

**“Things which don’t shift and grow are dead things”:  
Revisiting Betonie’s Waste-Lands in Leslie Silko’s  
*Ceremony***

Anna M. Brígido-Corachán  
Universitat de València  
Anna.M.Brigido@uv.es

ABSTRACT

This article explores the socio-political background that led to widespread Native American urban relocation in the period following World War II – a historical episode which is featured in Leslie Marmon Silko’s acclaimed novel *Ceremony* (1977). Through an analysis of the recycling, reinterpreting practices carried out by one of *Ceremony*’s memorable supporting characters, Navajo healer Betonie, Silko’s political aim to interrogate the state of things and to re-value Native traditions in a context of ongoing relations of coloniality is made most clear. In Silko’s novel, Betonie acts as an organic intellectual who is able to identify and challenge the 1950s neocolonial structure that forced Native American communities to either embrace hegemonic practices and lifestyles or else be condemned to cultural reification and abject poverty. Through his waste-collecting and recycling activities, Betonie develops alternative solutions that go beyond a merely spiritual or epistemological dimension of life and materially intervene in the social text. The margins of 1950s urban sprawl functioned as repositories of indigenous cultural and intellectual capital that was being consciously, actively transformed by Native agents such as him. Thus, through *Ceremony*’s medicine man, Leslie Silko criticizes disempowering attitudes of victimhood and Native self-shame while vindicating indigenous historical territories and unconventional political strategies. She also anticipates the liminal practices of material and cultural recycling we see in

countless Western cities today, in the aftermath of the most recent world economic crisis.

**Keywords:** Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony*, urban Indians, neocolonialism, cultural recycling

## 1. Introduction

Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* hardly needs an introduction. After its publication in 1977, her debut novel soon became one of the most widely read works of fiction by a Native American author and is now part of the U.S. national high school curriculum and of hundreds of university syllabi in the United States and abroad.

Although there now stand over two hundred scholarly articles indirectly or directly addressing the wide variety of issues tackled in this novel (storytelling and myth, mixedblood alienation, trauma, homing-in, ecology, and Native healing practices, among others), the greater amount of these papers primarily focus either on Silko's innovative transference of Keresan traditions and stories to the novel form, or on *Ceremony's* protagonist, Tayo, a socially alienated and psychologically broken mixedblood Pueblo Native American. At the beginning of the novel Tayo returns home from World War II's Pacific front to the Laguna reservation in New Mexico with a kind of posttraumatic stress disorder known as 'battle fatigue' or combat stress reaction. In most scholarly analyses of *Ceremony*, all other characters in the novel are generally read in relation to Tayo's progress as he tries to overcome his withdrawal from life and community, or are identified as diegetic counterparts or symbolic helpers in his epic journey, in the rather mythic sections of the story. Such is the case of Betonie, the Navajo/Mexican healer whose unexpected advice and iconoclastic ceremony trigger Tayo's return to consciousness and ultimate quest towards recovery.

In this article I specifically delve into Betonie's narrative scenes and do so independently from Tayo's own journey, in order to explore the post-war context of socioeconomic 'development' and urban relocation that transformed life in Native American communities during the 1950s-1960s, a context which serves as *Ceremony's* historical backdrop.<sup>1</sup> Stubbornly settled in a waste-land of sorts, a garbage dump located in the outskirts of the city of Gallup, New Mexico, where he has built his hogan, Betonie's creative and critical waste-recycling practices will establish him as a *postindian* warrior, as someone who has resisted in the face of colonial and neocolonizing forces, as someone whose active presence is imbued to the bone with the very concept of *survivance*, as defined by Native American writer and scholar Gerald Vizenor (1998).<sup>2</sup>

Betonie may not blatantly fulfill the role of public political agitator and leader that early critics such as Jack Forbes (1987: 22) and countless other readers might have wished for *Ceremony's* charismatic shaman. As Forbes posited in 1987 (*ibid*):

Can problems faced by Silko's characters be solved in a 'shamanistic' manner alone? (...). (W)hat if she were to have envisioned a more political conclusion? What if she were to

have identified the colonial network surrounding her people and developed a solution which challenged that network?

Silko's novel does not end with a radical political revolution at the social or institutional level. However, in this article I contend that Betonie functions as a true organic intellectual that is able to "identify the colonial network surrounding [his] people" – one who has developed creative solutions that go beyond the *shamanistic* dimension of life and intervene in the social text.<sup>3</sup> Throughout his memorable appearance in the novel, Betonie sharply interrogates the state of things, "reoriginalizes" and re-values Native traditions (Quijano's term, 1999: 99) in a context of ongoing "relations of coloniality" between hegemonic and subaltern cultures in the United States, and shares strategies for *survivance* that are not merely spiritual, but also epistemological, and material. For example, Betonie will identify and address one of the most important causes of contemporary Native disenfranchisement: a disempowering sense of self-shame, commonly manifesting itself in an attitude described by Gerald Vizenor (1998:50) as an "aesthetics of victimry" –a fundamental component of most Eurocentric representations of Native Americans. This internalized discourse of victimhood and debilitating apathy has been partly responsible for Native American tribal councils and individuals too often lying dormant or, worse, becoming directly or indirectly complicit with colonial powers, while territorial theft, assimilationist policies, cultural genocide, and other atrocities were being conducted in the name of progress and development.

Like a trickster rag picker, carefully collecting, studying, and archiving cultural/material artifacts from Gallup's garbage dump, Betonie reinterprets both traditional Navajo gnosis and contemporary Western practices of consumption and waste management, while he actively questions the new development-bound and uneven "relations of coloniality" (Quijano, 1999) Native American communities faced during the post-war period. Through Betonie's chapters, then, we can see how *Ceremony's* political stance was not only ground breaking in 1977 but remains relevant today, considering its strategic uses of material and cultural recycling in pauperized societies and disenfranchised collectives at a g/local scale.

## 2. Culture and Development in the Native American Southwest

The European colonization of the Native Americas in the territories that later became the United States is usually divided by contemporary historians into 5 phases of federal policy which, in different ways and under different guises, aimed at land theft and either destruction or assimilation of the Native body into the American mainstream. These historical periods are: treaty-making (17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries), removal (1830s), allotment (1880s), reorganization (1930s), termination (1950s), and self-determination (1970s-on) (Emmons, 2013).<sup>4</sup>

This article focuses on the two decades immediately following World War II, the period generally known as *termination*, which covers the years portrayed in Leslie Silko's narrative. It was during this time that federal protection of Natives, and also

federal funds and services officially ended; that is, Native American communities were considered fully emancipated tribes and judged able to survive without any federal aid. With the implementation of termination policies, Native tribes soon fell prey to state control and taxing, and also to the corporate exploitation of their remaining natural resources. Ultimately, it is this period of time, the 1950s and 1960s, when close to one hundred thousand Natives were relocated to cities (Fixico, 2000), that is key to understanding the Native American Literary Renaissance of the 1970s that Silko is a central part of.

*Ceremony* vividly illustrates the impact that the new concept of ‘development’ (first introduced by U.S. president Harry Truman in his inaugural presidential speech of 1949) had on Native American communities of the Southwest. Post-World War II developmental policies, also known as the Truman Doctrine, supposedly aimed at strengthening intellectual and technological solidarity with less privileged foreign countries characterized by massive poverty, at a time when all remaining European empires were quickly becoming decolonized as their former colonies had gained independence (Escobar, 1995). Clearly, such a philanthropic campaign on the part of the United States sought to increase direct economic and cultural control over these now free and vulnerable ‘developing’ nations and, therefore, contributed to strengthening the expansive American Empire of the Cold War years by increasing its area of political influence (Escobar, 1995; Churchill, 1997; Rist, 2002). These ‘philanthropic’ foreign policies, which were soon implemented over many geographical areas across the globe, had already been rehearsed in the very ‘backyards’ of the United States: in Latin America (Salvatore, 1998) and *also* in Native American reservations throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Jacobson, 1984; Churchill, 1997).

In 1947 the U.S. government completed a survey of all its mineral resources and discovered that many mineral-rich areas were located on reservation land. In the Southwest the Hopi, Apache, Laguna Pueblo, and Navajo shared a great percentage of the U.S. uranium, coal, oil, and gas reserves, which were part of the Grants mineral belt (Nies, 1996: 351). Then in 1949, Herbert Hoover, who had previously worked as a mining engineer, became president of the United States. Curiously, one of his first political decisions was to recommend termination as a federal policy affecting all Native American communities; this entailed the abrupt discontinuation of all federal aid and protection. Furthermore, termination involved cancelling Native tribes’ trust status, which resulted in Native communities having to pay taxes for all federal and state services used. Hoover also managed to eliminate some tribal constitutions and to neutralize the Indian Reorganization Act, the so-called Indian New Deal, which had enabled some reservation self-management in the 1930s. Termination ultimately aimed at ‘emancipating’ Native communities, liberating them economically so that energy corporations could have easy administrative access to all of these available mineral resources (Nies, 1996: 352). Termination would become official federal policy in 1953 after rich uranium deposits were discovered under Navajo territory, and once Dillon Meyer sat as Commissioner of Indian affairs.<sup>5</sup>

One of the most immediate consequences of federal termination policies was urban relocation. Many Native families were promised employment and price-protected housing if they left the reservation and, consequently, in an effort to escape utter poverty and disenfranchisement, over 200,000 Native Americans moved to cities between 1950 and 1968 (Nies, 1996: 253). According to the U.S. Census of 2010, 5.2 million people identified themselves as Native American (2.9 million or 0.9%) or Native American of mixed descent (2.3 million or 0.7%) (Norris, Vines, and Hoeffel, 2012: 1-3). Approximately 45% of this Native population live in urban areas today, a designation which does not include smaller border towns (National Urban Indian Family Coalition, 2007; Fixico, 2000).<sup>6</sup> Many of these Natives are third and even fourth generation urban Indians.<sup>7</sup>

'Developmental' repercussions in Native territory would include urban relocation, labor exploitation, ecological devastation, and irrevocable cultural loss. Additionally, this drive for internal development would bring on a whole new set of psycho-social pathologies and traumas, many of which affected Native war veterans who already suffered from combat stress reaction. This is the case of Tayo, Silko's well-known protagonist (Brígido-Corachán, 2012).

### **3. Mixed Heritages and Liminal Space: A Navajo Healer in the Urban Frontier**

In *Ceremony*, published in 1977 but set in the early 1950s Southwest, Leslie Silko was one of the first Native American authors to vindicate indigenous intellectual traditions and ways of knowledge as successful sources of psychological and social healing (Mitchell, 1979; Blumenthal, 1990). However, and unlike many nationalist-oriented Native American scholars who currently favor tribal theories based on autochthonous epistemologies that turn away from Western theory and thought,<sup>8</sup> mixedblood healer Betonie is presented as the ultimate collector and *recycler* of Western refuse.

Betonie's grandfather, Descheeny, was a Navajo medicine man who defiantly took in a Mexican captive with hazel green eyes – a powerful cross-cultural union that brought about the strategic reconfiguration and strengthening of his rituals and gave rise to a new genealogical line of mixedblood healers. His Mexican grandmother thus played a key role in the development of Betonie's own healing philosophy and idiosyncratic practices: "'This is the only way', she told [Descheeny]. 'It cannot be done alone. We must have power from everywhere. Even the power we can get from the whites'" (*Ceremony* 150). Betonie thus gathers, safeguards, and creatively reinterprets discarded methods and artifacts that may contain some healing potential, regardless of their ethnic origin or prior function.<sup>9</sup>

At a turning point in Silko's novel, when everything else has failed (white doctors, counselors, and hospitals, traditional Pueblo medicine), Tayo is sent to meet this eccentric medicine man and ask for his advice.<sup>10</sup> Betonie's Navajo family lives nearby, in the Chuska mountains North of Gallup, but Betonie himself has chosen to leave the Navajo reservation and relocate to the outskirts of this border town between New

Mexico and Arizona: Gallup, or Na'nízhoozhí, as it is known among the Diné, and which, incidentally, was built on stolen Navajo lands.

Kimberley Blaeser (1996: 158) has pointed out that most mixedblood characters in contemporary Native American novels are able to overcome their alienation and marginalization when they move back to a 'center' that may be of a geographical, spiritual, communal, and/or epistemological kind. Betonie willingly positions himself in the geographical and cultural margins, outside of both city and reservation. Imbued in epistemological and historical liminality, he proves that such a 'center' can be built anywhere.<sup>11</sup>

Today, Gallup is a small border town with a population of about 21,700, 43% of which is of Native American heritage.<sup>12</sup> When many of these Native American families relocated to Gallup in the 1950s they had to endure extremely harsh living conditions. As Silko briefly describes in *Ceremony*, most relocated Natives lived in the colored quarters by the banks of the river to the North of the city, in "Little Africa, where blacks, Mexicans, and Indians lived" (108) in shacks, and under bridges. Once again, federal promises of work and housing were broken and most Native men soon fell prey to undignified salaries, unemployment, psychological alienation, and alcoholism; women were often forced to resort to prostitution. Police raids would become common under these bridges, and children were often taken from their mothers to foster homes and shelters in the area. Silko's novel suggests that one such child, born under a bridge in Gallup of a dissolute, perhaps prostitute, mother was Tayo himself, an urban Indian, before he was left in Laguna at age four with his grandmother and uncles.

Betonie lives in a house "built into the hill" (*Ceremony* 119), yet close enough to the colored quarters. His living space, with a roof made of sand and dirt, resembles an underground Kiva or Navajo ceremonial chamber, a kind of cliff dwelling. As he himself explains, his hogan was there first, on Navajo grounds, before the whites arrived. Now he uses its point of elevation and its proximity to the dump and to the shacks, where relocated urban Indians pile up, as a panopticum of sorts, as a privileged position from which to observe and reflect on this newest social 'development': the urban sprawl of Indian disenfranchisement. In such a manner, Betonie actually inhabits a unique frontier space characterized by transculturation, tricksterism, fluidity, and multidirectionality. Just as an ordinary territory is fixed, *imagined* and *mapped* by colonial powers, the dynamic space of the frontier refuses such containment and "carries with it such a heavy burden of colonial discourse, it can only be conceived as a space of extreme contestation" (Owens, 1998: 26).<sup>13</sup>

By relocating his personal 'center' to this hill, Betonie escapes the "clearly demarcated reservation space" (Owens, 1998: 27) and also the organized urban grid where Indians are allocated very specific geo-social whereabouts. These two 'urban territories' or scenarios imagined by neocolonial powers for Native Americans in the 1950s are in plain view from Betonie's hogan: the arroyo embankment, where Natives are condemned to the invisibility of disenfranchisement and abject poverty, and the Ceremonial Grounds, where the Inter-tribal Indian Ceremonial takes place once a year, and where Indians are condemned to the simulation of a performance on stage, mainly

aimed to entertain tourists.<sup>14</sup> As Owens has pointed out (1998: 27), Indian territory “transcends geographical location,” and Betonie constantly reminds the reader that such is his case:

“You know, at one time when my great-grandmother was young, Navajos lived in all these hills” (...) “It strikes me funny,” the medicine man said, shaking his head, “people wondering why I live so close to this filthy town. But see, this hogan was here first. Built long before the white people ever came. It is this town down there which is out of place. Not this old medicine man. (*Ceremony* 118)

In his *Dirty Wars. Landscape, Power, and Waste in Western American Literature*, John Beck (2009: 152) also contends that Betonie fulfills a clear political function. Both Betonie's defence of adaptability and change as key to Native survival and his conscious re-location to the urban waste-lands make him a “politically configured (...) figure of engaged opposition to both ossified tradition and capitalist development,” where commercialized traditions are displayed as a tool of neocolonial domination. No other symbol illustrates such reified cultural subservience to hegemonic culture as much as the Gallup Ceremonials where Indians perform simulated *Indianness* while white tourists watch “from the grandstand” (*Ceremony* 116).

And so from this privileged position on top of the hill, at the intersection between the Chuska Mountains, Gallup's garbage dumps, “Little Africa,” and the Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial Grounds, Betonie “can keep track of people” (*Ceremony* 117). He can also experience first-hand the contradictions that lay in the simultaneous coexistence of what anthropologist Bonfil Batalla (1989) has called the *Mexico imaginario* (imaginary hegemonic Mexico) and the *Mexico profundo* (deep indigenous Mexico), which, applied to Gallup, translates as the tension between a commodified, unthreatening Indian presence (the pow wow dancers performing for whites and tourists on a stage) and the invisible yet conspicuous absence of real Natives living in abject poverty under bridges, and temporarily hiding during the Intertribal Ceremonial week. We could thus say that Betonie lives at the interstices of the modern and the traditional, the rural and the urban, between the neocolonial cultural industries and capitalist waste. He actively criticizes the uneven development blatantly displayed in post-war American society where Natives inhabit a “small world” when compared to “the world of comfort in the sprawling houses [Betonie]'d seen in California, a world of plenty” (*Ceremony* 127). Betonie himself had been a full urban Indian a few decades back, when he was sent by his Navajo family to study and learn the English language at the Sherman Institute in Riverside California so that he could carry the ceremonies in the new language and also to study the ‘enemy.’ As he points out to Tayo, change is key to survival, for “things which don't shift and grow are dead things” (*Ceremony* 126).

#### **4. Lessons from the Dump: Betonie's Recycling Practices**

To negotiate these utter contradictions, forms of social injustice, and uneven developments, Betonie devises his own ‘ceremonials,’ and for them he uses a wide

variety of mixed ingredients that pile up in his eclectic, eX-centric house in the outskirts of Gallup. These include cardboard boxes and plastic shopping bags containing dried sage, mountain tobacco, and willow twigs in bundles, together with all sorts of recycled Western artifacts: piles of newspapers, telephone books from distant American cities, Coke bottles, unused calendars, and much more.

(Tayo) wanted to dismiss all of it as an old man's rubbish, debris that had fallen out of the years, but the boxes and trunks, the bundles and stacks were plainly part of the pattern: they followed the concentric shadows of the room (*Ceremony* 120).

Tayo considers this impossible collage of broken commodities and old herbs a "medicine's man paraphernalia," but for Betonie they are simply new medicines for new times, and all of these objects have "stories alive in them" (*Ceremony* 120-121). Betonie's "recycler" role (Snodgrass, 2011: 63) is key to understanding Silko's criticism of the neocolonial network that kept disenfranchising Native communities in the 1950s. Like many behavioural scientists today, Betonie acts as a pioneer of waste-analysis, a collector and recycler who reinterprets and transforms the refuse and byproducts of Western development while challenging its former commodity function.<sup>15</sup>

Historically, garbage scavengers were social agents who became particularly visible in the early days of modernity and capitalist development. The growing industrialization that took place in the West during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries would give rise to an unavoidable vast accumulation of industrial waste and also to the emergence of this new social figure: the rag picker or *chiffonier* (Benjamin, 1999: 349; Assmann, 2002: 73).

As described by the French poet Baudelaire, the *chiffonier*:

collects and catalogues everything that the great city has cast off, everything it has lost and discarded, and broken. He goes through the archives of debauchery, and the confused array of refuse. He makes a selection, an intelligent choice, like a miser hoarding treasure, he collects the garbage that will become objects of utility or leisure when refurbished by Industrial magic (qtd. in Benjamin, 1999: 349 and in Assmann, 2002:73).

Above all, 19<sup>th</sup> century rag pickers would soon become, according to Aleida Assmann (2002: 73), new types of collectors, or archivists who, gathering the broken fragments of a civilization, diligently surveyed living history to produce an eclectic assortment of counter-memories. Thus, in *Ceremony*, scavenger Betonie is not merely "a figure of social misery but the agent of a cultural counter-memory"—his "archive of waste" is used to remember forgotten stories, which, in turn, become powerful materials for new ceremonies (Assmann, 2002: 74). In *Ceremony*, this so-called 'Industrial magic' becomes a transformative healing practice that takes into account the Navajo tradition, wherein Betonie's incorporation and mixing of new elements, products, and refuse of contemporary Western society enable him to successfully tackle modern pathologies and preoccupations affecting Native American communities. The medicine man's self-made industrial magic actually takes us back to the original meaning of the



word 'industry' in the English language: an "intelligent or clever working; skill, ingenuity, dexterity, or cleverness in doing anything" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). Betonie's defining creative skill is his ability to transform broken materials into new powerful artifacts by way of recycling, as well as his openness to imagine new uses for old things.

Recycling practices such as these are not a new phenomenon for Native American communities. Acoma Pueblo clay pots show how Pueblo Natives often recycled materials to extend their life and use. Clay pots were engineered and molded so they would last for many years and then, when they finally broke, they were "crushed down to a fine clay powder (...), then soaked to soften it to a workable clay consistency" so that new pots could be made out of it (United States Environmental Protection Agency, 1995). Recycling practices among Native Americans were not aesthetic but mostly practical and based on material need. Native American hunters used all parts of an animal prey including bones, hides, tissues, and inner organs to transform them into purses, sacks, or tools. Similarly, hand-woven quilts are traditional examples of textile recycling in many tribes.

Furthermore, after the arrival of Western colonizers, European gunflints, kettle pendants, and chipped glass were often turned into scrapers and other tools by Native tribes in Connecticut (Lavin, 2013), while tribes in the Northeast found a variety of functions for wampum bands, revealing how recycled Native and Western products soon became part of Native American cultural technologies and economic practices in colonial America.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, as Pueblo philosopher Gregory Cajete emphasizes, Native incorporation of Western technologies "is conservative and based on intrinsic need, and care is taken to ensure that technologies adopted and applied do not disrupt a particular ecology" (1999: 69, qtd. in Cheyfitz, 2009: 142).

Thus, just like Native children looking for food as their primary means of survival, "prowl[ing] for garbage in the alleys behind the houses" in the Gallup of the 1950s described by Leslie Silko, Betonie looks for spiritual, cultural, and also physical *survivance* in the dumps, ironically located next to the commodified Ceremonial Grounds. In fact, when Tayo first arrives in Gallup with his uncle, he describes Gallup's Indians as "walking survivors" who "by the time they realized what had happened to them, they must have believed it was too late to go home" (*Ceremony* 115).

For quite some time now, cultural critic Jesús Martín Barbero (1999) has studied the phenomenon of urban relocation of rural, mostly indigenous communities, and the cultural recycling they have carried out in the marginal *guettos* or *favelas* of large Latin American cities:

(...) en la actualidad, mucha de la gente que vive en la ciudad lo hace sobre la base de estrategias ilegales y la mayor parte de esa gente no ha nacido en la ciudad en la que se encuentra, procede del campo y habita en la ciudad, una ciudad que no es capaz de proporcionarle trabajo (...) La mayoría de la gente vive del **rebusque**, se rebusca la vida rehusando saberes, lenguajes, destrezas que la vida moderna ha dejado desfasadas.

*Rebusque* as an activity or way of life implies the creation of a system of search and classification of objects found in garbage cans but also, and just as importantly, the search for and reincorporation of old skills and practices that, once quite common, have since been abandoned and/or considered useless because their value was no longer appreciated. *Rebusque* practitioners rescue, transform, and use anything, however small or simple, that may contribute to their survival in the city. For Martín Barbero (1999), in fact, Latin American cities were, at the turn of the 21st century

(...) ante un mapa cultural bien diferente de aquel al que nos tiene acostumbrados la maniquea retórica del desarrollismo. El mapa real se halla tejido de continuidades y destiempos, de secretas vecindades e intercambios, entre modernidad y tradiciones (...) *La periferia o el suburbio -nuestros desmesurados barrios de invasión, favelas o callampas- se ha convertido en lugar estratégico del reciclaje cultural: esa cultura del rebusque* (Y.Campos/I.Ortiz,1998) en la que se mezclan la complicidad delincuencial con solidaridades vecinales y lealtades a toda prueba, una trama de intercambios y exclusiones que hablan de las transacciones morales sin las cuales resulta imposible sobrevivir en la ciudad, del *mestizaje entre la violencia que se sufre y aquella otra desde la que se resiste.*

The hidden economy of material and cultural recycling practiced by many relocated indigenous groups has been a recurrent reality in the peripheries of many Latin American cities since the 1990s and is now also visible in many cities of the West, as in the case in Greece and Spain, due to the current global crisis which is disenfranchising all kinds of social and ethnic collectives. This was also the reality in the developmental context of Native American relocation of the 1950s in the United States. Recycling, re-using, and reinventing in each of these contexts became not only a matter of physical survival but also constituted a whole reimagining of one's social experience and, as such, Betonie establishes these practices as a kind of resistance to the violence of developmental territorialization.

Any object, even those that may be identified as junk, has a dynamic value that is contextual, that may be lost and recuperated, or that may grow or disappear overtime (Thompson, 1979). Thus, waste can poignantly help us to understand the meaning of "cultural value" (Hawkins and Muecke, 2002), and Betonie's actions and reflections can reveal how the value of things and ideas truly depends on one's own needs.

Assmann's (2002) analysis of Betonie's "waste archive" as a vindicative site of counter-memories is very compelling but it does not fully address *Ceremony's* political context, that is, the impact that industrialization and developmental policies had on Native communities during the post-World War II era. Assmann (2002: 75-76) suggests that Betonie is interested in waste recycling from a purely metaphysical perspective – with Betonie's garbage collecting practices primarily intended for shamanistic ceremonies aimed at healing traumatic experiences. Similarly, Patricia Yaeger's (2003: 111) interpretation of Betonie's trash as a "site of self-healing" and of his archive as a place where "pain becomes epistemological, a source of perverse enlightenment" is cogent but does not take into account the political drive that *also* lays behind Betonie's actions. Things that have been disposed of, set aside, forgotten about, or rejected by

dominant society are reminiscent of the whole history of Native American communities in their violent relationship with white hegemonic society. The broken commodities and junk collected by the Navajo healer echo many past “cycles of loss and debris” in the Americas and their cyclical nature recalls native conceptions of circular time and history (Yaeger, 2003: 111); but once they become part of Betonie’s archive these objects are not just re-valued or imbued with epistemological or healing powers. Rather, phonebooks and calendars, coke bottles, and newspapers remain, literally, material data from a very concrete historical period: the 1950s, characterized by termination policies, urban relocation, mass-consumerism, and internal development. Recycled refuse is, on the other hand, also reminiscent of core characteristics in Pueblo history and worldview: adaptability, resilience, resistance.<sup>17</sup>

From his elevated observant position on the hills, watching “the land which was stolen (...) its theft being flaunted” (*Ceremony* 127), Betonie acts as an organic intellectual reflecting on colonial history, considering this new social experience, seeking ways to reimagine it, counter-hegemonically, on the Natives’ behalf, stirring in Tayo the “desire (...) to make things right, to take back” (*ibid*). Betonie’s role as *vigilante* of the fringes, unwilling to limit himself to the colonial confines of the Navajo reservation or to any other institutionally allocated urban Indian scenario, must be understood as a political statement that aims to vindicate the real, boundless extension of the Navajo territory, a persuasive reterritorialization of land and culture that will open up Tayo’s path in the second half of the book.

Thus, in addition to the holistic and epistemological dimensions that permeate Betonie’s archive (Assmann, 2002; Yaeger, 2003), the shaman’s interventions in Tayo’s narrative clearly manifest Silko’s interest in exploring and denouncing the neocolonial context of poverty, disenfranchisement, and commodification endured by Native communities during the 1950s. It is for this reason that Betonie’s appearance in the story is preceded by a striking series of seemingly disconnected episodes set in Gallup’s arroyo where Native survivors endure conditions of utter economic pauperization, alcoholism, alienation, and institutional abandonment. Betonie’s metaphysical recycling cannot be considered separately from his socio-political role as an organic intellectual. In his quest to find effective solutions to “challenge (...) the network” of hegemonic power (Forbes, 1987: 22) Betonie observes, interrogates, and shares his revelations, while the causes and agents responsible for such post-war realities are easily summoned up in the reader’s mind. Betonie functions as a liminal *persona* who lives in the intersections between tradition, spirituality, mass-marketed commodities, and reified cultures (the Ceremonial Grounds), his recycling practices ultimately seeking new meanings and new strategies for safely “entering and leaving modernity” at will, as García Canclini (1995) would say.

According to Mary Ellen Snodgrass (2011: 63), “(i)n an era of advanced capitalism, garbage becomes a token of planned obsolescence, sterility, and death,” but Betonie is able to turn this refuse into creative thought, cultural *reoriginalization* (Quijano, 1999), and, above all, physical and spiritual *survivance*. As Pueblo philosopher Gregory Cajete points out, a ceremony is, after all, “both a context for transferring knowledge and a

way to remember the responsibility we have to our relationships with life” (1999: 70-71).

For Tayo, Betonie’s garbage-collecting practices stir an anger that has slowly accumulated in him, a rage that has accrued from broken white promises, from the deterioration of his community away from traditional historical landscapes, from injustice, frustration, and guilt originating in his own *undignified* birth and childhood. Facing Betonie’s collection of refuse, the leftovers of the ‘developed’ society of Gallup, is cathartic for Tayo in that it will soon move him towards a position of pride, self-awareness, and responsibility. These are all the lost qualities that Tayo will have to pursue in his epic journey through the rest and most well-known parts of the novel. Tayo’s reconstitution starts with some grilled mutton ribs that are cooked by Betonie on the recycled front of a wrecked car he rescued from the dump, the ultimate re-invigorater.

By going urban, both Betonie and, briefly, Tayo (who was perhaps born in Gallup himself) become paradigms of the Native American Renaissance intelligentsia of the 1960s and the 1970s, who was able to creatively appropriate all this eclectic refuse when building their ‘centers’. In fact, most Native American writers and scholars remain urban Indians in the frontier, albeit with strong ties to their places of origin.

As Judith Nies points out, “(u)rban America made Indian America more aware of what reservation life had that greater American society did not –land, continuity, roots, a shared sense of community” (1996: 354). These urban Indians would become the activists, writers, artists, intellectuals, and scholars to revitalize Native cultures and traditions in the 1970s.

## 5. Conclusions

In this paper I briefly explored the context of urban relocation of Native communities in the post-World War II period, which occurred as a direct consequence of federal termination policies and developmental campaigns. Through Betonie’s recycling, reinterpretive practices, Silko builds a ground breaking political and epistemological framework that powerfully challenges the Eurocentric developmental model in the Southwest. The outskirts of the 1950s urban sprawl also functioned as repositories of indigenous cultural capital that was being consciously, actively transformed. Thus, through *Ceremony*’s medicine man, Betonie, Leslie Silko questions Native stoicism, self-shame, and the disempowering “aesthetics of victimry” (Vizenor, 1998) favored by dominant society. Leslie Silko also vindicates indigenous historical territories and unconventional socio-political strategies, and anticipates the liminal practices of material and cultural recycling we see in countless cities today, in the aftermath of the most recent world economic crisis.

As John Beck has pointed out, Betonie “overturns received definitions of value and waste” (2009: 152). His compilation of an archive of counter-memories and the myriad of strategies of epistemological, psychological, social, and political *survivance* he introduces turn him into a *postindian* warrior characterized by active presence,

resilience, and tradition-based critical re-invention. Indeed, as Michael D. Wilson contends, “(f)or most characters in *Ceremony*, the indeterminate hybrid space is uninhabitable, treacherous, even fatal” (2008: 35), yet Betonie and later Tayo, following his footsteps, show how cultural margins, often characterized by fragmented and re-configured rubble, can be a powerful site from which to rebuild life and culture – digging into the debris of the modern to reinvigorate tradition.

## Notes

1. For a more in-depth analysis of Tayo as cultural epic hero who rises to confront neocolonial pathologies affecting Native American communities see my article: “Patologías del desarrollo: Historia y cosmovisión indígenas en la novela de Leslie Silko, *Ceremony*” (2012). “Patologías del desarrollo” specifically delves into post-war reconfigurations of witchery and war, explores New Mexico’s uranium mines as sites of evil associated with internal colonization processes, and identifies g/local healing practices among the Pueblo Indians. Research for both articles was carried out under the auspices of the R&D&i project “Culture as a Resource of Development: Practices, Discourses and Representations in Contemporary Modernizing Processes”, funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (FFI2011-2014).

2. According to Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor (1998: 63; 2008: 19), *survivance* can be described as a powerful intertwinement of two concepts: survival and endurance or continuance. This term, which he associates with contemporary *postindian* warriors, emphasizes a sense of active presence that questions the practices of “dominance, tragedy, and victimry” (Vizenor, 2008:19) that have been so detrimental to Native communities since their first encounter with European invaders. *Postindian* warriors must confront the “aesthetic ruins of *indian* simulations” (Vizenor, 1998: 15). To these core meanings of *survivance*, which are evoked by the suffix *-ance* (survival and endurance), Helmbrecht Breinig adds those of remembrance and resistance, both of which nicely supplement Vizenor’s original definition (2008).

3. ‘Organic intellectuals’ were first described by Antonio Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks*. According to him, they voice subaltern preoccupations and ideas and favor the interests of a specific class or collective, whereas traditional intellectuals, although seemingly autonomous, are still tied to hegemonic institutions and discourses. Organic intellectuals thus play a crucial role in the articulation of counter-hegemonic discourses.

4. When tackling Native American *colonial* history, scholars tend to focus on pre-20<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century colonization processes, although, obviously, forms of internal colonization continued to take place throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, while Native communities were striving for sovereignty (Churchill, 1997; King, 2003; Bruyneel, 2007; Brígido-Corachán, 2012).

5. Dillon S. Myer, who had been in charge of the Japanese American internment or concentration camps during WWII, became Commissioner of Indian affairs in 1950 (Nies, 1996: 352).

6. This percentage rises to 63% urban Indians, that is, to two thirds of the Native American population today, if we include these smaller towns located near reservations. According to the

2010 U.S. Census, a total of 1.7% of 308.7 million Americans in the United States identified as American Indian or Alaskan, including mixedbloods.

7. We should also bear in mind that there were once Native cities, and therefore pre-colonial urban Indians, spread throughout the Americas prior to the arrival of the European colonizers. Some of these cities, such as Cahokia (East of St. Louis), were located in what is now the continental United States.

8. See, for example, works by Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Craig Womack, Robert Warrior, and Jace Weaver, with whom I share an aim to bring non-Eurocentric paradigms and tribal frameworks of analysis into play when engaging Native American literature. This effort can prove impractical, however, when considering Native American texts as inherently international and also as inter-connected and open to transformation and change. Native texts are produced by a wide variety of indigenous tribes that had already established networks of cultural exchange prior to European arrival, and some, such as Pueblo Indians, have been historically characterized by cultural diversity and an openness to incorporate other traditions into the communal body (Silko, 1997; Allen, 1998). Some Native works are, therefore, more open to intercultural conversations and analyses.

9. Several critics have examined Betonie's (and Tayo's) mixedblood peculiarities and potential. Such analyses became most frequent in 1990s literary criticism, when hybridity and mixing became staples of postcolonial theory and were considered key features for analyzing culture (Riley, 1992; Owens, 1998: 35-36). However, very little has been said of Betonie's status as an urban Indian, located at the spatial outskirts of several Southwestern cultures. In his essay, "Blue Medicine", Kenneth Lincoln delves more deeply into Betonie's mixed ancestry and on the implications of reconfigured rituals and change to "counter racial divisions" and to "unify people" (2002: 53). On Tayo's and also Leslie Silko's mixedblood heritages as liminal sources of communal transformation see Owens (1992: 35), Silko (1997), and Nelson (2005: 245-247). On Descheeny's story and its role in Tayo's own homing-in ritual see also Silko's *Ceremony*, pp.145-152.

10. Before visiting Betonie, Tayo had already been assisted by Laguna healer Ku'oosh who, although unable to cure him, is first to relate Tayo's sickness to something greater than 'battle fatigue': the loss of balance between the community, its landscape, and traditions, all of which are disintegrating. On the pivotal role of ceremonies and traditional Native American medicine in *Ceremony* see Mitchell (1979) and Lincoln (2002).

11. Both Betonie and Uncle Josiah's Mexican lover, Night Swan, have, in fact, built a kind of spiritual and physical dwelling characterized by "peaceful isolation" (Wilson, 2008: 35), at a remove from their own communities of origin.

12. Located near the Four Corner region, between the Navajo and Pueblo reservations, and founded as a railroad town when some of the first train tracks uniting the Atlantic and Pacific were laid in the 1880s, today 20.9% of Gallup's population remains below the poverty line. 35.2% of Gallup's citizens are white, while 43.8% identify themselves as Native American, and remaining groups are Latino, African American, and others (2010 U.S. Census Bureau). According to historian Donald Fixico, there were more than 50 liquor shops in Gallup in the late 1960s (2000: 88).

13. For a full definition of 'frontier space' and its intrinsic features in Native American fiction see Louis Owens (1998: 26).

14. The Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial is a festival supposedly honoring Native American cultures that features pow-wow dancing, rodeos, horse races, and an Indian market. The festival has however been co-opted by whites, who have been managing it and making most of the

profit, for decades. In such tourist scenario, where sacred ceremonies and traditional practices are reified and decontextualized, Indians are displayed by the city council as a spectacle of the past, "simulations of Indianness" (Vizenor, 1998: 160) from the official colonial archive.

15. For an in-depth account of waste and refuse as core data to analyze and understand modern societies see the *Encyclopedia of Consumption and Waste* (Zimring et. al., 2012).

16. For further examples of recycling practices in pre-colonial and colonial America see Marshall J. Becker's "Small Wampum Bands Used by Native Americans in the Northeast: Functions and Recycling" (2008), Lucianne Lavin's *Connecticut's Indigenous Peoples. What Archeology, History, and Oral Traditions Teach Us about Their Communities and Cultures* (2013), or selected articles in Michael E. Harkin's and David R. Lewis' edited volume: *Native Americans and the Environment. Perspectives on the Ecological Indian*. (2007).

17. On the trans-cultural inclusiveness and adaptability typical of Pueblo worldviews see Silko's essay collection *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit* (1997) and Paula Gunn Allen's *Off the Reservation. Reflections on Boundary-Busting, Border-Crossing, Loose Canons* (1998). On the adaptability and ceaseless transformations of Navajo culture see Peter Iverson (2002) and David. A. Rice (2005: 139).

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