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"LIKE A GREAT RIVER FLOWING RESTLESS": FUGITIVE FIGURES ACROSS (CENTRAL) AMERICAN BORDERS IN LESLIE MARMON SILKO'S *ALMANAC OF THE DEAD*[*]

INTRODUCTION

Readers and critics of contemporary Native American literature are by now widely familiar with Leslie Marmon Silko's "Five Hundred Year Map"—the striking geohistorical remapping of the Northern Americas that opens her powerful novel *Almanac of the Dead* (1991). Traversed by the intersecting trajectories of many of the novel's main characters, Silko's map focuses on the border between the United States and Mexico even though the exchanges, clashes, and movements that are marked on the map extend from Alaska to Buenos Aires. By choosing to open her ambitious, anticolonial indictment with one of the Western devices that was key in charting and ultimately controlling the territories of the Americas, Silko makes a "subversive rhetorical move."[1] Silko's map does not provide an actual rendering of geographic space; instead, it purposely defies the innate abstraction of traditional Western cartography by distorting its distances and contours and by recording onto it the specific experiences and actions of local inhabitants, migrants, businessmen, drug-dealers, and revolutionaries. More than a map, then, Silko's visual text functions as a form of simultaneous narration and

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[1] Ann Brigham, "Productions of Geographic Scale and Capitalist-Colonialist Enterprise in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 50, no. 2 (2004): 303–4.

provides a dense socioeconomic and political snapshot of the lawless American frontier at the end of the 20th century—a new frontier dominated by the transnational flow of peoples, ideas, stories, guns, and capital.[2]

On Silko's map, the East-West axis that echoes the historical formation of the American nation as Manifest Destiny is graphically overshadowed by a busy presence of North/South movements, with their corresponding arrows and stories.[3] "Military arms, aircraft to private army" and "torture videotapes" are South-bounded commodities, whereas "cocaine to finance arms" or "the Twin Brothers walk north with hundreds of thousands of people" have a northern direction. The movements traced by these elements and characters on the chart as they cross borders *illegally* continually seek to contest the existence of physical/political walls that artificially prevent the entry of *othered* bodies into U.S. territory, while the governments and oligarchies involved encourage the transnational circulation of money, merchandise, weapons, and drugs. Thus, *Almanac of the Dead* closely examines the colonialist interests that have shaped human interactions in the Americas for the past five hundred years and presents an alternative, continuous archive of trans-Indigenous histories and practices that have too often been overlooked. It claims a borderless American continent that is, ultimately, Indigenous.[4]

Silko's counter-archiving process is ambitious, purposeful, and yet necessarily selective, leading to perhaps unavoidable historical and spatial gaps. The most southern site that is graphically represented in the Five Hundred Year Map is Tuxla Gutiérrez, the capital of Chiapas, in Mexico. The map

[2] Many scholars have explored the striking visual features together with the political and historical subtexts in Silko's map. See for, e.g., Ann Brigham, "Productions of Geographic Scale," 303–5; Alex Hunt, "The Radical Geography of Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*," *Western American Literature* 39, no. 3 (2004): 260–62; Miriam Schacht, "'Movement Must Be Emulated by the People'. Rootedness, Migration, and Indigenous Internationalism in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*," *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 21, no. 4 (2009): 53–54; Shari Huhndorf, "'Mapping by Words': The Politics of Land in Native American Literature," in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Environment*, ed. Louise Westling (Cambridge: CUP, 2014); Ewelina Bańka, *View from the Concrete Shore. Visions of Indian Country in the Works of Silko, Vizenor, and Alexie* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2018): 103–10. For a thorough analysis of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands as a new "American Frontier" in *Almanac*, see also Rebecca Tillett, "The Price of 'Free' Trade: NAFTA and the Economies of Border Crossing in George Rabasa's *The Floating Kingdom* and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*," *Comparative American Studies* 6, no. 4 (2008).

[3] Arnold Krupat, *The Turn to the Native: Studies in Criticism and Culture* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 51–52.

[4] Huhndorf, "'Mapping by Words'," 55–56.

thus strategically omits a revolutionary and also blood-soaked territory that, lying just 200 kilometers to the south, is fundamental to understanding the history of the Americas at the time of the novel's composition: the border between Mexico and Guatemala. This border functioned as another lawless American frontier in the 1980s; it was frequently crossed by many undocumented refugees escaping from ongoing Central American conflicts. In this article I contend that, in her envisioning of a transborder, trans-Indigenous network of anticolonial resistance, Silko renders an idealized view of the revolutionary *South* as an embryonic and fugitive space of subaltern vindications and hope that is articulated predominantly around Mexico. This is a powerful vision but one which, nonetheless, does not fully take into account the Indigenous genocides taking place south of the Mexican border. To address such an omission, this article considers Silko's selective incorporation of Southern geographies and peoples and examines the role that the military conflicts in Central America, their guerrillas and refugees play (and also fail to play) in Silko's envisioning of the Indigenous South as a site of resistance.

BORDER CROSSERS AND FUGITIVE DISCOURSE IN *ALMANAC OF THE DEAD*

Over seventy characters meet, interact, collide and/or collaborate with one another in Leslie Marmon Silko's 763-page novel. Many of these characters are illegal border crossers who embrace, through their spatial movements and transgressive practices, a *fugitive discourse* aimed to mobilize change in local, national, and international power spheres.[5] They also aim to reinstate the Americas as borderless Indigenous territory.

Calabazas and Zeta Cazador, Yaqui dissenters and partners in a smuggling business that also helps finance the illegal entry of many Central American immigrants into U.S. territory, clearly embrace Guillermo Gómez Peña's idea that the border is "boycott, ilegalidad, clandestinidad, contrabando, trangresión, desobediencia binacional,"[6] but it is also a space of trans-

[5] On the central role of *fugitive* geographies and practices in the (Native) Americas see Gerald Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1998) and Samuel Truett, *Fugitive Landscapes: The Forgotten History of the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).

[6] Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *Warrior for Gringostroika* (Saint Paul, MN: Graywolf Press, 1993), 43.

ethnic collaboration demanding creativity, resourcefulness, and resilience—a site of cultural resistance where dominant forms and practices are resignified and subverted. To survive in such frontier spaces, Indigenous communities often had to resort to fugitive poses and movements that would render their real aims invisible to the ruling colonial class, who was in turn too busy creating narrative and visual fictions to justify its dominance. Discussing such fugitive gestures of Indian portraiture, Gerald Vizenor has argued that "native resistance was abstracted as a fugitive pose in national histories" while the simulation of the Indian filled U.S. imaginaries.[7] We must therefore "watch the eyes and hands in fugitive poses to see the motion of natives, and hear the apophatic narratives of a continuous presence."[8]

Linking fugitive practices and historical resistance in a similar vein, Martineau and Ritskes describe "the fugitive spaces of indigeneity" as "critical ruptures where normative, colonial categories and binaries break down and are broken open. In these breaks we witness resistant voices that refuse to be silenced."[9] In *Almanac*, fugitive discourse, anti-colonial resistance, and Indigenous sovereignty go hand in hand, and Calabazas and Zeta are not their sole practitioners. Silko's novel introduces a great number of revolutionaries such as African American and Cherokee counter-historian Clinton, the Barefoot Hopi, a Korean-American computer hacker (Awa Gee) and, more significantly, Mayan leaders Angelita La Escapía, Tacho and El Feo, whose Army of Justice and Redistribution operating in southern Mexico will be further explored in this article. In *Almanac*, Indigenous and non-Indigenous border crossers challenge the power and legitimacy of neo/colonial laws that impose(d) spatial and epistemological boundaries over Native territories on a daily basis. These fugitive figures seek to document and confront unresolved colonial conflicts throughout the Americas.

As Calabazas, a land-rooted Yaqui traditionalist who leads his thriving smuggling business from Tucson, explains in an oft-quoted passage of the novel:

> We don't believe in boundaries. Borders. Nothing like that. We *are* here thousands of years before the first Whites. We *are* here before maps or quit claims. We know where we belong on this earth. We have always moved

[7] Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses*, 145.

[8] Vizenor, 165.

[9] Jarrett Martineau and Eric Ritskes, "Fugitive Indigeneity: Reclaiming the Terrain of Decolonial Struggle through Indigenous Art," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, no. 1 (2014): iii.

> freely. North-South. East-West. We pay no attention to what isn't real. Imaginary lines. Imaginary minutes and hours. Written law. We recognize none of that…. We don't see any border…. We don't stop. No one stops us.[10]

Calabazas' speech on the artificiality of imposed Eurocentric delimitations effectively introduces a suspension of time and space that is marked by his use of adverbial expressions set in the past (*before*, *thousands of years*), which are strategically combined with present tense verbs in oxymoronic constructions.[11] As Fischer Hornung points out, "Silko stretches English tenses to the utmost, dissolving the grammatical sense of time into mythical timelessness 'we *are* here *before*'."[12] Calabazas purposely erases geographical and temporal borders and shapes them according to a dynamic conception of geo-history that is rooted in Indigenous cosmologies. But his notion of "timelessness" is not simply *mythical* but deeply historical, for it invokes Silko's Laguna Pueblo epistemological tradition, where time is experienced and expressed in a simultaneous rather than chronological manner.[13] Calabazas' fugitive discourse thus manifests itself through elusive movement and is expressed through a transgressive syntax that vindicates Indigenous intellectual and territorial sovereignty.[14]

In *Almanac*, Silko also reconfigures a common *t(r)opos* that has laid at the core of many North American narratives of resistance in the 20th century: the novel presents, at times, an idealized view of the unruly South, depicted as an embryonic, fugitive space of revolution, possibility, and hope. In Silko's novel, resistance necessarily comes from the South, even if it is funded by the North. In this respect, it is interesting to bring to the discussion James H. Cox's insightful volume *The Red Land to the South*. Cox argues that Silko was not the first American Indian author to set her eyes on Mexico and present it as an ideal scenario for urgent panIndigenous coalitions and revolution. D'Arcy McNickle, John Joseph Matthews, Lynn Riggs, and Todd Downing had travelled to, written about and attended inter-Ame-

[10] Leslie Marmon Silko, *Almanac of the Dead* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 6.

[11] Dorothea Fisher-Hornung, "Economies of Memory: Trafficking in Blood, Body Parts and Crossblood Ancestors," *Amerika Studien. A Quarterly* 47, no. 2 (2002): 214.

[12] Fisher-Hornung, 214.

[13] See, for example, Silko's famous description of continuous time as a tortilla where "(a)ll times go on existing side by side for all eternity. No moment is lost or destroyed. There are no future times or past times; they are *always all* the times." Leslie Marmon Silko, *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit Essays on Native American Life Today* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 137.

[14] Robert Allen Warrior delves into the concept of intellectual sovereignty in *Tribal Secrets. Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

rican Indian conferences in Mexico in the late 1930s and 1940s. They all shared "political affinity for and historical interest in Indigenous Mexico" and coincided in their belief in the anti-colonial "revolutionary potential" of Mexican Indigenous communities at the time[15]—a time in which Native American communities in the United States were being forcefully pushed towards acculturation. Like Silko, these Native authors specifically focused their attention on Mexicas, Mayas, and Yaquis above other Mexican or Central American Indigenous tribes.[16]

In Silko's case, that rebellious, hope-filled South, the South that the Laguna stone snake looks towards, at the end of the novel, is located not in Tucson but in the jungles of Chiapas, South of Mexico. Furthermore, Indigenous resistance in the *Almanac* must be understood in tight connection with the national liberation struggles that were taking place in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua during the 1980s. A key colonial border that should also concern *Almanac*'s readers is, therefore, the border between Mexico and Guatemala, which was bursting with Indigenous anti-colonial, anti-imperialist activity throughout that decade, as we will see in the next section.

SOUTHERN GEOGRAPHIES IN *ALMANAC OF THE DEAD*

In *Almanac*'s last section "One World, Many Tribes," many fugitive figures and plot lines converge at the International Holistic Healers Convention in Tucson, where one of the featured speakers, the Barefoot Hopi (an activist who raises international financial aid to recover Native American land) stresses the centrality of the North/South axis in the Americas. Delivering a message from sacred snakes Quetzalcoatl and Damballah, he emphasizes that:

> From out of the South the people are coming, like a great river flowing restless with the spirits of the dead who have been reborn again and again all over Africa and the Americas, reborn each generation more fierce and more numerous. Millions will move instinctively; unarmed and unguarded, they begin walking steadily north, following the twin brothers.[17]

Although *Almanac*'s stories most often unfold in Southwestern states (Arizona, New Mexico, California, and Texas), the Barefoot Hopi is clearly

[15] James H. Cox, *The Red Land to the South. American Indian Writers and Indigenous Mexico* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012): 22–23.

[16] For a detailed study of these depictions see Cox, *Red Land to the South*.

[17] Silko, *Almanac of the Dead*, 735.

alluding to Southern Mexico in his speech. The Army of Justice and Redistribution led by the Mayan Twin Brothers, Tacho and El Feo, advances from Chiapas towards the U.S. border like a restless river going against the current. This anticolonial movement also recalls a more overarching Global South of the wretched and the oppressed. There are, in fact, several intersecting and oppositional Souths in the novel: Tucson (and the Southwest), Mexico, and the wide-ranging global territories of the dispossessed, from the Caribbean to Africa. Within these, Silko's Five Hundred Years map graphically identifies the novel's geopolitical, historical, and narrative center in Mexico (the ancient almanac's origin) and, particularly, in the state of Chiapas, the center of operations of the Mayan Army of Justice and Redistribution.

The uncanny similarities between the Army of Justice and Redistribution in Silko's novel and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) have been noted by many scholars. The EZLN rose in arms against the Mexican state in January of 1994, just after the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and three years after the publication of the novel. Deborah Horvitz, Claudia Sadowski-Smith, and Rebecca Tillett, among other scholars, have drawn significant political, historical, and tactical parallels between these Indigenous movements.[18] Little more can be added to their poignant comparative analyses so I will stress what is perhaps a less-known fact: the Zapatistas were not the first to confront the Mexican government for their continuous exploitation of Indigenous labor and territorial theft in the second half of the 20th century. There had been prior insurgent movements seeking a degree of Indigenous autonomy in Chiapas and Oaxaca since the early 1970s.[19] Silko's "prophetic" anticipation of the Zapatista uprising was not visionary but rather grounded in material and historical information she was, if not fully familiar with, at least aware of as a compulsive news reader and clipper during the years of composition of the novel.[20] As we see in *Almanac*, Silko followed the news on the Central Ame-

[18] See Deborah Horovitz, "Freud, Marx and Chiapas in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*," *Studies in American Indian Literatures: The Journal of the Association for the Study of American Indian Literatures* 10, no. 3 (1998): 47–64, Claudia Sadowski-Smith, "The US-Mexico Borderlands Write Back: Cross-Cultural Transnationalism in Contemporary US Women of Color Fiction," *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 57, no. 1 (2001), and Tillett, "The Price of 'Free' Trade."

[19] Hector Díaz Polanco, *Indigenous Peoples in Latin America: The Quest for Self-Determination* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997).

[20] See Silko's interview with Perry where she specifically comments on the news clippings on U.S. cocaine financing the Nicaraguan contras she collected at the time. Donna Perry, "Leslie

rican military coups and ensuing conflicts directly affecting the Indigenous population. These brutal wars resulted in the displacement of thousands of Indigenous people, among them dozens of Mayan communities from Guatemala.

In 1954, a CIA-backed coup overthrew the democratically elected government of Jacobo Arbenz and unleashed a 36-year armed struggle in Guatemala. During those terror-stricken decades, hundreds of Indigenous communities were tortured and slaughtered by the government, hundreds of thousands of Mayan people died, while another hundred thousand found themselves forced to leave the country in exile.[21] Some of the harshest military reprisals took place in the early 1980s, the same years during which around 30,000 Salvadorans were killed by military death squads. Echoing the brutal march of the Trail of Tears and reminiscent of countless other tragic removals and exterminations from the 16th to 20th centuries in the Native Americas, the genocide of the Maya in Guatemala and of many Indigenous and mestizo civilians in Salvador is perhaps most shocking and shameful because it took place only 40 years ago.

Yet neither Guatemala's and El Salvador's (and, further South, Nicaragua's) internal conflicts nor the thousands of displaced Mayas who lived in refugee camps in Southern Mexico during the 1980s are given a voice in Silko's colossal archive. They are briefly alluded to and represented as an anonymous, collective, ghostly presence in Chiapas. But, surprisingly, none of the close to one hundred main or supporting characters in the novel is a Mayan from Guatemala or a Salvadoran refugee, even though Chiapas is one of the *Almanac*'s most relevant and recurrent narrative settings. Unlike the Chiapanecan Mayas, Angelita, El Feo and Tacho, all Central American characters in the novel are denied a specific identity, a name, and a story. Tacho, one of the leaders of the Army of Justice and Redistribution (together with his twin brother El Feo), is one of the few characters who notices this Indigenous mass of war fugitives and dispossessed:

> Tacho had began to see changes all around Tuxla. The government was uneasy about the relentless stream of refugees from the wars in El Salvador and Guatemala. Maybe the white men had counted themselves, then counted the Indians. What Tacho saw as the refugees increased was white men would

Marmon Silko," *Backtalk: Women Writers Speak Out* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 325–26.

[21] See Michael T. Millar, *Spaces of Representation: The Struggle for Social Justice in Post-war Guatemala* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2005).

> soon be outnumbered by Indians throughout Mexico. Police patrols had been increased, sweeps were made twice a day through the market for refugees to drag away for "interrogation," and if they survived, to refugee camps miles away from the border.[22]

Although Tacho's vision shows political awareness and solidarity with these Mayan brothers and sisters from the other side of the border, the refugees' movements and spatial actions are not contextualized historically; they are elusive, fugitive figures in the Twin Brothers' political narrative—a *relentless stream* of threatening bodies that could quickly fill the ranks of a transnational Indigenous army and destabilize Mexico's white neo/colonial oligarchy.

Later in the novel, Tuxla Gutiérrez's police chief and General J. (who works as a consultant for the Guatemalan government) briefly refer to the refugees and the refugee camps. U.S. funded aircraft, helicopters, and secret military units were being used to track these refugees who were believed to be "leftist strike units" from El Salvador in disguise.[23] Once arrested, the police chief "favored refugee prison camps where the refugees could do field work at nearby plantations during the day," whereas General J. "advocated harsher measures" to avoid Hitler's "logistical problems" with the Jews and the extermination camps.[24] General J. evokes the actions and rationale of several pro-genocide dictators and military leaders in Central America at the time.[25] Moreover, he alludes to the various refugee camps that spread throughout Chiapas and Yucatan from the early 1980s until the signing of the Peace Accords in Guatemala, in 1996, although no further or specific information is provided about these camps.

For Rebecca Tillett, the Central American refugees in the novel "emphasize wider Indigenous histories within the Americas: a range of colonial exploitations of Indigenous peoples; contemporary governmental oppressions of such social groups, including ongoing acts of genocide; plus contemporary capitalist exploitation across the Americas of Indigenous groups."[26] However, considering their pivotal role in the complex weaving of pan Indigenous histories and neocolonial exploitation, I find it surprising that no Central American refugee characters, or any other characters for that matter

[22] Silko, *Almanac of the Dead*, 476–77.
[23] Silko, 494.
[24] Silko, 495.
[25] See also Tillett, "The Price of 'Free' Trade," 338.
[26] Tillett, 338.

express these concerns directly in the *Almanac*. Guatemala's ongoing Mayan genocide and land theft have to be inferred in a novel that is fiercely direct and detailed in its historical exposé and political critique. In Tacho's eyes, these refugees make Indigenous Mexicans strong with their numbers but their very recent history of torture, persecution, genocide, and their precarious existence in refugee camps is never openly addressed, other than through General J.'s comment that these camps are a "waste of time and money."[27]

On the other hand, the arrival of the Guatemalan and Salvadoran refugees to Chiapas is often referred to as the catalyst that may finally bring change to the Americas. General J. tells Menardo that "a *great storm* is gathering on the southern horizon,"[28] as he stocks on military planes that he will take South of the Mexican border, to Guatemala and possibly to El Salvador and Nicaragua. Like the Barefoot Hopi's *great river flowing restless* from the South, the police chief in Tuxla Gutiérrez also uses a metaphor that combines people, water, and unpredictability—a stream of desperate bodies carving its own course. The chief is particularly concerned about "(t)he southern border [being] particularly vulnerable to secret agents and rabble-rousers, sewage that had seeped out of Guatemala to pollute 'the pure springs of Mexican democracy'." [29]

Ironically, Menardo's Universal Insurance company successfully takes off precisely because "Chiapas had the misfortune of being too close to the border."[30] Sometime later, Menardo complains that "[g]ardeners, servants, and the Indians had become more sullen since guerrilla forces had made regular strikes across the border. Guatemala had too many educated Indians. It was the fault of the Church. From the very beginning priests treated them like human beings." [31] This last remark is perhaps the most fleshed-out historical reference to the causes triggering the conflict down South, and yet the Guatemalan Civil War was more than a party of indoctrinated Indians joining the guerrilla and confronting their genocidal government. This oversimplification is not surprising, as it comes from Menardo's perspective. But for someone as informed on southern matters as Silko evidently was (see her interview with Perry), it is remarkable that she did not choose to offer a counter-perspective to Menardo's and General J.'s: a Guatemalan-Mayan

[27] Silko, *Almanac of the Dead*, 495.
[28] Silko, 293; emphasis added.
[29] Silko, 272.
[30] Silko, 261.
[31] Silko, 321.

perspective. Guatemala's neocolonialist conflict is thus never fully explored; it becomes a fugitive geography or trope in the novel.

And thus when, later in the novel, the Mexican president "declare(s) a state of emergency as thousands and thousands of war refugees from the South were spilling over Mexico's southern boundaries," readers understand why the U.S. government "demanded that Mexico stop the refugees;" "rumors circulated about desert-camouflaged U.S. tanks deployed along the entire U.S. border."[32] The conflict has geographically shifted, the border now threatened by rabble-rousers is that of the United States. And this is the only border that matters, for it prevents all of the interconnected Souths from fully uniting.

Conversely, the only Central American characters that are slightly more fleshed out are the wealthy, light-skinned Salvadoran couples crossing the U.S./Mexico border with Alegría, Menardo's opportunistic wife, in one of Mario's Luxury Bus Tours. Alegría's cruel comments and merciless description of these bodies, as they fail to survive their unexpected desert crossing, contribute to the novel's image of Central Americans as humans whose personal drama is not worth looking into:

> Alegría knew she had only hours to find water or reach help at the highway after she saw the Salvadorian women. The two had died in each other's arms … delirious from thirst and had dumped the contents from their purses in a last desperate search for something to drink. One woman had drunk her French perfume; the empty bottle was in her lap.… She did not look at the faces, not for fear she might see black, swollen tongues or buzzard-eaten eye sockets, but because she had not noticed the women's faces while they were alive and certainly did not want to bother with these Salvadorian cows now that they were dead.… Alegría hardly bothered to notice the identity of the corpses she passed … she alone was going to live; she herself would survive.[33]

The wealth and banality of the Salvadoran couples crossing the border in their expensive party dresses clearly point to economic imbalance and social injustice as one of the sources of the conflict down below, but this point is not developed further. Alegría, who is white and feels "upper class" after her marriage to Menardo, also discloses her colonialist racism when she openly confesses that she "was not sorry to leave behind the sadness and the mess. Mexico would only become more violent…. The masses were naturally lazy everywhere, and they often starved; that was nature."[34]

[32] Silko, 513.
[33] Silko, 675–76.
[34] Silko, 671.

On the other hand, El Feo, Tacho's twin brother, believes that this mass of angry and desperate people will play a very different role in the war for the Americas: The "[p]eople had begun to gather spontaneously and moved as a mob or swarm follows instinct, then suddenly disperses."[35] Like a string of broken lights that can quickly infect one another and turn a whole system down, El Feo was confident that "one uprising would spark another and another. El Feo did not believe in political parties, ideology, or rules. El Feo believed in the land. With the return of Indian land would come the return of justice, followed by peace."[36] Foreseeing some of their most visible features (no recognizable leadership, power of the people, collective responsibility, lack of affiliation to political parties, spontaneous actions, alliances across race, class, and gender, and *fugitive discourse*, among others), El Feo's combat philosophy thus anticipates the antiglobalization movement, the Arab Spring, the #noDAPL movement, and the Central American human caravans that often try to reach the U.S. border, among other spontaneous movements led by the people.[37]

In Silko's novel, headless international tribalism is invoked as a form of effective resistance and it will be sparked by the dispossessed masses of the South, listening to the voices of their ancestors. The stream of restless fugitive figures in the novel is a key trigger of action. No wonder the *Popol Vuh*, most likely written by fugitive Guatemalan Mayas in the 16th century, in a context of brutal colonial violence and dispossession, is one of the central sources that inspired Silko's almanac in the novel.[38] Even if Central American voices are missing in this complex revolutionary network, Silko has placed trans-indigenous solidarity, and a borderless Indigenous America, at the center of the discussion.

[35] Silko, 513.

[36] Silko, 513.

[37] On panIndigenism and inter-tribal solidarity in the #noDAPL movement see Anna M. Brígido-Corachán, "Material Nature, Visual Sovereignty, and Water Rights: Unpacking the Standing Rock Movement," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 50, no. 1 (2017): 69–90. On radical trans-Indigenous solidarity with the Central American caravans moving north in recent years see Anna M. Brígido-Corachán, "Indigenous Homelands and Global Refugees: Unpacking Joy Harjo's Solidary Poetics in *An American Sunrise*," *Western American Literature* 59, no. 2 (2024): 125–52.

[38] Mariajosé Rodríguez-Pliego, "The Border Underground: Indigenous Cosmovisions in the Migration Narratives of Leslie Marmon Silko and Yuri Herrera," *Comparative Literature* 75, no. 1 (2023): 27–49.

CONCLUSION

Leslie Marmon Silko's novel *Almanac of the Dead* is a creative handbook for practical and theoretical, collective and individual Indigenous resistance: it presents concrete instructions to practice historical remembering and anti-colonial rewriting, engaged witnessing and testimony, transborder, cross-ethnic alliance building, and fugitive discourse, among others. Through the "fugitive spaces of Indigeneity," the Americas are broken apart and rebuilt as a borderless territory that is articulated through Indigenous vision and "continuous presence."[39] The novel awakens all readers to the interrelated acts of oppression and injustice that articulate the world(s) we live in. Silko envisions the South as a site of entangled conflicts and creative resistance—one that is tightly grounded in real historical conflicts and acts of resilience throughout the Americas. Even though the contemporary history of Guatemalan Mayas and of other Central American Indigenous groups remains somewhat muted in her archive—Silko's oppositional and resistant South takes this restless river of refugees into account. *Almanac of the Dead* ultimately aims to strengthen Indigenous alliances, transborder histories, migratory communities, and decolonizing struggles around the globe.

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"LIKE A GREAT RIVER FLOWING RESTLESS": FUGITIVE FIGURES ACROSS (CENTRAL) AMERICAN BORDERS IN LESLIE MARMON SILKO'S *ALMANAC OF THE DEAD*

Summary

Over seventy characters meet, interact, collide, and/or collaborate with one another in Leslie Marmon Silko's 763-page novel *Almanac of the Dead*. Radically shaking up Western conceptions of time, history, and space, Silko's opus follows the criss-crossing trajectories of Indigenous fugitives, actively seeking to document and confront unresolved colonial conflicts throughout the Americas. Silko's alternative archiving process is ambitious, purposeful, and yet necessarily selective, which results in some historical gaps. This article contends that, in her envisioning of a transborder, trans-Indigenous network of anticolonial resistance, Leslie Silko renders an idealized view of the unruly *South* as an embryonic and fugitive space of subaltern vindications and hope that is articulated predominantly around Mexico. This is a powerful vision but one which, nonetheless, barely mentions the ongoing Indigenous genocides taking place South of the Mexican border during the 1980s in Guatemala and El Salvador—the tumultuous decade Silko spent researching and writing her massive novel. To fill such an omission, this article takes account of Silko's selective incorporation of Southern geographies and peoples. It engages the territories south of the U.S. border that are included in Silko's Indigenous map of the Americas, and examines the novel's representation of Guatemalan Mayas and Salvadoran refugees, who appear as anonymous, ghostly shadows in the Mexican chapters.

Keywords: Native American Literature; Leslie Marmon Silko; *Almanac of the Dead*; fugitive discourse; Central American history; borders; Mexico; Global South

„JAK WIELKA RZEKA PŁYNĄCA NIESPOKOJNIE": POSTACIE UCIEKINIERÓW PRZEKRACZAJĄCYCH GRANICE AMERYKI (ŚRODKOWEJ) W POWIEŚCI *ALMANAC OF THE DEAD* LESLIE MARMON SILKO

Streszczenie

W powieści Leslie Marmon Silko *Almanac of the Dead* spotyka się i pracuje ze sobą ponad siedemdziesiąt postaci. Autorka zdecydowanie odrzuca zachodnie koncepcje czasu, historii i przestrzeni, śledząc krzyżujące się trajektorie rdzennych uciekinierów, starając się udokumentować i skonfrontować nierozwiązane konflikty na tle kolonialnym w obu Amerykach. Alternatywna strategia dokumentacji stosowana przez Silko jest ambitna i celowa, lecz z konieczności wybiórcza, przez co pojawiają się luki w dokumentacji. Ukazany przez nią obraz niepokornego Południa, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem Meksyku, to wyidealizowana wizja przestrzeni, w której powstaje transgraniczna, trans-rdzenna sieć antykolonialnego oporu. Książka, która jest ważnym obrazem, ledwie wspomina historię ludobójstw dokonanych na rdzennych mieszkańcach Gwatemali i Salwadoru z lat 80. XX wieku, kiedy to autorka opracowywała materiał do swego dzieła. Aby uzupełnić tę lukę, artykuł omawia wybiórcze potraktowanie tematu zawłaszczenia terenów Południa i ich ludności przez Silko, analizuje sposób w jaki powieść przedstawia gwatemalskich Majów i salwadorskich uchodźców, którzy pojawiają się jako anonimowe, upiorne cienie w historii Meksyku.

Słowa kluczowe: literatura rdzennych Amerykanów; Leslie Marmon Silko; *Almanac of the Dead*; dyskurs o uchodźcach; historia Ameryki Środkowej, granice; Globalne Południe