both of which entangle the Native American mind in duplicity:

all of creation suddenly had two names: an Indian name and a white name. Christianity separated the people from themselves; it tried to crush the single clan name, encouraging each person to stand alone, because Jesus Christ would save only the individual soul.... (68)

Betonie teaches Tayo that his "sickness was only part of something larger, and [that] his cure would be found only in something great and inclusive of everything" (125-26). Betonie's ceremony begins Tayo's journey home. He learns that he "was born from the mountain" (144), and that his recovery is analogous to a traditional story about "the boy walking in bear country being called back softly" from his near transformation into a bear (170). The ceremony locates Tayo in a particular place and time from which he realizes the illusion of all boundaries to other places and times. Situated by Betonie in a "white corn sand painting" on the mountainside (141), Tayo is oriented earth to stars: "there were no boundaries; the world below and the sand paintings inside became the same that night. The mountains from all directions had been gathered there that night" (145).

Betonie tells Tayo that he must recover his Uncle Josiah's dream to breed a herd of drought-resistant Mexican cattle which had been stolen by white ranchers. Tayo's quest takes him to a spirit woman, Ts'eh, with whom he is reunited to the earth in lovemaking: "he dreamed he made love with her...and he couldn't feel where her body ended and the sand began" (222). Tayo had gone, "not expecting to find anything more than the winter constellation in the north sky overhead; but suddenly Betonie's vision was a story he could feel happening—from the stars and the woman, the mountain and the cattle would come" (186). Tayo's awareness here marks an important turning point in his healing. Laguna stories are more than just words. They have a power to enact reality—like the power of a visionary who sees into the future by seeing clearly into the present. Stories are less inventions of the imagination, in western literary terms, than imaginative apprehensions of a cosmic order—a cosmology the Laguna Pueblo lives.

Tayo is made whole with his feelings as he is reoriented to the land and his community through the recovery of both Josiah's herd and the traditional ways of seeing. Ts'eh's love opens Tayo to a hyperrealization that

the mountain outdistanced their destruction, just as love had outdistanced death. The mountain could not be lost to them, because it was in their bones; Josiah and Rocky were not far away. They were close; they had always been close. (219)

Ts'eh's love also gives Tayo the strength to understand how his historical moment in the Second World War and its aftermath is but a part of the larger context of history. Tayo comes to see the reservation

he inhabits as the remnant of land over which his ancestors struggled and from which they were displaced.

Betonie had explained the coming of the white man in a story about the pre-European aboriginal world in which "there was everything/including witchery" (135). But at a "witches' conference," the white destroyers were told into being:

They see no life
When they look
they see only objects.
The world is a dead thing for them
the trees and rivers are not alive
the mountains and stones are not alive.
The deer and bear are objects
They see no life.
They fear
They fear the world.
They destroy what they fear.
They fear themselves

...

Entire villages will be wiped out
They will slaughter whole tribes

...

Stolen rivers and mountains
the stolen land will eat their hearts
and jerk their mouths from the Mother.
The people will starve

...

Up here
in these hills
they will find the rocks,
rocks with veins of green and yellow and black.
They will lay the final pattern with these rocks
they will lay it across the world
and explode everything. (135-37)

The rocks in Betonie's story are uranium, and the apocalyptic vision is made manifest in another sand painting—the bull's eye on earth at White Sands, New Mexico—where the first atomic bomb was detonated at Trinity Site:

There was no end to it; it knew no boundaries; and he had arrived at the point of convergence where the fate of all living things, and even

the earth, had been laid.... [The] line of cultures and worlds were drawn in flat dark lines on fine light sand, converging in the middle of witchery's final ceremonial sand painting. From that time on, human beings were one clan again, united by the fate the destroyers planned for all of them, for all living things; united by a circle of death that devoured people in cities twelve thousand miles away, victims who had never known these mesas, who had never seen the delicate colors of the rocks which boiled up their slaughter. (246)

Here the analogy of Pueblo defeat and Japanese annihilation is made explicit. The parallels that Silko sees between the nuclear testing assault on the earth at White Sands, the contamination of traditional Pueblo land, stories and ways of seeing, and the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki emphasize the tragic possibility of humankind's common fate under the white destroyers' witchery. Silko is suggesting the universality of her healing ceremony beyond the particular restoration and reintegration of Tayo into his world. Memory, stories, and a renewed reverence for the land are at the crux of the revision she proposes for the non-Native American reader, as well—the necessary praxis of ecocriticism. *Ceremony* joins an aboriginal manifestation of what Aldo Leopold calls the "land ethic" (237) with the process of history.

Silko's effort to reconcile the restoration of a particular landscape with a universal revision provokes the question of whether *Ceremony* itself—the story—is generative of healing, as a social constructionist might hold the story is generative of Tayo's ethnic identity. Although these two aspects of *Ceremony* are not strictly homologous, we can see how essentialism and constructionism are both implicated in the text when we identify the levels on which the novel engages us.

The construction of *Ceremony's* narrative and the reconstruction of Tayo's individual identity out of the Laguna Pueblo ethnic identity present at least three levels for consideration. There is a story in which a particular landscape is essential to a protagonist's quest for an identity (Tayo's and perhaps any Laguna Pueblo's). There is a story in which a particular landscape may be essential to a storyteller's communal voice as her experience is constructed (Ts'its'tsi'nako's thought process) and as she constructs her narrative—a semi-mediated experience in which Silko knows the landscape both from being there and from the cultural stories which give "there" its identity. And there is a story in which a particular landscape is entirely mediated figuratively to a reader who has never been "there" and may never be "there" but can relate to the figurative landscape as a symbol of a universal landscape.

Since the last case operates on the level of pure construction—narrative figuration—to a reader, no particular landscape is essential to the story’s symbolic power, albeit the significance of Trinity Site is inestimable. The first and second cases, however, are more problematic, since a cultural identity has arisen in and around a particular landscape and has constructed a storyteller who constructs a story which is (and has always been) constructing a culture. And part of that “cultural work” is precisely a return to the land: a reclamation of the originary space, literally and spiritually. William Bevis identifies this “Homing In” theme as the most characteristic of contemporary Native American novels:

Most Native American novels are not “eccentric,” centrifugal, diverging, expanding [characteristics of the “leaving home” plots of American “classics”], but “incentric,” centripetal, converging, contracting. The hero comes home.... In Native American novels, coming home, staying put, contracting, even what we call “regressing” to a place, a past where one has been before, is not only the primary story, it is a Primary mode of knowledge and a primary good. (582)

If coming home or staying there is “a primary good,” we cannot discount the importance of a particular tribal landscape to the “cultural construal of descent” (Keyes 5) by theorizing it away in the analysis of larger historical forces, since such an approach demeans the Native American experience it purports to explain.

The “primordial sentiments” of Aztlán writers, not only about the land but about language and religion as well, similarly complicate the question of ethnicity. For instance, the epigraphic citation above, from an interview with Rudolfo Anaya, affirms the storytelling/spirit/land matrix relevant to *Ceremony* in both its quasi-essentialist and quasi-constructionist aspects.

In *Bless Me, Ultima*, Anaya constructs a dialectic of two competing visions, or cultural elaborations, of the land, life and spirit to which a young boy, Antonio, is exposed by his parents and others. He associates the following as oppositional characteristics of Antonio’s parents:

Mother	Father
Luna	Marez
sheepherders	conquistadors
sheep	wild horses
Catholic	pagan
La Virgen de Guadalupe	the golden carp
moon	sea
river valley	llano

farmer-priest	vaquero
security	freedom
dream	rebellion

Anaya ultimately synthesizes these competing interpretations through the old *curandera* Ultima—her name itself a code for her syncretic healing power. Throughout the time that Ultima lives with Antonio and his family on the edge of the llano, the seven year old boy struggles to reconcile the demands of his parents' traditions and his own growing awareness of their contrariety. Ultima—whose soul manifests itself as the "protective spirit" of an owl, the spirit of the night, moon, and llano—translates and mediates for Antonio his parents' conflicting visions of the land (38).

Ultima opens with Antonio's recollection of the summer when the "magical time of childhood stood still, and the pulse of the living earth pressed its mystery into my living blood" (1). Ultima teaches Antonio "the names of plants and flowers, of trees and bushes, of birds and animals...and to listen to the mystery of the groaning earth" (14). He remembers that he "had been afraid of the awful *presence* of the river, which was the soul of the river, but through...[Ultima he had] learned that [his] spirit shared in the spirit of all things" (14).

From Ultima Antonio also learns "the stories and legends of my ancestors...and how that history stirred in my blood" (115). Throughout the novel, Anaya emphasizes a type of culturally constructed yet essentially retained "blood knowledge," as Antonio struggles to read and interpret both Ultima's stories, which he transmutes into his "dream-fates," and his experience. Anaya uses the dream narratives to explore the cultural formation of identity and the growth of Antonio's soul through the conflicts arising from his dawning awareness of good and evil.

The central drama that preoccupies Antonio is Ultima's struggle against Tenorio and his three witch-daughters—or *brujas*—who put a curse on his maternal uncle Lucas. Although Ultima must fight the *brujas* to cure Lucas, she has only an uneasy alliance with the village priest who suspects her of being a *bruja* herself. Ultima's power of empathy, which is the source of her healing knowledge, mystifies Antonio since it exceeds the power of both the Catholic Church and the *brujas*. His mother's devotion to the Church and its icon, La Virgen de Guadalupe, conflicts with Antonio's initiation into the cult of the golden carp—a pagan river god. It is Ultima who assures him in a dream that the maternal, baptismal "holy water of the moon" and the paternal "salt water of the sea...are one...[; that he has] been seeing

only parts...and not looking beyond into the great cycle that binds us all" (112-13).

In Antonio's dream-fate about the story of the golden carp, we see how a cultural construction informs and becomes part of an individual's psychological identity. Antonio struggles to understand the good and evil that surround him: the magical power of the land with which Ultima is in touch, and the violence and evil of sin and death personified by Tenorio. In one crucial dream Antonio is confronted by a Jehovah-like Old Testament God, who is jealous of the golden idol and who confounds and frustrates the boy's impulses to forgiveness and vengeance. Antonio sees the land collapsing under the weight of its sins into the waters beneath it—as he was told in a story—where it is swallowed by the golden carp and redeemed:

He had been witness to everything that happened, and he decided that everyone should survive, but in new form. He opened his huge mouth and swallowed everything, everything there was, good and evil... [He] became a new sun in the heavens. A new sun to shine its good light upon a new earth. (168)

In his dream-fate, Antonio syncretizes a vision that encompasses the competing demands of his culture and, Anaya suggests, becomes the basis for his own evolving cross-cultural identity. Through dreams and storytelling, Antonio learns to take "the llano and the river valley, the moon and the sea, God and the golden carp—and make something new" (236). From Ultima and his father, he had learned to

love the magical beauty of the wide, free earth. From my mother I had learned that man is of the earth, that his clay feet are part of the ground that nourishes him, and that it is this inextricable mixture that gives man his measure of safety and security. Because man plants in the earth he believes in the miracle of birth, and he provides a home for his family, and he builds a church to preserve his faith and the soul that is bound to his flesh, his clay. But from my father and Ultima I had learned that the greater immortality is in the freedom of man, and that freedom is best nourished by the noble expanse of land and air and pure, white sky. (217-20)

Anaya's "primordial sentiments" in this passage suggest the essential connection—the "inextricable mixture"—he affirms between Chicanos and the land. The people are "of the earth" and their "clay feet are part of the ground that nourishes" them. Yet the primordial is also a part of the culture and community that constructs the people and the land in a primordial nexus. The seeds that are planted in the

earth by analogy yield communal roots in family and religion. Anaya's maternal vision here resonates with Silko's affirmation in *Ceremony* that the "mountain could not be lost to...[Tayo and Ts'eh] because it was in their bones" (219). Against the maternal "staying home" vision, Anaya posits a paternal "leaving home" vision in which he asserts "that the greater immortality is in the freedom of man...."

The seeds of Anaya's ethnicity and politics lie buried in the tension of these contrary visions. In a 1991 essay, "Aztlán: A Homeland Without Boundaries," Anaya discusses his vision in Jungian terms:

Myth is our umbilical connection to the past, to the shared collective memory. After long years spent in the realm of imagination and creativity, I came to understand that many of the symbols which welled up from my subconscious were not learned, they were part of my ethos, symbols from the archetypal memory residing in the blood. (236)

In this passage Anaya seems to reinforce the essentialist element at the expense of the cultural construction of descent. In *Ultima*, Anaya binds the soul to a body grounded in the earth around which a protective community is constructed, thus exemplifying how Paula Gunn Allen's characterization—"We are the land" (119)—may be a political as well as a cosmological statement.

In fact, in 1986 Anaya admitted in an interview that he felt a greater need for a "political stance" than he had when he wrote *Ultima* ten years before:

We have not only the story to write, we also have to remind our people about their history and their traditions and their culture and their language, things that are...threat[ened]...and liable to disappear if we don't look closely at ourselves in a historical process—and part of analyzing that historical process is not only story and myth and legend and tradition, it's a political space we occupy. How have we occupied it?...How do we feel as a minority group, a clearly recognizable ethnic group, when we have to respond to colonial space—how do we carve out our own identity? (Balassi 91)

Five years later, however, Anaya asserts "a most difficult proposal, the idea that we can move beyond our ethnocentric boundaries, that we can envision the limitations of ethnicity even as we extol our self pride" ("Aztlán" 241). Like Anzaldúa, Anaya now argues for a radically expanded ethnic vision, for a planetary identity: "a new consciousness where the Earth truly becomes the homeland of everyone...a 'homeland without boundaries'" (239). Ultimately, he is as-

serting a radically contracted form of essentialism (with his "archetypal memory residing in the blood") and a radically expanded form of constructionism (with his "new consciousness" based on a "homeland without boundaries"). Whether an ecologically sound planetary consciousness can be based on the insights and dynamics of an ethnic identity, however—such as that of the Aztlán or of a Native American—is a very open question, since it shifts the emphasis of ethnicity from descent to social practice.

The Chicano poet Jimmy Santiago Baca provides another perspective from an Aztlán writer, who in his poem, *Martín*, consciously reconstructs his ethnic identity—in effect propounding one answer to Anaya's question: "how do we carve out our own identity?" In an interview in *This Is About Vision*, Baca comments on his genesis as a writer: "If you have a mythology then you have a place; if you don't have a mythology, you ain't got nothing. When I came back from prison, I decided to start writing about things I thought were as old as the earth; and so I started writing *Martín*, keeping in mind that I wanted to describe my existence in New Mexico. Whether those things are "true" or not is another question. A lot of them are not, but they are true in the sense that I needed something to explain my existence, and I did it best by going through the land and asking its secrets." (Balassi 183)

Like Tayo, *Martín* is a child of mixed Amerindian and Mexican ancestry—but an abandoned orphan as well. Baca adumbrates *Martín's* abandonment by his parents when he begins the poem at the boy's childhood home, the abandoned pueblo of Pinos Wells. His mother's "departure uprooted" him (13):

the fairytale of my small life
stopped
when mother and father
abandoned me, and the ancient hillgods of my emotions
in caves of my senses
screamed, and the corn seedling of my heart
withered—like an earth worm out of earth,
I came forth into the dark world of freedom. (5)

Martín recalls his mother's tragic life as "a false dream" (28). From a rural family of Lucero shepherders, she was abused by her incestuous father. Soon after *Martín* was born, she had abandoned him to his maternal grandmother, and fled to California where her new lover "rescued" her from her language and cultural identity. He eventually kills her and himself in a jealous rage. *Martín's* father, we

learn, was a de-tribalized Apache and an alcoholic: "set adrift in darkness, / no tribal magnetic field / to point the way, / you lost your bearing, / your direction home" (29).

Uprooted from the earth, Martín himself later loses his bearings, wandering the streets and drifting across country. But he yearns for a better life—"like the Mesquite tree / in the desert / howls thirst / for lush storm runoffs" (38)—and returns home to Burque. Martín completes the cycle of restoration by putting down roots with his wife Gabriela and promising never to abandon their infant son Pablo.

Martín's landscape is a figurative medium in which Martín sorts out his conflicted and uprooted cultural identity while trying to reconcile the opposing demands of his brief childhood visits with his relatives outside of the orphanage:

I was caught in the middle—
 between white skinned, English speaking altar boy
 at the communion railing,
 and brown skinned, Spanish speaking plains nomadic
 child
 with buffalo heart groaning underworld earth powers. (16)

This sense of dual perception or affinity, like Tayo's Native American and Christian or Antonio's shepherd and conquistador, is a salient characteristic of ethnic identity, akin to DuBois's African American double consciousness. Like Silko and Anaya, Baca also reprises the powerful earth-body metaphor in *Martín*, but emphasizes almost exclusively the land as an earth-soil rather than a landscape-vista trope. Earth figures of emotions and the body recur in the poem: "the corn seedling of my heart"; my "heart / became an arroyo, and my tears cut deep cracks in my face of sand..." (15). When he visits Quarai (an "ancient mission ruins in Punta de Agua, a small pueblo in the Manzano Mountains" [104]), Martín acknowledges his "Shape / the grit and sediment I am, / mineral de Nuevo Mejioco" and promises to "stay close to Mother Earth"; and to "learn the dark red Apache words / and wind burnished chants, / the blazed red Spanish names of things / that absorb centuries of my blood" (39).

Martín portrays a re-immersion into the earth through the "coming home" or "making home" theme Bevis describes (582). Like *Ultima*, both *Ceremony* and *Martín* also stress the learning process of cultural identity that occurs through both the stories an ethnic community tells and an individual's own self-discovery as he or she appropriates from available cultural symbols. Martín's orphanism—parental and cultural—impels him to recover the identity of which he was de-

prived. He consciously fashions himself by revisiting the double pain of his early parental loss (their loss of a generative ethnic identity and his loss of them) and by renewing their cross-cultural ethnicity in himself. That work of renewal does not take place in the assimilationist diaspora but in the originary borderlands site. As the commingling of English and Spanish in *Martín* attests, however, the site of the poem's "cultural work" is also centered on what Flores and Yudice identify as the struggle over language in a social movement.

Both Baca and Anzaldúa use language more exclusively than Anaya, whose language practice is as inclusive of a non-Chicano reader as Ultima's spirituality is inclusive of Catholic customs. In contrast, Baca and Anzaldúa strategically exclude the non-Spanish speaking reader in order to rearrange the field of cultural relativity. In their work, borderland bilingualism is privileged over monolingual English hegemony and so enacts what Flores and Yudice see as the arbitrariness of all borders and all centers (79-80).

For Silko and Anaya, the land is one with the ineffable spirit that primordially binds the people to the land and into an ethnic community. For Baca, the land is a figurative element in a conscious, ethnic refashioning—a virtual ethnic trope in which a primordial "mythology" is created to construct a "place" that will nurture an Aztlán identity on personal and political levels.

Simon Ortiz's poem *From Sand Creek* brings together the essentialist overtones of place and the constructionist elements of history and culture that comprise an individual's and an ethnic group's identities. His poem is pervaded with the sense of displacement and disorientation from the land that the characters in both *Ceremony* and *Martín* struggle to overcome, as well as the growing understanding of the historical implications of political struggle. While Silko and Baca tell stories of renewed identity, and Anaya a story of a child's growing identity, *From Sand Creek* documents the fog of fragmented identity that perplexes both Amerindians and Euro-Americans in a post-colonial epoch that denies its history.

In *Winged Words*, Ortiz expresses the view of land and spirit that I am suggesting is distinctly and characteristically southwestern:

When I say oral tradition I mean, for myself as an Acoma person not just knowing the stories and not just knowing the songs, but how I am determined by my being born and growing up in the Acoma Pueblo-community of New Mexico and the Southwest.... You recognize your birth as coming from a specific place, but that place is more than just a physical or geographical place, but obviously a spiritual place, a place with the whole scheme of life, the universe, the whole scheme and power of creation. Place is the source of who you are in terms of your

identity, the language that you are born into and that you come to use.
(Coltelli 104-05)

Although Ortiz is an Acoma Pueblo, he writes about the massacre of Cheyenne and Arapaho men, women and children in Colorado in 1864 as an emblematic event in the genocidal westward expansion by Anglo-Americans. Unlike Silko, therefore, he writes from within but not about his particular, indigenous community except as that community is part of the broader native and non-native American communities. One result of Ortiz's conflated points of view is that, of the four writers discussed, his figurative sense of the land and the landscape is the most generic. The land is a symbol detached from its geography—in a sense the abstract field of history. When we read *From Sand Creek*, we do not get an image of that place in its particularity, because it has been effaced from our historical consciousness just as Amerindians were first removed from the land and then removed from our history.

For the Native American whose internal colonialization is history, the land *is* lost: "It is a wonder / they even made it to California. / But, of course, / they did, / and they named it success. / Conquest. / Destiny" (43). Since the land and its people are one, the conquerors' belief that the land existed as a resource to be exploited or a landscape to be traversed entailed a double betrayal:

They must have felt
no need to know anything
eternal.

Anything
was true enough,
good enough for them.
Wild animals, wild rivers,
and wildness was not foreign
to them but they only heard
frantic warning whispers
of hungry starved European ghosts.
And they created new ghosts
as they needed them.

And onward,
westward
they marched,
sweeping aside the potential
of dreams which could have been
generous and magnificent

they should get on their knees
 and drink the red rare blood,
 drink to replenish
 their own vivid loss.
 Their helpless hands
 were like sieves. (67)

Ortiz here uses the quintessential image of primordial ethnicity—blood—to inspire social change and resistance; in other words he elaborates a symbol of cultural descent in the service of social practice. The futility he conceives in the final image of “hands/ [that] were like sieves” also suggests the current Native American dilemma in which history and ethnic traditions are being lost in assimilation. Ortiz’s remedy, it seems, is to “drink the red rare blood,/...[and] replenish/ their own vivid loss.” It is similar to Baca’s remedy in *Martín* to “learn the dark red Apache words/...[and to] stay close to Mother Earth” (39). Its acute pathos reminds a reader of the deeper poignancy in Paula Gunn Allen’s assertion that “we are the land” (119).

In *From Sand Creek*, the blood-drenched land is a sacred symbol of the persistence of memory. Just as Tayo in *Ceremony* must integrate his experience of a massacre in the Philippine jungle during the Second World War with the historical conflict he left behind on the reservation, Ortiz strives to put the Vietnam experience in its historical context: “In 1864,/ there were no Indians killed./ Remember My Lai” (15). My Lai recapitulates Sand Creek: “We are glazed/ with war (37)... My partners, hollows/ and pockets,/ are shadows/ of souls” (37-39). Ortiz writes to reawaken the Amerindian revolutionary consciousness, the “honest and healthy anger which will raze these walls, and...[in] the rising of our blood and breath...will free our muscles, minds, spirits” (84). But if *From Sand Creek* is a poem striving against post-colonial assimilationist consciousness and striving to inspire a literature of pan-Indian identity and resistance,² it is also a poem which, in Bevis’s terms, is still fragmented under the powerfully centrifugal forces of the dominant white culture. When the following voice speaks: “My mind is a cove/ of light/ shining upon a vista/ of a great grassed plain./ I know/ there is a world/ peopled with love” (83)—it speaks from within the confines of a VA Hospital.

Ortiz—like Silko, Anaya, and Baca—writes himself into what Anaya calls “colonial space,” and his work, like their work, contributes to the centripetal counterforce necessary to sustain an ethnic group, even organize it into a social movement. In *Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs*, Wallace Stegner points out that “in the

West, what we have instead of place is space. Place is more than half memory, shared memory" (72). Native American and Chicano writers speak for place, of their essential connection to the land, and of the "shared memory" their ethnic communities construct from living on the land. The first step in Betonie's healing ceremony is the drawing of an earth sand painting that orients Tayo in the cosmos. Similarly, Ortiz recounts in *From Sand Creek* how "Indian astronomers studied the stars and set them in their memory so their people would not ever forget their place in all creation" (46). For these southwestern writers, stories, spirits and the land are an "inextricable mixture" (Anaya 217) in both Amerindian cosmology and Chicano world views.

Notes

1. Although the binary opposition of essentialism and constructionism is no doubt misleading, I begin with this basic dyad in order to hopefully reconceptualize ethnicity theory in regard to the role of landscape and geography for the Pueblo and Chicano peoples. This line of thinking was first suggested to me in the very different context of Steven Epstein's "Gay Politics, Ethnic Identity: The Limits of Social Constructionism," in which he struggles to overcome what some would say is the strawman of an overly reductive opposition. While I grant the validity of this critique, I found Epstein's article useful in reconceptualizing—basically dismantling—the dichotomy in order to explore the full complex explanatory dynamic of gay identity. While many theorists have elaborated complex systems to account for ethnicity, I am struck by how little attention is paid to the connection of homelands and individual and group self-identification. Thus I begin by engaging the basic concepts of essentialism and constructionism in the hope of reconsidering the theoretical emphasis that should be given to geographical place.
2. For a consideration of "the factors that have led to the ethnic change manifest in the emergence of a new pan-Indian nationalist movement in the United States" (246), see Ronald L. Trosper's "American Indian Nationalism and Frontier Expansion."

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