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Movement and Place-Based Consciousness in Leslie Marmon Silko's *The Turquoise Ledge*

Movimiento y conciencia del lugar en las memorias de Leslie Marmon Silko's *The Turquoise Ledge*

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ABSTRACT: This essay examines Leslie Marmon Silko's place-based consciousness in her relational, anticolonial memoir *The Turquoise Ledge*. Challenging traditional Western autobiographical formats, Silko portrays herself as a protective figure in constant motion through solitary walks where she combines urban speed walk tactics and slow movement, both of which enable her to change perception and engage the land in a caring and creative manner. During her walks through the Tucson Mountains, she ponders on what she sees and experiences from a philosophical, environmental, and historical perspective that is grounded on the Indigenous concept of land as "earth house." As she walks with the land, she keeps three aims in mind: 1. to revitalize Indigenous environmental knowledge and praxis; 2. to create a safe homespace for more-than-human others in and around her ranch in southern Arizona; 3. to preserve place-based memories and sites from colonial destruction. Silko engages the storied landscape through repetitive pedetic actions where observation, surveillance, and protection of her other-than-human neighbors, strongly articulate her centripetal process of self-construction. These neighbors and friends include palo verde trees, arroyos, gila monsters, birds, ants, rattlers, and grasshoppers, among others. Through her walks, observations, and acts of radical hospitality, this well-known Laguna Pueblo author formulates a relational and decolonial spatial praxis—where familiar repetition converges with the wondrous and unexpected. In *The Turquoise Ledge*, Silko teaches us a more sustainable way of engaging and respecting place—one that adheres to key tenets of Native Science such as observation and reflection, relationality, creativity, care, and solidarity.

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Key words: Leslie Marmon Silko, The Turquoise Ledge, walking, place-based solidarity, relationality, other-than-human, radical hospitality, Tucson Mountains.

RESUMEN: Este ensayo examina el concepto de *place-based consciousness* (conciencia del lugar) en *The Turquoise Ledge*, las memorias anticoloniales de la autora nativo americana Leslie Marmon Silko. Cuestionando los formatos tradicionales de la autobiografía en la cultura occidental, Silko se representa a sí misma como una figura protectora del territorio, en constante movimiento a través de paseos solitarios en los que combina tácticas de caminata rápida urbana y de movimiento lento, los cuales le permiten cambiar su percepción del entorno y relacionarse con la tierra de una manera solidaria y creativa. Durante sus paseos por las montañas al sur de Tucson, Silko reflexiona sobre lo que ve y experimenta desde una perspectiva filosófica, ambiental e histórica derivada del concepto indígena de "casa-Tierra". Caminando *con* la tierra, plantea tres objetivos: 1. revitalizar el conocimiento y la praxis medioambiental indígena; 2. crear un hogar seguro para la comunidad humana y más-que-humana que la acompaña; 3. preservar las memorias y los lugares de la destrucción colonial. Silko interactúa con el paisaje histórico a través de acciones pedéticas repetitivas donde la observación, la vigilancia y la protección de sus vecinos más-que-humanos articulan fuertemente su proceso centrípeto de construcción personal. Estos vecinos y amigos incluyen árboles palo verde, arroyos, monstruos de Gila, pájaros, hormigas, serpientes de cascabel y saltamontes. A través de sus paseos, observaciones y actos de hospitalidad radical, la reconocida autora de la comunidad Laguna Pueblo formula una praxis espacial relacional y decolonial, donde lo familiar recurrente converge con lo maravilloso e inesperado. Partiendo de metodologías y valores de la Ciencia Nativa como la observación, la reflexión, la relacionalidad, el afecto, y la solidaridad, Silko nos muestra una forma más respetuosa y sostenible de relacionarnos con el entorno.

Palabras clave: Leslie Marmon Silko, The Turquoise Ledge, caminar, solidaridad centrada en el lugar, relacionalidad, más-que-humano, hospitalidad radical, Tucson Mountains.

"To walk or not to walk? I tell myself the more walks I take the more material I will have for the manuscript. Yes, no. I decided yes, a slow walk" (Leslie Marmon Silko, *The Turquoise Ledge* 231).

1. INTRODUCTION[1]

In her memoir, *The Turquoise Ledge*, published in 2010, Native American writer Leslie Marmon Silko presents herself as a protective, surveillant figure in constant motion through solitary walks in the Tucson Mountains, close to the ranch she turned into her

[1] I would like to thank the Generalitat Valenciana's Conselleria d'Innovació, Universitats, Ciència i Educació (Research project "Reconfiguraciones de género, raza y clase social en la literatura étnica norteamericana de la era Obama/Trump" GV/AICO/2021/249) and the Real Colegio Complutense at Harvard University for financial and academic support leading to the completion of this article.

home thirty-six years ago. Walking through this ancient and diversely populated landscape becomes a catalyst of thought and creativity—a key source of identity, connection, and commitment to place. This article unpacks Silko's relational construction of the self through mobility and place-based consciousness—that is, a deep awareness of interdependence that results from respectful and participative engagement with a specific territory and its other-than-human inhabitants. To that end, I review traditional ideas formulated by Pueblo and Tohono O'odham writers such as the role of active participation in Native science, and the redefinition of homeland as *earth house*. I also examine two recent concepts developed by First Nations scholars Glen Coulthard and Leanne Simpson: place-based solidarity and radical hospitality. Occasionally, I use complementary ideas on mobility penned by settler scholars whose lines of thought run parallel to this Indigenous-based framework. I set these ideas in dialogue with the outmost humility and respect for Native American thought and, specifically, for Silko's inspiring work, which also draws from a variety of Indigenous and non-Indigenous sources.

Originally from Laguna Pueblo in New Mexico, Silko has resided in Albuquerque, Alaska, and Italy, among other places, but her ranch in Arizona, located in the historical territory of the Hohokam people, is the place around which her memoir is fundamentally centered.[2] The book consists of five main sections (Ancestors, Rattlesnakes, Star Beings, Turquoise, Lord Chapulin), and is presented as a series of domestic scenes and reflective walks through the mountains. Both indoors within the ranch, and outdoors in the mountains, Silko observes, protects, and nurtures animal and plant beings forming a complex, human/other-than-human kinscape—a web of interconnected relations that is rooted in Pueblo worldviews. In a 2010 interview, she described this kinscape as follows: "I sort of have an easier relationship now with rattlesnakes and bees, and things, probably easier than with my family or human beings. I mean they are my family" (Richey, 2010). In her memoir, she often refers to these other-than-human beings as friends or neighbors. They are, in fact, her "longest friends in the more than thirty-two years living [in the Tucson hills]"; these wild animals showed her "friendship and even affection" and can "give us sustenance and hope when nothing else in the human world can" (Silko, 2010c).

While caring for all these friends, she often presents herself immersed in creative processes such as writing or painting. The subtle thread connecting most chapters are her walks through the mountains and the small turquoise nuggets she rescues from the arroyos to be carefully set on her writing table. As Rebeca Solnit (2020: 4) posits in her book *Wanderlust*, "a desk is no place to think on a large scale" and, indeed, Silko often returns to the big arroyo pathway to clear her mind, trail into thought, and transcend the self through close connection with her surroundings.[3] Her own writing desk soon becomes filled with quartz rocks, bits of glass, and an assortment of rescued things reminiscent of

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[2] The Tucson Mountains were populated by the Hohokam people a thousand years ago. In the 18th century, miners, homesteaders and, more recently, hikers in the Saguaro National Park have taken over the area. The Native Hohokam left pictograph markers, petroglyphs and grinding stones in the caves, arroyos and rock terraces (Ascarza, 2010: 7), many of which are described by Silko in her walks.

[3] Through the use of this very charged verb in settler American intellectual history, "transcend", I am by no means connecting Silko with the transcendentalist movement although, interestingly, she does quote from Emily Dickinson's poetry heavily in the last section of the book, and praises her view of animals, plants, and gardens as gates to "the ineffable and mysterious glimpses of transcendence and eternity" (2010a: 281).

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Betonie's kiva (filled with found and recycled objects of all kinds) in her first novel, *Ceremony*.[4]

The Turquoise Ledge is not a conventional memoir because Silko's own personal and family memories are only rendered in the first section of the book, "Ancestors". The remaining 240 pages focus instead on her daily walks, animal care, or her struggles to artistically portray the Star Beings, while she writes her still unpublished novel *Blue 7s*. Human beings are rarely present in the four later sections, although she occasionally mentions her friend Bill, her sons' visits, a phone call from her friend Joy Harjo, her acupuncturist, or the veterinarian that saves her dear macaw Sandino. But these human-to-human relations are always alluded to in passing. In interviews, Silko confirms that she consciously wrote against the conventions and expectations of traditional self-writing (Richey), purposely mixing genres, and building a relational self through creativity and the imagination.[5] Silko openly warns the reader about this in her short preface:

> A great deal of what I call "memories" are bits and pieces I recall vividly; but the process we call "memory," even recent memory, involves imagination . . . I make myself a fictional character so I can write about myself. Only a few proper names are included because it wasn't my intention to write about others but instead to construct a self-portrait.
>
> (2010a: 1)

This self-portrait or imaginative self-construction is deeply enmeshed in the web of life that surrounds her; to the extent that her sense of "self" seems to almost dissolve in the narrative as the web itself continues to grow and gains center stage.

According to Leroy Little Bear (2000: x), Native American worldviews focus on "ideas in constant motion and flux, existence, consisting of energy waves, interrelationships, all things being animate, space/place, renewal, and all things being imbued with spirit . . . The constant flux notion results in a 'spider web' network of relationships," much like the one described by Ku'oosh in an oft-quoted passage from Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*:

> "But you know, grandson, this world is fragile."
> The word he chose to express "fragile" was filled with the intricacies of a continuing process, and with a strength inherent in spider webs woven across paths through sand hills where early in the morning the sun becomes entangled in each filament of web. It took a long time to explain the fragility and intricacy because no word exists alone, and the reason for choosing each word had to be explained with a story about why it must be said this certain way. That was the responsibility that went with being human, old Ku'oosh said, the story behind

[4] Betonie, a Navajo medicine man, keeps boxes and shopping bags filled with herbs and roots, together with fragmented objects of the settler colonial world such as telephone books, old bottles, and calendars, to be used in his eclectic ceremonies. These objects are precious because they all "have stories alive in them" and can thus activate energies that connect us to the web of life (Silko, 1977: 121). See also Brígido-Corachán's analysis of Betonie's recycling aesthetic (2014).

[5] On relationality in Silko's autobiographical writing since *Storyteller* see also Portillo (2017) and Sarkowsky (2020).

> each word must be told so there could be no mistake in the meaning of what had been said; and this demanded great patience and love.
>
> (Silko, 1977: 35-36).

In the novel, Ku'oosh seems to be speaking Keres, the language of Laguna Pueblo, and the word chosen by this old medicine man to describe the fragility of interdependence is respectfully silenced in the story. The weight of this mysterious word, and the stories associated with it, powerfully emerge nonetheless: our world is interconnected and in constant motion. For Ku'oosh, this unavoidable entanglement makes us all vulnerable to but also responsible for one another. Moreover, the way we describe the world is culturally bound by language, and each word becomes a source of great love and responsibility.

Silko's care for the world beyond human experience, her love and dedication to language and creative expression, her deep awareness and sense of responsibility towards the land and its diverse beings, are manifest in each page of *The Turquoise Ledge*. Our world co-exists with many other worlds forming an intricate superposition of space and time. Challenging Western views of matter in nature as immobile or lifeless, Silko moves through the surrounding landscape in each of her chapters and notices these superpositions. She ponders on what she sees and experiences from a philosophical, environmental, spiritual, and historical perspective, often taking into account other ways of seeing and other movements through the land, parallel to her own.

Southwest scholar Larry Evers and Tohono O'odham poet and linguist Ofelia Zepeda describe home as an *earth house*: "a place to live within ever-widening webs of community that spin out to include not just humans but all the living things of the natural world (1995: vii)." In this essay, I identify specific ways traced by Silko to actively construct such earth house by developing a *place-based consciousness* that is grounded in connection and interdependence. Place-based consciousness requires awareness of and commitment to a specific community of beings that share the same territory and with whom one establishes meaningful relationships of care, respect, and reciprocity.

Place-based consciousness has been described by many Native scholars and writers through kindred denominations. The late Kiowa novelist N. Scott Momaday referred to such state as "an American land ethic," or "the way we come to terms with the world around us" in a relational, moral, and respectful manner (1997: 47). For Acoma poet Simon Ortiz, reciprocal interdependence and mutual care are a "moral obligation" of both self and community, for our self-consciousness is necessarily grounded in culture and in place (see Bańka, 2023: 179). Examining *The Turquoise Ledge* within the more general framework of Silko's fiction works, David L. Moore (2017) describes the process leading to such place-based awareness as "conscious indigeneity" or "reviving consciousness through animated nature." As we will see in *The Turquoise Ledge*, this ethical commitment to place and its diverse inhabitants is not necessarily easy and should not lend itself to romanticization. Questioning and even mocking the stereotype of the ecological Indian, Silko portrays numerous situations where the other-than-human beings being taken care of clash against one another in their struggle for survival. In her aims to be inclusive and hospitable to all, her efforts to bring harmony to the many creatures living in her ranch is at times perceived by her as stressful and other times as comical. Either way, her resolute drive to care for all these beings always supersedes her own needs, while her own sense of self constantly gains meaning through her relations and generous actions. Outdoors in the mountains and at home, in the ranch, Silko presents an

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earth house in a constant state of motion and change. Sometimes conflict sparks and shakes the web of relations but, most times, her wandering feet and wondering thoughts guide us through a continuous sense of interconnection and beauty that is triggered by her deep engagement of place.

As she walks through the land and writes in her turquoise, rain, or cloud notebooks, Leslie Marmon Silko practices what Pueblo philosopher Gregory Cajete has referred to as Native Science—a *pursuit of knowledge* that is interdisciplinary, intuitive, and holistic—one "born of a lived and storied participation with the natural landscape" (2000: 2). For Cajete, such participation must be "open to the roles of sensation, perception, imagination, emotion, symbols and spirit as well as that of concept, logic and rational empiricism" (2000: 2). In Silko's case her spiritual pursuits, are also open to personal and historical memory, creativity, and commitment to the web of relations she is vividly a part of.

Her notes are also political and often tackle the settler colonial world and its destructive drive. The decimation of the land that results from the homesteaders' greedy expansion through protected landscapes and from the disregard of local authorities infuriates her. Walking as a form of surveillance becomes a coping mechanism that calms her down. In Chapter 26, Silko also examines transborder mobility and migration and defends Mexican people's rights to cross the border without visas, because this is their land too (144).[6] The word *ledge* in her book title is also significative. It is the source of the precious turquoise stones she gathers in her walks, but it is also reminiscent of the ledger art created by many Indigenous tribes on colonial paper to narrate their warrior and spiritual accomplishments. By restating Indigenous ways of seeing and experiencing a place, *The Turquoise Ledge* is a "narrative of resistance" (Ziarkowska, 2017) and an expression of what Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and Edna Manitowabi have more recently described as "radical resurgence"—a form of mapping and reinserting Indigenous praxis in the world, away from colonial thought (2013: 279).[7]

In some ways, *The Turquoise Ledge* also recalls anti-colonial, environmentalist projects like Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*. Thoreau has been described as a "citizen scientist", a committed member of a community that extends beyond the human (Vuchnich, 2024). While living at Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts, he noted down a wide range of observations that were biological, political, and also spiritual—he described his walks as a spiritual pursuit, in fact, not a scientific one. Thoreau collected hundreds of botanical specimens and his Herbarium and field notes are today used by scientists as evidence to prove the effects of climate change.[8]

Like Thoreau, Silko's memoir is a compilation of walks and field notes, where traditional ecological knowledge mixes with her own memorial and spiritual reflections. She also writes about the cultural and historical knowledge of the people who first inhabited the Tucson Mountains over 1000 years ago, the Hohokam. She describes their stone grinders, water cisterns, carved crystals, and petroglyphs, the sacred uses of the saguaro fruit in rain ceremonies, their dancing platforms built on the rocks. While walking

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[6] According to the Mexica foundation story as portrayed in the *Tira de la Peregrinación*, the U.S. Southwest is the place of origin of the Nahuatl, and Silko believes this will be the language spoken in the area in a hundred years (Silko, 2010a: 40)

[7] See also Otjen's study of *The Turquoise Ledge* as a resurgence narrative (2019).

[8] According to the curators of the exhibit "In Search of Thoreau's Flowers," 27% of the specimens Thoreau documented in the mid-19th century have already disappeared from Walden Pond, and about 36% are currently so low in numbers that environmentalists also foresee their imminent extinction from the area (Vuchnich, 2024).

and in the ensuing stories, she carefully maps the territory tracing the outline of the arroyos, the positioning of the old, now abandoned copper mines, the palo verde trees that spot the area, the ants who manage to protect their palaces using leaves and flower petals to avoid the rain floods.

When theorizing about walking as a practice that leads to thought and self-construction in relation to a specific place and to the universe, it is tempting to refer to Western texts such as Thoreau's *Walden*. But the practice of walking in nature or journeying as spiritual quest precedes settler colonial occupation and lays at the heart of many Indigenous stories of emergence, migration, spiritual search, ceremony, cultural contact, or trade (Hamilton, 2018: 10, Bańka, 2023: 178). Many of these ancient Indigenous paths were in fact traced over older animal migration trails (as Silko quickly points out in Chapter 1, when she notes that the arroyo reveals the earlier marks of animals). She herself inherited a love for solitary walks and pebble collection from her Great Grandaunt Alice (Silko, 2010a: 51), and many of the traditional *hummah-hah* stories of the Pueblo are embedded with such placed-based awareness of the natural world, always in constant movement and change. In her essays, she describes her people's migration stories as interior journeys leading to "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: awareness never deteriorated into Cartesian duality, cutting off the human from the natural world" (Silko, 1996: 37).

Mimi Sheller's article "Mobility Justice after Climate Coloniality" (2023) urges us to develop non-anthropocentric frameworks that set relational ontologies and other-than-human ethics at the center of life and community. If we are to "recover habitability in a world on the threshold of ecological limits [we must] learn from those who have already survived and rejected the coloniality of climate and the extractive political economies of carbon capitalism" (2023: 1-2). Such awareness of and continuity with place permeate Indigenous praxis and is a constant focus of Silko's fiction and non-fiction work.

Walking defies body/mind, past/present, time/space boundaries, "the body and the mind can work together, so that thinking becomes almost a physical, rhythmic act"—one that foregrounds the continuity of experience lost to Western culture during the industrial age, but is kept in many other cultures' lived experiences and worldviews today (Solnit, 2002: xv). Tracing Silko's exterior and interior rhythms, in the next sections I will focus on specific walking stories featured in *The Turquoise Ledge*. Through them I hope to further illuminate Silko's mobility strategies and her formulation of a place-based consciousness.

2. FOOTPATHS: REFRAMING VISION AND PARTICIPATION IN THE KINSCAPE

Unlike Silko's earlier memoir *Storyteller*, *The Turquoise Ledge* does not fully focus on her childhood, her family, or her cultural heritage. In her short Preface, she briefly discusses her birth on March 5th, 1948, the same day a supernova exploded in the Mixed Spiral galaxy, a Chinese Year of the Rat. Immediately after this cosmic fact, Silko moves on to tell us how she learnt to speed walk in the mountains in Chapter 1. It is while speed walking and, later, while slow walking rather than horse riding, that she gets into a new creative rhythm—a reframed "peripheral vision" where "the pace and rhythm of the walk direct her process of observation" (Goodman, 2021: 227). She develops a new way

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of "looking and being" (Goodman 2021: 227) and this enables her to pay full attention to the small creatures in the web of relations. By engaging her surroundings on foot, she is able to recognize traditional environmental practices in the area. She spots the water cisterns, petroglyphs, and grinding stones left by the Hohokam ancestors, for example, and quickly develops a renewed place-based consciousness—one where her native New Mexico and Laguna Pueblo are no longer at the center, but these mountains in the Sonoran Desert, which she has turned into her home.

> My friend Bill Orzen taught me to speed walk on flat ground in town, but I prefer the hills to the city, so I adapted the speed walk to the steel tough terrain. The walks took me back into the Tucson Mountains to the old trails where I rode my horses thirty years ago when I first moved here. *The trails are narrow footpaths made by the ancient tribal people who lived in the Tucson Mountains for thousands of years*; later on prospectors used the old trails and made new trails to their mining claims.
>
> (Silko, 2010a: 5. My emphasis)

It is worth highlighting that Silko has visited these mountains often with her horses, but it is on foot that she is able to fully focus on earth and sky as interconnected, animated matter. She notices the little beings, the mining ants constantly shaking the earth from below so they can build their labyrinthic homes. She connects their creative engineering practices on soil with the cosmic patterns traced by the Hokokam, a thousand years before, enhancing our awareness of the broader universe around: "*On foot I can see* the ant palaces, some in solid rock, others with starburst circles of stones they've mined and somehow moved up from below. The star pattern reminded me of the Star Being *images incised into sandstone thousands of years ago*" (Silko, 2010a: 5. My emphasis).

To reframe human perception and move from anthropocentric to Earth-centered paradigms, "sensate participation, ecological awareness, and relationship" must be activated through insight, immersion in thought, exemplification, and discussion (Cajete, 2000: 5-6). And this is exactly what Leslie Marmon Silko does in this first chapter. Learning to speed walk, she develops a new observation, reflection, and participation method through conscious movement; she adjusts her walking rhythm to respectfully suit the type of land she walks on, as each kind of sand imposes a particular form of gravity onto our feet. She attunes her vision to see the self in relation to the dynamic web of life surrounding her, which includes very small creatures like the hard-working ants, or the mysterious turquoise pebbles.

> At first I didn't pay much attention to the stones in the arroyo because I was focused on my walking—I was new to the notion of a speed walk through the desert. *In the arroyo the deep drifts of fine white sand had a gravity of their own that sucked my feet down*. So in those early months of learning how to walk over rough desert terrain at a fast pace I had all I could do to keep moving, I wasn't thinking about rocks in the arroyo.
>
> …
>
> Slowly it got easier and *I started to notice* the pebbles and rocks in the fine white sand, and the animal tracks and signs of coyote and bobcat in the arroyo. *I began to find* small rocks and pebbles streaked with turquoise.
>
> (Silko, 2010a: 6. My emphasis).

According to Amy Hamilton in her book *Peregrinations*, "[m]eaning is achieved not only by human linguistic abstractions but also through the agential power of the material world" (2018: 16). For her, "[t]he basic unit of human movement, the footstep, … possesses both symbolic and material power. Our walking bodies hold a vast history of human intra-action with the more-than-human world" (Hamilton, 2018: 106). And our walking stories "should be brought to bear on understandings of place and sense of place" (Adamson, 2015: 8, qtd in Hamilton, 2018: 11).

As we have seen in this first story, Silko portrays herself as a hesitant walker in training who is learning to "speed walk" in the desert, that is, bringing a contemporary urban practice to the mountains she used to visit with her horses, to make it a part of her workout. On foot, establishing a physical contact with the earth or, as Rebecca Solnit describes it, "reading with one's feet" (2002: 70), she discovers that our vision is reframed when we see from the ground. Silko feels the agency and competing movement of the sand engaging her feet. Other-than-human beings such as ants or rain water have movements of their own that also endow place with meaning, turning it into an active site in constant motion and transformation. When Silko returns to the same place she had written about the day before, the landscape has already changed through animal, rain and wind power intervention (2010a: 7).

Silko's place-based consciousness also transfers to her art in unplanned ways. Slowly, she develops a creative method that is based on Native Science:

> The idea was that the exercise and open air would help *release my mind into a less self-conscious state where I could better perceive* the delicacy of the light and the dawn moisture in the breeze. How sweet the air smells and how luxurious it feels to move through this yellow dawn light. The idea of the fast pace was a cardiovascular workout, but also the pace of the walks helped me *edit the experience of the walks to the essentials*.
>
> (2010a: 5-7. My emphasis)

These fast speed walks in the mountains enable Silko to move from a *self-conscious state* to a place-triggered awareness through which she can experience the web of life and motion around her. It is not during the walk but afterwards that she notes down a few *essential* reflections based on observation and insight. For example, she notices that ancient grinding stones were often placed close to old palo verde trees because the Hohokam crashed the palo verde beans into powder on site to facilitate their transportation (2010a: 12). She also remembers how grinding stones were "fundamental to survival" in her own Laguna Pueblo community and could *talk* to their owners (2010a: 11-12). Grinding stones are historical and cultural markers—material repositories of more sustainable relations and practices. They record and voice a story that connects her to the ancestors—both at home in New Mexico and in this place turned home.

According to Gregory Cajete:

> Close observation of plants, animals, landscape sights, and sounds, changes in wind and humidity—everything surrounding the people—is part of Native science, as it is in the Western scientific tradition. It is the Native emphasis on participation and experience that embeds the sense of kinship with all nature in the minds, hearts, and souls of all members of the community. Learning to be

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> confident in one's ability to live within nature is a key motivation and feature of maturity.
>
> (2000: 101)

Cajete describes this sense of awareness and becoming through the concept of *self-reliance*, the idea that both "knowledge and creativity have their source in a person's inner being and in their personal journeying and thinking" (2000: 102). Through walking as creative practice, Silko moves from a state of self-consciousness to one of place-based consciousness. And these ideas are later poured into the notebooks that will become *The Turquoise Ledge.* In Chapter 9, she again recalls the "peacefulness" and "blissful silent meanderings among the old bottles and broken tea kettles at the abandoned dump by the river" undertaken with Aunt Alice around Laguna as a child. She still seeks "odd pebbles and colorful rocks for hours on end in the same blissful consciousness" (2010a: 51). She remembers Aunt Alice's "love of solitude and self-reliance which have served [her] well" (2010a: 52). In Chapter 35, she also refers to her walking practice as a way of accessing a "deep meditative state" (2010a: 186).

Drawing from Kiowa author N. Scott Momaday's layered perception of place in his well-known passage "The Remembered Earth," Chadwick Allen uses the term "*seeing with* the land" to refer to this change of perception—from the self to a more grounded state that privileges the other-than-human. When we look at a particular landscape, we need to *see with* the small things but also "*see with* the land's potential for physical interaction and psychological engagement, to see and to *see with* the land's capacity to provide emotional solace, to provoke spiritual contemplation" (Allen, 2022: 27). As Momaday explains in his oft-quoted passage, this kind of perception is activated by memory and the imagination as they engage a particular place:

> Once in his life a man ought to concentrate his mind upon the remembered earth, I believe. He ought to give himself up to a particular landscape in his experience, to look at it from as many angles as he can, to wonder about it, to dwell upon it. He ought to imagine that he touches it with his hands at every season and listens to the sounds that are made upon it. He ought to imagine the creatures there and all the faintest motions of the wind. He ought to recollect the glare of noon and all the colors of the dawn and dusk.
>
> (Momaday, 1997: 45).

In *The Turquoise Ledge*, Silko's movements through the land activate her own memory, creativity, and imagination in direct connection with the more fragile other-than-human beings who demand her care and artistic attention. Silko consciously dissolves her-self into this web of relations, and reaches a more grounded and creative way of *seeing* the universe; she *cultivates* a "planetary vision" (Goodman 2021: 193).

3. ALL OUR NEIGHBORS: TOWARDS AN ETHICS OF CARE AND RESPONSIBILITY

Part Four of Silko's memoir is entitled "Turquoise," and Silko has by now mastered the practice of speed walking on tough terrain. Following her mobility/reflectivity method, she further ponders on the importance of slowing our movements through the land in order to *see*. In the following passage, it is animated

nature, in fact, the slope of a basalt ridge, that forces her to slow down and reframe her vision, to *see* the layered, multispecies world she shares with others:

> The steep slope of the basalt ridge below the Old Thunderbird Mine shaft *showed me* an amazing bobcat years ago as I rode my horse, but also the Gila monster, and only recently the maroon red horned lizard. Why might I notice more wonderful beings here than other spots?
> Maybe the steep slope *slowed* the horses I rode and I had time to observe my surroundings more closely; now when I walk, the *slope slows me down* so it is possible to *see* more of what is alive in the world.
> (Silko, 2010a: 195. My emphasis)

By animating the slope of the basalt ridge, she presents the slope as not just a friendly space but a friendly neighbor that engages her to shape her perception in a purposeful manner. Towards the end of the book, she vividly describes how the dirt and stones in one of her favorite trails "welcomed her back" after the hot summer recess: "I felt it through the soles of my walking shoes; a softness, a giving way, a gentleness that *welcomed* me like an *old friend*. I suppose the trail and I are *old friends* after thirty years of my horseback rides and walks" (2010: 294. My emphasis).

In numerous occasions, such as the life entanglement she describes in Chapter 36, she shows her efforts at actively weaving a community of beings together through care ethics—aiming to accommodate a variety of animal and plant needs competing for her hospitality.

> It's mid-November and the bees are back. The wild Sonoran honey-bees migrate with the hummingbirds. The bees' return coincided with the return of my long-time friend, the male white-eared hummingbird. During the hot weather months, the bees and hummingbirds migrate to the mountains . . . Now that the weather here has cooled off, they are back.
> (Silko, 2010a: 195)

In this familiar portrayal of the birds and insects populating her garden, Silko focuses on their own mobilities and life trails. The bees and hummingbirds relocate to Ramsey Canyon during the summer months, but they always come back to visit in the Fall. She leaves waterpots under the big mesquite tree to avoid conflict between them because the wild bees "are hungry and thirsty: they frantically swarm over the hummingbird feeders. Wherever there is shade and water a great many desert creatures come to find *comfort* so I'm careful to keep the ceramic pots away from the paths because they attract rattlesnakes" (Silko, 2010a: 195). She also describes them as old acquaintances who trigger familiar routines and respond to her hospitality with gentleness: "The bees and I have known one another for a long time. We first *met* when I used to have water hyacinths in the rainwater pool. I never harm them intentionally and they never sting me intentionally though of course accidents occur from time to time, but we harbor no hard feelings." (Silko, 2010a: 195-196. My emphasis)

In her essay collection, *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit*, published in 1996, Silko argues that a home can only be fenceless, open, and inclusive of all things.

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> The land, the sky, and all that is within them—the landscape—*includes human beings*. Interrelationships in the Pueblo landscape are complex and fragile. The unpredictability of the weather, the aridity and harshness of much of the terrain in the high plateau country explain in large part the *relentless attention* the ancient Pueblo people gave to the sky and the earth around them. Survival depended upon harmony and cooperation, not only among human beings, but also among all things—the animate and the less animate, *since rocks and mountains were known on occasion to move*"
>
> (Silko, 1996: 29. My emphasis).

Survival in the age of climate change is more dependent than ever on a radical shift of perspective and practice. We must all gain a deeper awareness of the web of interdependence we are a part of, and commit to it. According to Acoma Pueblo poet Simon Ortiz, Indigenous consciousness is grounded in energy and movement, and also in place and spirit: "Feeling, thinking, and being absolutely aware of our role as communal human beings within a holistic universe will do wonders for all of us and all of creation because that will make us be aware of sustainability as a principle of continuance" (Ortiz in McAdams, 2010: 8). Human creativity is part of "this immense continuum" because it is "part of the greater flow of creativity in nature" (Cajete, 2000: 15) and Silko certainly fosters it in *The Turquoise Ledge*. She gives us a master class on place-based solidarity and care ethics—an ethical framework that emphasizes affectivity, caretaking, attachment, and "the inevitability of dependence and interdependence . . . in the basic fabric of human [and more-than-human] well- being" (Whyte and Cuomo, 2016: 234). Drawing from the work of feminist philosophers Carol Gilligan and Virginia Held, Whyte and Cuomo further define "care ethics" as the "approaches to moral life and community that are grounded in virtues, practices, and knowledge associated with appropriate caring and caretaking of self and others" (2016: 234). For Pueblo philosopher Gregory Cajete, "Living a life or relationship through ethical participation with nature is the ideal behind the practice of Native science and its orientation to place" (2000: 183). This key idea also lays at the basis of Glen Coulthard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson more recent concept of *grounded normativity* or "place-based solidarity".

> Grounded normativity houses and reproduces the practices and procedures, based on deep reciprocity, that are inherently informed by an intimate relationship to place. [It] teaches us how to live our lives in relation to other people and nonhuman life forms in a profoundly nonauthoritarian, nondominating, nonexploitative manner. . . Our relationship to the land itself generates the processes, practices, and knowledges that inform our political systems, and through which *we practice solidarity*
>
> (2016: 254)

Challenging capitalist views of the desert as wasteland or unproductive landscape, Silko "depicts herself as just one inhabitant among many other-than-human beings and things that cocreate and belong within the Sonoran Desert… [she] writes herself into a multispecies landscape that teems with rattlesnakes, pack rats, skunks, mice, pigeons, gods, macaws" (Otjen, 2019: 136), and also boulders, arroyos, trees, plants, and the small bits of turquoise she gathers in her walks. In *The Turquoise Ledge*, Silko's sense of self moves away from individualism and onto a relational, place-centered way of being

in the universe. Most importantly, she crafts a language of care and radical hospitality where she *meets* the bees, the hummingbird, or the grasshopper Lord Chapulin and his wife. According to Glen Coulthard, radical hospitality urges Indigenous communities to welcome vulnerable beings, human and more-than-human, into their homelands (qtd in Daigle and Ramírez, 2019: 82). And this is not a mere gesture but a form of inclusion that reverses colonialist thought and praxis, for "with this welcoming, comes an accountability to place and its' kin" (Naylor et al., 2018: 203). Even the black grasshoppers who eat all of her flowers and who are described as "furtive, sly guests" are welcomed because they are Lord Chapulin's relatives (Silko, 2010a: 286). All beings are received in the ranch with generosity and their needs are unconditionally acknowledged—as in the humorous scene where Silko has to temporarily abandon her writing because Lord Chapulin, her grasshopper friend, demands a portrait.[9] Always a thoughtful and caring host, she attends to their needs so they find "comfort" (Silko, 2010a: 196).

4. REMAPPING THE WORLD: CREATIVE MOTION AND HISTORICAL INTERCONNECTION

Stories in the Laguna Pueblo tradition function as geographical, scientific, spiritual, and cultural guides for the community. In *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit* Silko specifically describes stories as maps that document old trails and spatial practices: "There is a story connected with every place, every object in the landscape," and these mapping stories are filled with repetitions which are "designed to help you remember" so this geographical knowledge is also passed on from one generation to the next (Silko, 1996: 56-57). In line with this multifold purpose, Silko's memoir records a variety of ancient trails and changing landscapes in the Tucson Mountains. Through this geographical mapping, she inscribes traditional environmental knowledge and identifies specific natural sites that should be kept safe from human destruction. Silko's wide array of walking stories draw from the close observation of soil, animal, and plant behavior, from found things and animated matter, from memory and scientific knowledge.[10] Her walking stories work as repositories and catalysts of knowledge. As sites of *resurgence*—they "map… a way out of colonial thinking by confirming Indigenous lifeways or alternative ways of being in the world" (Simpson and Manitowabi, 2013: 279). Returning to the same trails and sites (the javalina and deer plaza, the ancestors' place, the Gila Monster Mine pit, the big arroyo, the orange boulders), she endows these places with an ecological, cultural, historical, and spiritual meaning that is Indigenous-centered and that powerfully interrogates settler colonial culture.

Chapter 47, for example, functions as a spatial guide for observant walkers. She retraces her movements through the Thunderbird Mine, the prickly pear cacti, the bottom of the arroyo, the "dark gray basalt and light-colored boulders of tuff and limestone", the flat top boulder with the old petroglyph, or the boulder "chiseled out to form a rainwater cistern" with great amounts of care (Silko, 2010a: 256-257). She poetically describes the smells, the sounds, the unexpected sights—like the dark grasshopper eating coyote dung,

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[9] Some of Silko's sketches and paintings of Lord Chapulin were featured in an issue of *The Kenyon Review*. See Silko (2010b).

[10] In her memoir, Silko mentions books from a variety of scientific traditions such as José Díaz Bolio's *The Geometry of the Maya and Their Rattlesnake Art* (2010a: 106), or Irene Pepperberg's *Alex and Me*, which examines animal intelligence (2010a: 305).

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which helps her identify the reason why they are poisonous (Silko, 2010a: 256). Silko takes her camera so she can photograph the water cisterns and petroglyph again, after many years of visits, to examine potential changes. She finds more evidence proving that the ancestors have lived nearby—grinding stones, flint, hand-chipped jasper—she remembers the singing voices and the elusive figures she has seen in the dark (Silko, 2010a: 259).

The Turquoise Ledge presents a map of the Tucson Mountains that will stand against the environmental destruction carried out by Silko's homesteader neighbor, also known as "machine man," who uses the arroyo as a private sand and stone pit for his ranch. She has been forced to accept that "[t]his is the old West and private property rights are absolute here; there's no such thing as the common good" (Silko, 2010a: 296). Silko blandishes her writing and her graffiti art against such selfish neighbors, negligent county officials, and governmental laws that fail to protect the landscape. She graphically animates the boulders with Star Beings crosses, to scare the machine man destroyer, and reminds us that, in the future, the earth herself will bring some justice on. These sites will be organically transformed through rain, wind, and earth power (Silko, 2010a: 296). In one of the closing chapters, she further reflects on these rocks' own mobility history. They came from the Great Sea, millions of years ago, and "[t]hey will be on their way once more to the Santa Cruz River on its way to join the Salt River then on to the Colorado at Yuma and finally the sea" while "man and machine [will] be no more than a shadow of a mote of dust" (Silko, 2010a: 315).

Through her mapping praxis, Silko respectfully inscribes other Indigenous knowledge into the text: she draws from Hohokam geographical understandings and cultural practices—honoring the Indigenous communities who have been engaging and communicating with these mountains for centuries. In Chapter 50, she quotes a few lines of verse from Ofelia Zepeda's poem "Music Mountains," where the Tohono O'odham poet talks to the surrounding mountains, addressing them through their O'odham names: Cemamagi, Tumamoc, Babad Do' ag, Cew Do' ag, Cuk Do' ag (Silko, 2010a: 272). Silko enthusiastically celebrates the publication of Zepeda's poetry collection *Where Clouds Are Formed*—another book filled with walking stories, relationality, clouds, and Indigenous mappings.[11]

Like Zepeda's, Silko's map of the territory is radically transborder. The ancient Hohokam communities who inhabited these mountains have O'odham descendants north and south of the U.S. border and are also historically related to other Indigenous communities in Mexico. The small turquoise stones she has been gathering for thirty years become her evidence. Indigenous traders from Mexico powdered the soft chrysocolla to obtain the special blue paint used to decorate their representations of Tlaloc, Lord of Rain. The turquoise was "traded away to the south for macaw feathers or food" (Silko, 2010a: 260). Following Pueblo conceptions of circular time, she affirms that "[t]he ancestors are still here, right now" (Silko, 2010a: 274). The web of interdependence is constantly activated across time and space in her work. Material things communicate stories of the past and present, and animals repeatedly returning to the area also enable her to connect the past with the present and future, to imagine a place-based future. They ground Indigenous memory and keep it alive.

[11] See Brígido-Corachan (2023)'s book chapter "Relational Bodies in Motion" for a more in depth analysis of Zepeda's cultural and spiritual movements through the land in the Sonoran Desert.

The practices of walking, land-caring, reflecting, remembering, and crafting form a creative entanglement in *The Turquoise Ledge*. Through a renewed place-based consciousness and radical hospitality towards the other-than-human, Silko shows us the way towards a more sustainable and caring world.

5. CONCLUSION: LESLIE MARMON SILKO'S RADICAL EARTH HOUSE

This article has engaged Leslie Marmon Silko's mobility practices in her most recent memoir, *The Turquoise Ledge*. Walking in the mountains, reframing vision, and "seeing with the land" (Allen, 2022: 27) become creative and committed acts of radical care for the Earth we all live on. They enable the Laguna Pueblo author to activate a renewed place-based consciousness and to build a caring, fenceless home in the Tucson Mountains.

Silko vividly describes her frequent walks through the animal and human-made trails around her ranch. Her walking stories become powerful instruments to revitalize traditional environmental knowledge and praxis, and to preserve place-based memories and sites from colonial destruction. She learns to immerse herself in deep, critical reflection while in motion, so that pedetic forces enhance her sense of relationality, creativity, care, and political activism. She sees disruptions in the multispecies ecosystem of the Tucson Mountains as a result of extractivism and urban sprawling, both of which generally affect vulnerable populations of human and other-than-human beings and, frustrated by the blatant neglect of the authorities, she reacts to this destruction through her art.

Vulnerability, as Yarimar Bonilla contends, "is not simply a product of natural condition; it is a political state and a colonial condition" (qtd in Sheller, 2023: 7). In *The Turquoise Ledge*, engaging the land through respect, care, and radical hospitality becomes a form of anticolonial resistance or resurgence. This selfless engagement draws attention to the responsibility, spiritual connection, and creativity grounding Native Science. Silko generously shares with her readers a new set of pedagogical stories and strategies that may help us shif our perspectives and develop deeper environmental awareness and solidarity with other-than-human worlds. She urges us to confront our social, moral, and environmental crises through relational ethics and radical hospitality.

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