Native American and Chicano/a Literature of the American Southwest

*Intersections of Indigenous Literature*

Christina M. Hebebrand

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Intersections of Indigenous Literature

Christina M. Hebebrand

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FOUR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOTES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDEX</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgments

“3 AM.” From the book *the last song* by Joy Harjo. Copyright © 1975. Reprinted by permission of the author.


Introduction

This study sets out to demonstrate that the shared history of Chicanos/as and Native Americans in the Southwest, their spiritual attachment to their homeland, and the diverse cultural, tribal, and familial influences on their lives, determine their literary characters, personas, and lyric voices and reflect their struggle to establish a unified bicultural identity. This identity allows them to persevere in the dominant Euro-American society as a unique cultural and social group. In mediating between the conflicting elements that impact their sense of self, indigenous authors of the Southwest can be fruitfully studied as a coherent group that sets itself apart from their colonizers. Some indigenous authors use the expression “the people” (sometimes spelled with a capital “p” or italicized) to designate their group; both Rudolfo Anaya (Chicano) in his novels *Bless me, Ultima* (1972), *Heart of Aztlán* (1976), and *Alburquerque* (1992), and Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo) in her novel *Almanac of the Dead* (1991) frequently make use of this expression to suggest a unity among tribal people of the Southwest. The name Chicanos/as gave themselves, “La Raza,” and the Navajo word by which tribal members call themselves, “Diné,” which means “the People” as well, can be seen as further examples of southwestern indigenous peoples’ belief in the cultural affinity with each other.

In the 1977 collection of southwestern literary voices, entitled *Southwest: A Contemporary Anthology*, the editors Karl and Jane Kopp write, “The Southwest and its spirit are not defined by state lines, for geography, climate, and the human experience bound up with them elude such things” (393). This statement is reflected in the various attempts to define the Southwest geographically, i.e. in the diverging ways of broadly or narrowly delineating its demarcations. While the editors of *Southwest* follow the broader definition approach, including western Arkansas and Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico and southern Colorado, Arizona and southern Utah, as well as southern California, they do point to the fact that “The center of the Southwest is located in an area of Arizona and New Mexico that transcends the state boundaries, coincidental with an ancient kingdom or nation of the Anasazi” (xi). Moreover, the Southwest is a distinct region of the United States because “The original inhabitants of the Southwest, the Anasazi, and their descendants, plus other native peoples who journeyed to the New World long before Cortez or Columbus, have shaped a rich tradition of close involvement with ‘place’” (x).

This sense of place, the feeling of attachment to the homeland, is reflected in the literary works of contemporary Native American and Chicano/a writers of the Southwest, and thus is one of several parallels that link these authors with each other. Janice Monk and Vera Norwood, in their article “Angles of Visions: Enhancing Our Perspectives on the Southwest” (1987), refer to this connection as well, stating that contemporary Native American and Chicano/a writers place emphasis on the connection between creative expression and the land, so that many of their “inspirations, materials, themes, and processes of creation emanate directly from the land,” and thus allow them to develop their unique literary voices (40).
In fact, the inspiration that southwestern indigenous authors draw from the land is not related only to themes and characters; more than just providing them with material to write about, the land to them is a creative force in a spiritual sense as well. Both Chicano/a and Native American authors of the Southwest make clear in their writing that for them, the region is indeed a holy ground, referring to their spiritual and ancestral ties to the land. N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa), who grew up on the Jemez Pueblo reservation, confirms this notion when he states in his essay, “Landscape with Words in the Foreground” (1987), that “language and literature involve sacred matter and sacred places, places of deepest mystery and ancient vision” (1). Similarly, Rudolfo Anaya (Chicano) underscores his and his characters’ spiritual attachment to the Southwest in his novels by evoking the image of Aztlán, the lost and holy land of the Chicanos/as, and by making it the place to which they turn in their search for a sense of identity.

“The literature that emerges” from the Southwest, Reed Way Dasenbrock points out, is determined by “the cultural contact situation of the Southwest” (310), which is mainly determined by three cultures: the Native American, the Chicano/a, and the Euro-American culture. While a case can be made that Chicano/a and Native American authors are indeed (new) regional writers based on the representation of local characteristics in their works, regionalism is not the best category to subsume them under, because doing so would place them in the same group as Anglo authors of the Southwest, like Cormack McCarthy, for instance. However, such categorization would deflect from Chicano/a and Native American writers’ resistance against Euro-American subjugation and their struggle to establish a sense of identity based on their ancient heritage. Consequently, this study suggests that it is more useful to investigate the parallels between those authors of the Southwest who are indigenous to the land and draw upon their tradition and culture in the production of their works and thus set themselves apart from the Euro-American writers of the region.

Chicano/a writers of the American Southwest have always been aware of their Indian heritage, and at least since the Chicano Movement and Literary Renaissance in the 1960s they have drawn attention to this fact in their writing as well. The use of the term “Chicano”—derived from the Spanish word “Mexicano”—which became popular during the Chicano “Movimiento,” has not only served to unite Chicanos/as in their fight against Euro-American oppression, but is also intended to express that people of Mexican descent are not to be put in the same category as people who voluntarily left their land of origin and adopted an American nationality, i.e. as immigrants to the United States. In his introduction to Aztlán: An Anthology of Mexican American Literature (1973), Luis Valdez states:

Our insistence on calling ourselves Chicanos stems from a realization that we are not just one more minority group in the United States. We reject the semantic games of sociologists and whitewashed Mexicans who frantically identify us as Mexican-Americans, Spanish-Americans, Latin-Americans, Spanish-surname, Americans of Mexican descent, etc. We further reject efforts to make us disappear into the white melting pot […]. (xiv)
First and foremost, despite their mestizo, or tricultural (Indian, Spanish, and American) mixed-blood heritage, Chicanos/as see themselves as Indio, as descendants of the indigenous population of the American Southwest and Mexico, a fact that shows in many works by contemporary Chicano/a writers of the Southwest in their drawing upon ancient Indian religious thought, folk tales, and their homeland, Aztlán.

Since many Chicano/a writers of the Southwest are quite open in the expression of their pride in their indigenous heritage, and since their works range from subtle articulations of the significance of their ancestry to explicit and loud demands of being recognized as indigenous peoples, it is not surprising that some attention has been given to exploring the traces of Indian roots in Chicano/a literature. It is not possible to list them all, but it seems that they can be loosely grouped into three categories. Many of these studies, such as Aztlán: Essays on the Chicano Homeland (1989), edited by Rudolfo Anaya and Francisco Lomeli, focus on the Chicanos/as’ history of colonization and oppression, their “reawakening” during the Chicano Movement, and their renewed pride in their Indian heritage through their identification with their homeland Aztlán. Other works, such as Alfred Arteaga’s Chicano Poetics: Heterotexts and Hybridities (1997), or Ramón Saldívar’s Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference (1990) explore the structural, formal, and linguistic peculiarities of Chicano/a writing due to Chicano/a authors’ awareness of mestizaje, their mestizo heritage. Another group of critics investigate the reflection of Indian roots, most prominently their use of legends and folk tales as well as Indian religious thought, in the works of individual authors. Examples of this latter kind of criticism are Jane Rogers’ “The Function of the La Llorona Motif in Rudolfo Anaya’s Bless Me, Ultima” (1997), or Ralph E. Rodriguez’s “Chicana/o Fiction from Resistance to Contestation: The Role of Creation in Ana Castillo’s So Far From God” (2000).

While these critical studies recognize the influence of (ancient) Indian culture on contemporary Chicano literature and its relationship to other cultural influences, most prominently that of the dominant Euro-American society, thereby confirming the notion of mestizaje, there as yet has been no in-depth study of the intersections between contemporary Native American culture and Chicano/a culture as reflected in their literatures. Because contemporary Native Americans are to a large extent mixed bloods as well, descendants of sometimes more than one Indian tribe and Europeans, and because they are often marginalized as one group among the miscellaneous “ethnic” people that comprise the “melting pot” that is the United States, they are faced with a similar problem as Chicanos/as are today as well: to establish a sense of self by mediating among the various cultural, tribal, and spiritual factors that determine their identity. At the same time they struggle to affirm and reinforce their indigenous birthright to the Southwest, resisting being “swallowed” by the dominant, assimilationist Euro-American society. Indeed, Luis Valdez’ emphatic statement about the character of Chicanos/as in defiance of the “immigrant complex” imposed on them (xxxii) may be applied to contemporary Native Americans as well to warn against a reading of their works in the larger category of “ethnic studies”:

We left no teeming shore in Europe, hungry and eager to reach the New World. We crossed no ocean in an over-crowded boat, impatient and
eager to arrive at Ellis Island in New York. No Statue of Liberty ever greeted our arrival in this country, and left us with the notion that the land was free, even though Mexicans and Indians already lived on it. We did not kill, rape, and steal under the pretext of Manifest Destiny and Western Expansion. We did not, in fact, come to the United States at all. The United States came to us. (xxxiii)

Chapter 1 will provide the historical and cultural context for this study. It serves to demonstrate the historical ties of Native Americans and Chicanos/as in the American Southwest in order to illustrate their cultural connection as well as their shared fate as colonized people. This demonstration is important because knowledge of the similar fate and perspectives of these colonized peoples will enable the reader to understand better the writers’ need to heal the wounds of conquest and the resulting loss of land, language, religion, and culture, and their consequent preoccupation with these themes in their works. Tracing the trends in American historiography to demonstrate a continuous neglect and misrepresentation of indigenous peoples in American history writing, this chapter also shows how indigenous writers of the Southwest have realized the potential of their novels to question the prevalent Eurocentric version of the historical past and to write counternarratives, which prepare the grounds on which history can be reimagined and reconstructed to provide new paths for the future. By contesting the popular Euro-American rendition of the history of the colonization of North America through various narratives and “revisions,” Native American and Chicano/a writers succeed in recreating a history of the Americas, and thus engage in the process of historiography not only to critique the uncritically accepted “historical” past, but more importantly to reconfigure it in order to envision and prepare for a future in which native peoples can find their appropriate place in the world and forge their individual, hybrid sense of self.

Chapter 2 will investigate contemporary Native American and Chicano/a writers’ spiritual connection to their homeland. Examining how tribes’ origin stories inform their understanding of the land they call home demonstrates how indigenous people depend on the land for the establishment of their spiritual identity as well as for the actual practice of their religion. The chapter will also discuss how the Euro-American disregard of tribal belief systems has not only led to the colonizers’ ruthless missionary and conversion attempts, but has also caused the destruction of many places the tribes consider sacred. The Euro-American perception of the land as a commodity to be exploited and occupied has forced native peoples across the entire North American continent to leave their lands and to be separated from their ancestral homes. Consequently, literary works by Native American and Chicano/a writers reflect this devaluation of their religion and their sacred places, which has resulted in their struggling to practice their religions and to establish and maintain a spiritual relationship with their homeland. Moreover, the European colonizers’ imposition of their Christian religion, which in many cases has been fully or partially successful, has caused tribal people today to face the challenge of having to come to terms with their dual heritage in establishing their hybrid spiritual identity—a task that many of their literary works reflect.

Chapter 3 will apply Henri Tajfel’s social psychological theory of majority influence in an attempt to understand Native American and Chicano/a authors’ recognition of and interaction with the majority “Other,” their resistance against being subjugated by their
colonizers, and their efforts to sustain their distinct culture within the dominant Euro-American society. Many works by southwestern indigenous authors reflect this dialectic in a variety of ways, for instance, in their often openly polemical way of drawing attention to indigenous people’s ancestry and rich tradition and the injustice and crimes being committed against them by the colonizers. While some works display their authors’ efforts to reject and condemn any influence the majority culture may have on them, thus reinforcing the idea that indigenous people must define themselves as distinct social and cultural groups through which they achieve their sense of self precisely within this group and as a group, others demonstrate a more moderate and conciliatory stance, recognizing the need to adapt to the changed parameters and conditions of the late 20th century U.S. society.

Employing an extension and revision of Paul Ricoeur’s notion of “narrative identity” as posited by Ajit Maan, Chapter 4 will explore how works by Native American and Chicano/a authors of the Southwest express their people’s attempts to mediate the various and conflicting influences of native and non-native voices. By appropriating the dominant Anglo-American culture’s language and literary forms while at the same time incorporating texts, fragmented narratives and narrative forms, as well as material from their oral traditions to oppose those literary conventions, these indigenous authors’ works point to the struggle toward a coherent and non-fractured “internarrative identity” that the bicultural subject has to undergo in order to incorporate and mediate between these adverse elements. The chapter explores the connection between the formal characteristics and the subject matters of works by Native American and Chicano/a authors to discuss how the use of “hybrid” narrative forms reflects the creation of an “internarrative” bicultural identity.4

The interdisciplinary approach of this study combined with close readings of selected works by Native American and Chicano/a authors of the Southwest illuminates the close relation between these two literatures and confirms the contention that they indeed constitute an intersecting, indigenous southwestern American literature that is distinct and different from other literary works of the region as well as from other ethnic American literatures. Literary critics, scholars, and students must realize that southwestern indigenous literatures need to be studied in tandem in order to fully comprehend native authors’ resistance to being subsumed under the category of ethnic American writers as well as to understand their efforts to establish their rightful place in the canon of American literature.
Chapter One
Imagined Past, Imagined Future: Recreating History to Write the Future

Chicano critic Ramón Saldívar has pointed out that “For Chicano narrative, history is the subtext that we must recover because history itself is the subject of its discourse. History cannot be conceived as the mere ‘background’ or ‘context’ for this literature; rather, history turns out to be the decisive determinant of the form and content of the literature” (5). Native American poet Joy Harjo, an enrolled member of the Muscogee Tribe, emphasized the significance of history for Native American authors when she said in an interview with Greg Sarris, “History is right here in everybody’s face, in everybody’s heart, and it doesn’t stop and end, but it’s ongoing, and it’s circular, and we’re in it, and we’re in it together” (Joy Harjo, Lannan Literary Videos 1996; emphasis added). These two quotations encompass two of the most essential elements of the history of colonization shared by Native Americans and Chicanos/as, and hence not only explain the many references to historical facts in Native American and Chicano/a literature, but also point to the importance of incorporating an exploration of these authors’ collective history into an analysis of their works.

Since a complete history of indigenous peoples of the Southwest would clearly go beyond the scope of this study, the focus here will lie on the most crucial events affecting the region in the conquest and colonization of North America. In this context, it is imperative to investigate the Spanish as well as the later U.S. (Anglo-American) colonization of the Southwest, both of which were equally violent and paralleled each other in many ways. After exploring the shared history of Native Americans and Chicanos/as in this region and occasionally demonstrating how passages from their literature can serve as historical documents and interpretations, this chapter will investigate how Native American and Chicano/a authors make use of history in their works by “reimagining” and rewriting their past in counternarratives in order not only to find a way to cope with this unjust and violent history but also to create a better path for the future.

When discussing indigenous people’s history in North America it is important to point out, as James Wilson does, for example, in his book The Earth Shall Weep (1998), the lack of distinction most native people make between the terms “story” and “history.” Both expressions are from the realm of storytelling and are “part of the oral tradition” (Wilson 4). Through storytelling, mythical stories (such as creation stories), which are deeply rooted in the tribes’ traditions, as well as events of the past, are passed on to the younger generations. Moreover, often these stories are the only documents of tribal history, as most “Indian tribes had little use for recording past events; the idea of keeping a careful chronological record of events never seemed to impress the greater number of tribes of the continent” (Deloria 98). Similarly, the diverging nature of Native American and Christian creation stories, as Wilson notes, gives clues about the vastly different
worldviews, which, in fact, had a significant impact on the colonization of the Americas, and the American Southwest in particular. Vine Deloria, Jr., in his book *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion* (1994), states that “Christians see creation as the beginning event of a linear time sequence in which a divine plan is worked out, the conclusion of the sequence being an act of destruction bringing the world to an end” (78), the latter being symbolized by the Last Judgment. James Wilson points out that the Christian creation story focuses on the people’s “sin, banishment and loss” (4) and explains how in order to return to their “original state of grace,” Christians were once given the incarnation of God through Jesus Christ: “by intervening in our history at a specific, defined moment, God gives us a fixed point from which our history unravels away from Eden like a ball of string” (Wilson 5). This has led to the Christian notion of time as being linear and of all events occurring in a straight line with a clear beginning and end. This idea is further emphasized by the “Enlightenment idea of Progress and the theory of Evolution” (Wilson 6).

In contrast, the “beginning and end of time are of no apparent concern” to many tribal people (Deloria 78), as their worldview focuses on the cyclical nature of life. Native American creation stories focus on human beings as “an integral part of a ‘natural order,’ which embraces the whole of creation” (Wilson 7). These stories neither contain a fall from grace nor any idea of communal or inherited sin. Instead, indigenous people define themselves through their position in the natural world, their relationship to the land as well as the animal and botanical world. In annual ceremonies, tribes celebrate the seasons, the reappearance of natural phenomena, such as the return of the sun each year during the Zuñi dance Shalako each winter solstice (Allen 73), and food-related time periods, or seasons, such as the hunting season, the harvesting season, etc. Laguna Pueblo author Paula Gunn Allen states that “Cosmic cycles […] relate to life processes on earth and, by virtue of natural relationship, within the universe” (73). Consequently, “Historic time is […] less a straight line than a repeating cycle: instead of taking you a step further from your beginning, each year in some sense brings you back to it” (Wilson 7).

Due to this cyclical understanding of time, history is looked upon as cyclical as well, as Joy Harjo pointed out in the above quotation; events are thought—and expected—to repeat themselves. This worldview greatly benefited the conquerors—most prominently in this context Hernando Cortés, Francisco Vásquez de Coronado, and Don Juan de Oñate—and facilitated the colonization of the Americas. When Cortés and his troops arrived in central Mexico in 1519, a well-known Aztec legend about the god Quetzalcoatl, also called Feathered Serpent or Kukulcan by the Mayas (Vigil 42), worked in his favor and determined the welcome and treatment he received from the native people. The legend holds that during the Toltec rule, “the beneficent god Quetzalcoatl left the valley because of troubled times—mainly the downfall of the Toltec empire—with the promise that he would return” (Vigil 42) “gloriously from exile in the east to rule Mexico City” (Chávez 58). Upon seeing Cortés, the native people, above all the Aztec emperor, Montezuma, concluded he must be the returning god, coming back from the East, “intent on bringing back the good, moral, and just life” (Vigil 42). Thus Cortés and his followers (some of them local natives) were received on friendly terms, and they eventually seized Montezuma’s palace without much opposition. Discovering that the native people mistook him for a god, Cortés exploited the legend and the knowledge he gained of their pantheistic and polytheistic religion. By the time Cortés’ evil intent
became manifest, the Aztec leader had lost his power, so that he was easily defeated and eventually murdered. After Cortés’ capturing of Tenochtitlán, the modern day Mexico City, in 1521, the fall of the Aztec Empire was determined.

It is interesting to note, as Tzvetan Todorov does in his The Conquest of America (1984), that Cortés and his followers did not conquer, colonize, and thus destroy Mexico and its cities because they believed that the people were savages in need of civilization, as the later Anglo-American conquerors professed. Todorov maintains that Cortés drew many comparisons between Mexican and Spanish cities and found them to be equally civilized, that many of his comparisons (e.g. of the buildings and the marketplaces) were even “in Mexico’s favor” (128). Nonetheless, Cortés and the Spaniards were ruthless but at the same time clever in their conquering endeavors, as they not only exploited the Aztecs’ legends and religion, but also the gifts they received from the native people upon their arrival. One such “gift” was Malintzin, called Doña Marina by the Spaniards, later distorted into La Malinche. Vigil notes:

Malinche was originally bilingual, speaking the Nahuatl Aztec language and the Mayan dialect Aguilar [one of Cortés’ followers who became his initial interpreter] had learned, but she soon learned Spanish. Consequently, although Cortes [sic] understood only Spanish at the outset, he quickly utilized the two translators to become totally apprised of Indian designs. He used this tactical tool to speed up the march and to guard against the attack. (41)

Moreover, as Malintzin adopts the Spanish language, she functions not only as a linguistic translator, but also as a “cultural translator” of Indian customs and actions. Todorov asserts that “she resolutely chooses to side with the conquistadors. In fact, she is not content merely to translate; it is evident that she also adopts the Spaniards’ values and contributes as best as she can to the achievement of their goals” (100). It is probably this latter function in particular, along with the fact that she also became Cortés’ mistress, that has established the notion of Malintzin as a traitor, “as an incarnation of the betrayal of indigenous values, of servile submission to European culture and power” (Todorov 101).

There are several perspectives of La Malinche and many stories about her; in one she is equated with the mythic figure of La Llorona, the wailing woman who is said to have murdered her children to be with her lover, only to regret it later and cry for them every night by the river. Rudolfo Anaya has dedicated a book to the notion of La Malinche being La Llorona. In his novella, The Legend of La Llorona (1984), La Malinche is presented as a sympathetic and pitiful character who is shamelessly abused by her husband Cortés. When she finds out that he wants to take their children away from her and to give her to one of his captains as a gift, she drowns their twin sons in a lake not only to save them from this fate, but, more importantly, to sacrifice them in the war for a free Mexico (77).

Having defeated the Aztecs, Cortés and his followers conquered most of Mexico, gradually moving northward in their search for new land to conquer and occupy, thereby “projecting” their own myths onto the unknown region that was to become the Southwest” (Chávez 8). One of these myths concerned the Edenic and mystical place of the Aztecs’ origin, called Aztlán. Chávez states that “Aztlán, meaning either ‘land of the
herons’ or ‘land of whiteness,’ was an old name by the time of Cortés’ arrival. According to their own histories, the Aztecs had left that homeland, located somewhere in the north, in 1168 and journeyed to the lakes where in 1325 they founded Tenochtitlán” (8). Although there always has been controversy about where exactly Aztlán was located, it was and is thought to have been in the region several hundred miles north of Tenochtitlán, now the American Southwest, which has led Chicanos/as today to consider this region as the place of their home. However, the Spaniards’ search for Aztlán not only resulted in the emergence of the first “mestizos,” or mixed bloods of Indian and Spanish origin, but later it would also “lead to much uncertainty in the Chicanes’ image of themselves in both Mexico and the Southwest, for being descendants of both conquered Indians and conquering Spaniards and Indians, Chicanos would vacillate between a self-identity as foreigners and a self-identity as natives” (Chávez 10).

Another name for Aztlán was “Chicomoztoc,” which meant, “place of the seven caves” (Chávez 13). In 1538, two Franciscan friars set out for this mythic place, and they were the first to reach the (north-American) Southwest by land. “More than anything, their expedition caused the image of the Aztec homeland to become the first known Native American image to be applied to the region as a whole” (Chávez 13). In addition, reports from that same area, made by Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca in 1536, stated that he and his three companions “had heard stories about fabulously rich cities further north” (Wilson 188–89), which led to the organization of another expedition by the Spanish to find these cities, seven in number, as they became associated with the Seven Caves of the Aztecs (Chávez 14). Hence in 1539, Fray Marcos, accompanied by Esteban, a freed African slave, set out to explore the Southwest and reached the first of the Rio Grande Pueblos, Zuñi Pueblo, which Esteban called “Cibola (bison),” and which he claimed to be the first of the seven cities (Chávez 15). Wilson notes in The Earth Shall Weep (1998) that there are a number of stories surrounding this first encounter as well as a dance to commemorate it: “Many Pueblo people will tell you that ‘the first white man we saw was a black man,’ and at Jemez Pueblo on the Rio Grande there is an annual dance which […] portrays Esteban and Fray Marcos” (189; emphasis in the text).

Encouraged by these promising reports and descriptions of Zuñi Pueblo, which Fray Marcos described as “‘bigger than the city of Mexico’ and surrounded by a ‘land, which, in my opinion, is the largest and best of all those discovered’” (Wilson 190), the Spanish sent another expedition to this region, led by the ambitious Francisco Vásquez de Coronado. His expedition parallels in many ways the conquering of the Aztecs by Hernando Cortés, in that Coronado was not only able to use the knowledge of the Pueblo people’s culture and religion that was gathered from Fray Marco’s expedition, he also was so lucky as to arrive at an opportune time for his “mission.” Wilson writes:

For the Pueblos […] expectantly awaiting the ceremonial return of their own fantastically dressed ancestors, the spectacle of the Spanish cavalcade must have been full of disturbing images. […] Not surprisingly, when [the Spanish] sent emissaries into the villages to announce their impending arrival, the Indians interpreted their crosses as prayer sticks and assumed that the Spaniards were katsinas [ancestral spirits]. (190)
Hence it is important to note here that as much as the Spaniards were successful due to their superior weaponry and the ruthlessness of their conquest, their ultimate success lay in their ability to take advantage of the native people’s worldview. Wilson states that “The distinctive nature of the Puebloans’ civilization profoundly shaped how they saw the Spaniards and how the Spaniards saw them. Both sides had pre-existing categories into which they tried to incorporate the other” (188). Finding out about the native peoples’ myths and their belief in the cyclical nature of life, the Spanish were not shy to exploit the associations the native people made between the heroes of their mythical stories and their awaited return and the approaching conquerors.

Don Juan de Oñate’s expedition in 1595 was another step in the violent conquest of the Southwest. Ironically, before he set out on the expedition, he had been instructed by the Crown that “Your main purpose shall be the service of God Our Lord, the spreading of His holy Catholic faith, and the reduction and pacification of the natives of the said provinces” (Wilson 193; emphasis added). Since his predecessors had been very successful in their tactics, Oñate’s aim—like Coronado before him—was to use the knowledge he had gained of Native American culture to awe the Indians into submissions through ritual and a show of force. Knowing that the Pueblos would have heard of the conquest of Mexico by word of mouth, his entourage consciously mimicked many of the details of Cortés’ expedition against the Aztecs. The soldiers marched under an identical banner of the Virgin and were accompanied by Indian allies from the same people, the Tlascalan. (Wilson 193)

Despite Oñate’s order from the Crown to “reduce” (cf. above quotation) the natives of the Southwest, his—and his followers’—goal lay more in the submission of the Pueblos in order to turn the native people into slaves and cheap labor to work the land conquered by the Spanish, hence aspiring to improve their own position on the social ladder in the Spanish hierarchy. Nonetheless, faced with much resistance, Oñate and his troops brutally killed thousands of Puebloans, which led to his eventual resignation and the Crown’s decision to “hand over” the colony to the Franciscans for “missionary activity” (Wilson 194–97), which naturally focused on converting the native people to Catholicism, but also included assimilation in the form of suppressing native Indian languages.

The Franciscans’ presence left a significant mark on the Southwest, and can be found in works of contemporary Native American and Chicano/a authors of the region. One of the most prominent examples is doubtless N. Scott Momaday’s famous novel House Made of Dawn (1968). In it, Father Olguin, the Catholic priest on the Jemez Pueblo reservation, is a relevant figure and through him, Momaday illustrates the coexistence of Catholicism with the tribal religion at Jemez. Moreover, Father Olguin reads the diary of Fray Nicolás, his predecessor at the Catholic Church on the reservation, which reveals the Franciscan’s zealous missionary attempts to convert the people of Jemez to Catholicism. Fray Nicolás took a particular interest in the little boys—most prominently Francisco, the protagonist Abel’s grandfather—by making them altar boys and involving them in the
rituals of the church; this practice was in agreement with the missionary ideas of the Franciscans. As Wilson states:

Observing the central role of men in Pueblo religious life, and as the products of male-dominated society themselves, the friars tended to concentrate their efforts on the boys [...]. The friars regularly humiliated men who stepped out of line by punishing them in front of their children, sometimes graphically demonstrating their impotence in the face of colonial power by grabbing and twisting their testicles. (199–200)

Another literary document of the presence and missionary activities of Catholic priests in the Southwest is Rudolfo Anaya’s novel *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972). The protagonist Antonio’s family, especially his mother, is deeply committed to the Catholic Church, and his mother secretly hopes that he will grow up to become a priest. Antonio is instructed “in the mysteries of God” by Father Byrnes in catechism school (190), but the priest is unable to explain and answer existential questions about the nature of the Christian God, so that Antonio, who is considered by his friends to be the most religious of all boys and in one game even takes on the role of priest (208–15), resorts to explaining the Christian God’s flaws and oversights from the perspective of a native worldview: “‘Maybe God comes in cycles like the weather,’ I answered. ‘Maybe there are times when God is with us and times when he is not. Maybe it is like that now. God is hidden. He will be gone for many years, maybe centuries—’” (197). Antonio’s statement here is strikingly reminiscent of the Aztec legend of the god Quetzalcoatl, who, due to people’s immoral demeanor, went into exile and whose return the native people eagerly awaited.

The first Anglo-Americans who arrived in the Southwest during the first half of the 18th century were mainly business men who had heard about Mexico’s free trade policy, and traders interested in “the lucrative Mexican market”; however, they were soon followed by “land-hungry settlers and soldiers,” Anglo immigrants who, “under Mexico’s liberal colonization policy, […] were offered free land” (Wilson 210). The new colonizers reacted to the indigenous population with disdain, nourished by a “sense of racial superiority and national destiny that, in a different context, underlay the Indian Removal policy in the U.S.…(Wilson 211).

After Texas had gradually become more and more Anglo-American, Texan politicians declared it a republic in 1836 and requested admission to the United States. Texas was annexed by the U.S. government in 1846, and the political fate of the Southwest and its native people was determined. As becomes evident in the journalist John O’Sullivan’s infamous article in the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* in 1845, the Anglo settlers believed that it was their explicit right to take over the land:

Away, away with all these cobweb tissues of rights of discovery, exploration, settlement, contiguity, etc. The American claim is by the right of our manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federative self-government entrusted to us. It is a right such as that of the tree to the space of air and earth suitable for the full expansion of its principle and destiny of growth. […] It is in our
future far more than in the past history of Spanish exploration or French colonial rights that our True Title is to be found, (qtd. in Oakland Museum of California; emphasis added)

Consequently, when Mexico rejected any negotiations with the U.S. to purchase New Mexico and California from the Mexican Republic, the Mexican-American War broke out in 1846, and ended rather quickly due to the United States’ greater military power. When U.S. troops “entered Mexico City and hoisted the Stars and Stripes over the ‘halls of Montezuma’” (Wilson 212), Mexico was forced to surrender. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidago (1848) concluded the unequal war and resulted in Mexico’s ceding (present-day) California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas for a compensation of $15 million dollars (Miller/Faux 67).

As a consequence of these events, the Southwest faced a second phase of colonization, of invasion of their land, culture, and religion by foreign intruders. Unfortunately, this second colonization was no less violent and bloody, as it paralleled the first invasion in many ways. James Wilson states that “the US conquest of the Southwest ushered in a very different era for the Indians. Unlike the Spanish, Anglos did not view civilization primarily as something you imparted to other people—who were, almost certainly, racially incapable of it—but rather as something which, through settlement, you transposed into other areas” (213; emphasis in the text). Moreover, the Anglo immigrants were not interested in Indian labor, only Indian land, which made them view native peoples as merely another obstacle to overcome in the “civilization” and development of the region.

For Chicanos/as, the descendants of both indigenous peoples and the conquerors, the already problematic question of homeland and belonging and their self-image as Mexicans or Americans became even more shattered after the proclamation of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidago in 1848. Now the early settlers in the Southwest began to see themselves as Spanish-Americans instead of Mexicans. In contrast, new arrivals from Mexico, mainly invited into the country by the U.S. government before the depression as menial labor—then forced out of the country (or “repatriated”) during the depression (Meier/Ribera 148; Vigil 152–153)—were proud of being Mexican, which led to a rift between the old and new settlers. When Mexicans were again welcomed in the United States as labor and soldiers during World War II, the image of the Southwest changed decisively, and Chicanos/as for the first time began to see themselves (and be seen) as immigrants, manifested in the term “Mexican-American” which they now chose for themselves (Chávez 108). In this process of Americanization, even the earlier settlers, who had called themselves “Hispanos” previously, underwent this transition, reinforced by the increasing Americanization of their children. Consequently, “After the Second World War, Mexican-Americans found themselves separated from Mexico, unaccepted by the United States, but culturally reunited as an increasingly homogenous group unique to the Southwest” (Chávez 108).

Leslie Marmon Silko’s most famous novel, Ceremony (1977), not only documents the injustice of Anglo colonialism in the Southwest, but also shows a clear parallel between the situation of Native Americans and Chicanos/as today. A very important passage in Ceremony deals with the protagonist Tayo’s, and fellow Pueblo Indians’, post-World War II experiences. Although during the war Tayo and his peers were acknowledged for
their usefulness as soldiers, their lesser value as American citizens became clear even during recruitment: “Anyone can fight for America,’ [the recruiter] began, giving special emphasis to ‘America,’ “even you boys. In a time of need, anyone can fight for her. […] Now I know that you boys love America as much as we do, but this is your big chance to show it!” (64; emphasis in the text). Wearing a uniform of the U.S. army earned them borrowed respect, and each experienced a sort of “transformation” by putting on the uniform and becoming “one of the others.” For once, white people accepted them as being part of the same class, especially the Caucasian women whom they were able to attract, and who, in fact, were charmed even more by the soldiers’ exotic ethnicity. However, everything changed back to “normal” as soon as the war was over and they took off their uniforms. Tayo painfully realizes this situation and points it out to his fellow war veterans:

“One time there were these Indians, see. They put on uniforms, cut their hair. They went off to a big war. They had a real good time too. Bars served them booze, old white ladies smiled at them. At Indians, remember that, because that’s all they were. Indians. These Indians fucked white women, they had as much as they wanted too. […] These Indians got treated the same as anyone: Wake Island, Iwo Jima. They got the same medals for bravery, the same flag over the coffin. […] See these dumb Indians thought these good times would last. […] They were America the Beautiful too, this was the land of the free just like teachers said in school. They had the uniform and they didn’t look different no more. They got respect. […] First time you walked down the street in Gallup or Albuquerque, you knew. Don’t lie. You knew right away. The war was over, the uniform was gone. All of a sudden that man at the store waits on you last, makes you wait until all the white people bought what they wanted. And the white lady at the bus depot, she’s real careful now not to touch your hand when she counts out your change. You watch it slide across the counter at you, and you know. Goddamn it! You stupid sonofabitches! You know!” (41–42)

This passage demonstrates the similar treatment and classification of Native American and Chicano people before and during World War II, when the native people were merely (ab)used when needed, and then “discarded” and returned to their state of second-class citizens when they were no longer of use to the U.S. government.6

A similarly disturbing situation is described in Ana Castillo’s novel, So Far From God (1993), which takes place in Tome, a small town in central New Mexico. One of the main characters in the book is Doña Felicia, an old curandera (healer) who is estimated to be well over one hundred years old because of “her vivid memories of fighting in the Mexican Civil War with her first husband, Juan” (44). After the death of her first husband “in Zapata’s army” (60), she married again (“just before the depression” [61]), had more children and enjoyed a brief phase of financial affluence, which, however, came to an abrupt end:
Then they lost everything when they were deported back to Mexico in cattle cars along with the rest of the Mexicans who had been brought in as laborers during the days of prosperity. That husband also died, he was not shot in the head as Juan was before her eyes, but rather died of tuberculosis, the only thing that the United States had allowed him to bring back to his country. (61)

So *Far From God* addresses both past and present incidents of colonial oppression and injustice as inflicted upon native peoples and demonstrates the characters’ pride in their ancestry as well as their ties to their homeland.

After World War II, the many native people who had worked in war industries were left unemployed, whereas their white, Euro-American colleagues or fellow war veterans received jobs from the government (Deloria 6). Moreover, Vine Deloria, Jr. states, “In the 1950s, in order to get Indians off their reservations so that the lands could be sold and the tribal existence terminated, the BIA [Bureau of Indian Affairs] began a massive ‘relocation’ program that placed thousands of Indians in low-paying jobs in the urban areas of California, primarily Los Angeles, San Francisco-Oakland, and San Jose” (6). Again, N. Scott Momaday’s novel *House Made of Dawn* serves as a document of this historical event. Coming home from the war, Abel, the protagonist, is relocated to Los Angeles after serving time in prison for murdering a man on the Jemez Pueblo reservation. Dealing with the (Euro-American) relocation officers in addition to the (Euro-American) social workers who “counsel” him while he is on probation puts Abel under even more stress, hence aggravating his situation of having to live in a foreign environment detached from his cultural and spiritual home.7 Similarly in *Ceremony*, Emo, one of Tayo’s peers, is sent to Los Angeles at the end of the novel after several run-ins with the law.

Fueled by this discriminatory and disrespectful treatment, a mixture of Indians of different tribes established a community in the 1960s in California to regain a sense of pride and to “assert their Indian identity. Thus, the first stirrings of what became known as the [American] Indian movement began” (Deloria 6). Coinciding with and paralleling the Civil Rights Movement, it allowed Native Americans to gain a stronger voice (or discover their voice) by protesting publicly against racial discrimination. Although there were several actions the AIM (American Indian Movement) took to fight for Indians’ land and rights, there were probably three events that received the most publicized attention; even though these actions did not specifically occur in the Southwest, they had an impact on Indians in the Southwest, as they did on Native Americans’ life across the nation.

The first action was carried out on November 9, 1969, when a group of 200 Indians, calling themselves “Indians of All Tribes” (Wilson 394), occupied the island of Alcatraz, which had been vacated as federal prison, and “issued a proclamation asking for title to the island so it could be used for a spiritual center, university, and social service center. They compared Alcatraz to most Indian reservations: no water, no good housing, land unfit for cultivation, no employment; in short, a prison” (Deloria 9). This action received much public attention as celebrities such as movie stars and rock bands supported them, but ultimately the group’s goal was not reached. The Indians’ demands were, unsurprisingly, not met and “armed federal marshals repossessed the island in June 1971”
Despite the action’s failure, it was evaluated by Indians as having had positive results; Lenanda James, one of the protest movement’s leaders, stated, “many individuals were not ashamed to be Indian any more. People who had relocated in the cities were reidentifying themselves as Indians” (qtd. in Wilson 395).

In October 1972, another protest action carried out by the AIM got into the public spotlight. A “spiritual crusade” from the West Coast to Washington, D.C., with caravans of cars visiting reservations on their way east, got under way, called the “Trail of Broken Treaties,” thus reversing the shameful “Trail of Tears” of 1836–37 and drawing attention to the government’s infamous history of violating treaties with indigenous peoples across the country (Wilson 399; Deloria 19). When the marchers reached Washington, however, they were not only unable to find appropriate accommodation, they also encountered a government unwilling to meet with them, let alone discuss their twenty-point program, which contained a number of reforms the tribes considered necessary and which emphasized the need for a mutual respect of existing treaties between tribes and the U.S. government. The conflict ended in the Indians’ seizing the BIA headquarters, removing and destroying files, and the consequent arrest of some of the movement’s leaders; the BIA building was vacated after the government’s promise of a $66,000 fund to cover the marchers’ travel expenses (Deloria 19). Again, the action had at least the effect of raising the public’s awareness of native people’s problems and demands, even if the government rejected the Twenty Points as impractical (Wilson 401).

The siege of Wounded Knee in February of 1973 was another protest action by the AIM that made use of and reminded both the government and the American citizens of a dramatic—and for many Indians fatal—historical event. A large contingent of (mainly) Sioux Indians and their supporters marched into Wounded Knee and occupied the small town in South Dakota (Deloria 21), hence commemorating and reminding the public of their ancestors who were brutally massacred in 1890, following the government’s decision to ban the Ghost Dance, a pan-Indian religious movement, and to eliminate its followers. The siege ended three months later with the government’s promise to discuss “violations of the 1868 Sioux treaty” (Deloria 21). The Wounded Knee occupation was probably the pinnacle of AIM activism, and no later protest action received as much publicity. Wilson states that “Like Alcatraz, Wounded Knee attracted huge media attention and set off a wave of sympathy among Native Americans and radicals across the country. In several cities, Indian and Hispanic demonstrators were killed [by government authorities] in pro-AIM protests” (404).

As Wilson notes here, the AIM did not just receive sympathy, but also support from other ethnic groups in the U.S., above all from Chicanos/as, who were involved in their own civil rights movement, the Chicano “movimiento,” which bears numerous similarities with the AIM in its goal, actions, and results. Like Native Americans, Chicanos/as struggled to find their place in U.S. society after World War II, and tried to define themselves by coming to terms with their history and dual heritage, striving to form eventually a unified group with a “true Chicano identity, culture, and history“ (Meier/Ribera 219). Moreover, Chicanos/as became more and more aware of the social and financial inequality between Anglo-Americans and themselves, and thus “increasingly saw a parallel between themselves and the native peoples of other colonized lands: all had been conquered, all had been reduced to menial labor, and all had
been used to extract the natural bounty of their own land for the benefit of the conquerors” (Chávez 131).

Hence the first goal of Chicano/a activists was to achieve unity, which led to the creation of the term “Chicano” in favor of and to replace other terms such as “Hispano” or “Spanish American” (favored by the early settlers who tried to stress their descent from the conquistadors), “Mexican,” or “Mexican American” (with or without hyphen); especially the latter term was “unfortunate […] because with it came attached the myth of the ‘nation of immigrants,’ the complex of beliefs that surrounded the idea that the people of the United States had all originated in foreign lands” (Chávez 108). Due to this choice of terminology, therefore, many Mexicans resigned themselves to “forgetting” that their ancestors had inhabited the Americas and especially the Southwest for centuries and to accepting that “their parents were immigrants simply because they had stepped over a line artificially drawn across Mexico” (Chávez 108).

In the beginning, the Chicano movimiento was focused predominantly on education, seeking bilingual and bicultural instruction in schools and universities; consequently, it remained largely nonviolent, and the most extreme protests initially included school walkouts to draw attention to Chicano demands (Meier/Ribera 220). During the period of activism in schools, many student organizations were formed, which in 1969 were joined together in a single organization, called “Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA)”; this organization “served to spread the use of the term ‘Chicano’ in the Southwest” and was supported and organized by many teachers, professors, artists, and writers (Meier/Ribera 222). The movement enjoyed many significant, even if not highly publicized, successes, such as the introduction of courses in ethnic studies, an increased number of Chicano/a teachers, and in 1972—in a joint success of the activists of both the AIM and the Movimiento—the founding of Deganawidah-Quetzalcoatl University in Davis, California8 (Meier/Ribera 223).

After the assassination of President Kennedy, whose administration had given Mexican-Americans hope that their concerns would be addressed, several Chicano/a organizations nation-wide came together to send a joint resolution to President Johnson and to demand that Mexican-Americans, who, as they stated, were good citizens who “did not believe in or engage in civil disobedience or violent confrontation,” be included in antipoverty programs (Chávez 132–33). However, only a month later, the Mexican-American Farm Workers Association (NFWA), led by César Chávez, proved them wrong when they decided to launch an agricultural revolt, sparked by a grape pickers’ strike and followed by a walkout of workers on the lettuce fields, and the “explosive Chicano movement” was inaugurated (Chávez 134).

Besides César Chávez, Reies López Tijerina became a major figure in the Chicano Movimiento as the leader of the “Alianza Federal de Mercedes” (Federal Land Grant Alliance), which he founded in 1963 and renamed “Alianza Federal de Pueblos Libres” (Federal Alliance of Free Towns) in 1968 (Meier/Ribera 213). Tijerina recruited some 20,000 members to sign a petition to the United States government to “investigate the land titles for violations of that portion of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that guaranteed the property rights of Mexicans in the Southwest” (Chávez 139). When his efforts to appeal through legal and political channels failed, the Alianza resorted to civil disobedience and in 1966 occupied the Echo Amphitheater in Kit Carson National Forest, which, so Tijerina claimed, had once belonged to the land grant of San Joaquin de Chama
This way, the Alianza hoped to get the public’s attention and to force the issue back into the legal arena by involving the courts, thereby declaring the Chicanos/as’ “need for self-determination” and their demand for autonomy (Chávez 139). However, Tijerina and his Alianza were unsuccessful with this action as well, and Tijerina was charged with several counts of civil disobedience. While his charges were in the courts, Tijerina became an active figure in the antipoverty Poor People’s March on Washington in 1968, in which Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales, the leader of the Chicano/a community and particularly of the civil rights organization “Cruzada Para La Justicia” (Crusade for Justice) in Denver, Colorado, also participated (Meier/Ribera 214). Both Tijerina and Gonzales and their organizations were equally responsible for the Chicanos/as’ increasing nationalist awareness and their consequent reaffirmation of their ties to Mexico as well as their Indian ancestors; “mestizaje” became a widely used term to indicate Chicanos/as’ dual, Indo-Hispanic heritage (Chávez 141).

It was above all Corky Gonzales, however, who recovered and adopted the term “Aztlán” (Chávez 141) to designate the Southwest as the Chicano homeland, thus emphasizing Chicano/a indigenousness to that region and to affirm their ties to Native Americans. In 1969 at the first Chicano national conference in Denver, the term “Aztlán” was formally and universally accepted and became an important metaphor in “El plan espiritual de Aztlán,” a document drafted by the national conference to “declar[e] the spiritual independence of the Chicano Southwest from the United States” (Chávez 142). This “spiritual plan” for the region pointed to the injustice of Euro-American invasion and thus to the rightful ownership of Chicanos/as to the land. It read:

Conscious […] of the brutal “Gringo” invasion of our territories, we, the Chicano inhabitants and civilizers of the northern land of Aztlán, from whence came our forefathers, reclai[m] the land of their birth. […] We [who] do not recognize capricious frontiers on the bronze continent […] declare the independence of our mestizo nation, (qtd. in Chávez 143)

Rodolfo Gonzales—more than any other major figure in the Chicano Movimiento—stressed the importance of a cultural nationalism to help resist assimilation into the dominant U.S. society and to revive pride in the Chicanos/as’ rich heritage and culture. Gonzales’ polemical manifesto and poem/Am Joaquín/Yo Soy Joaquín (1967, 1972), which discusses the historical injustices Chicanos/as have had to endure and which appeals to the audience to resist further the dominant culture’s assimilationist agenda, is one of the many literary works which was inspired by and evolved out of the Movimiento.9 Meier/Ribera state:

the movimiento and the cultural renaissance of the late 1960s and 1970s clearly were mutually reinforcing. Artists drew inspiration from the movement as well as from their Mexican-Indian background; some created a unique synthesis of the two. Most authors drew upon their life experiences for topics and themes, but some combined these with cultural elements from their Indian past. (234)
The central goal of many of these works was to come to terms with the history and to redefine their identity, i.e. to achieve a more positive sense of self than the American society was willing to allow them, hence “adopt[ing] a tribal rhetoric” to delineate the process of assimilation “as a sinister plot to eradicate Chicano culture” (Bruce-Novoa 227).

Similar to the cultural and literary renaissance that originated in the Chicano civil rights struggle, the American Indian Movement influenced a Native American reawakening, and N.Scott Momaday’s winning the Pulitzer Prize in 1969 for *House Made of Dawn* marked the inauguration of a literary renaissance. Like many other Native American authors after him, Momaday incorporates historical events in his works, such as the Euro-American attempts to convert Indians to Christianity, the alienation felt by tribal members due to a failed assimilation into the dominant U.S. society, and the search for a sense of identity, in order to demonstrate the difficulties indigenous people face in the modern U.S. society.

More than just serving as documents of historical events, however, works by both Native American and Chicano/a writers constitute alternative renditions of the past, if not critiques of the prevalent and accepted Eurocentric version of history. In this context, it is important to investigate the current developments in historiography to understand native peoples’ place in American history and to shed light on native authors’ need to rewrite their past.

While it is not surprising that American history has always been considered to begin with the landing of Europeans on North American shores, hence neglecting thousands of years of indigenous habitation on the continent, it is even more deplorable that the significant changes in American historiography that have taken place over the past few decades have not led to the inclusion of the pre-contact past of native peoples in American history writing. As Molho and Wood explain, up until recently, many Americans and American historians have looked at the status and place of the United States in the world as “exceptional” (4). While this notion of “exceptionalism” at first “meant a New World that was ‘antithetical to the Old,’ an America that was different from Europe, inferior in many ways, but at least free from Europe’s ills” (4), this sense of difference changed a great deal during and after the Revolution when “Americans now saw their country possessing a freer, more prosperous, more egalitarian society than any in Europe; America had become for them a beacon and an asylum for the oppressed of the Old World” (5). In either scenario, however, America’s role and character was always perceived and considered in relation to Europe; if America was unique and different from Europe, it was nonetheless determined and defined by its ties to Europe. Molho and Wood also note:

most prominent American historians over the past century have always believed that the study of the European past illuminated some aspect of American history. […] Europe was the ground where ideas vital to America originated and were first tested. In some cases, Americans looked to the European past for inspiration and for lessons crucial to their moral, political, and aesthetic well-being. […] They imagined themselves not only to be a part of Western civilization but to be its fulfillment.
Europe had created Western civilization. America had the responsibility of helping it survive and flourish. (6–7)

Due to this understanding of America’s role in the advancement of Western civilization, it is not surprising that native peoples of the continent, who were regarded as being uncivilized savages, were not recognized in American history writing. Moreover, this philosophy, along with the notion of Manifest Destiny, helped historians to explain, justify, or merely ignore the atrocities committed against indigenous people.

It was not until the beginning of the 20th century that American historians turned their attention to immigration, which contributed to a gradual change in America’s attitude toward Europe. These changes brought about an increased interest in other cultures, as it was now believed that American history—in order to take into account the United States’ multicultural society—needed to be considered not from the moment of contact but from the places of immigrants’ origin (Molho/Wood 14). However, this shift in perspective—from an internal to a more external view of American history—only brought about a further emphasis of the notion of the United States as a “nation of immigrants,” and hence further neglected and alienated the indigenous people of the Americas. The civil rights movement in the 1960s gave a voice to marginalized and, to this point, oppressed social groups and “created a new sense of American diversity and pluralism that have brought into question older conceptions of America’s identity” (Molho/Wood 11). This gave rise to a new “social history,” which allowed previously silent people to enter the historical profession, which “led historians to imagine a new and different American past and new and different ways of thinking about the country’s collective identity” (Molho/Wood 11). Further inspired by the introduction of a new “cultural history” in the 1980s, which was a more interdisciplinary approach to history—borrowing from anthropology and literary theory—historians began to look at the historical past in terms of individual ethnographic moments that could be studied as texts (Molho/Wood 12).

These recent trends in American historiography have led to a transformed understanding of America’s place in the world, away from an “exceptionalist” notion of the identity of the United States to a more “cosmopolitan sense of [the] country’s relationship to the world” (Molho/Wood 13). Caroline Walker Bynum, former president of the American Historical Association, expressed this shift succinctly when she stated that “in these days of multiculturalism and postcolonial studies, it is the task of my generation of historians to find ways of turning, responsibly and wisely, from the Eurocentric history into which we were born to the more global history our children will inherit” (qtd. in Molho/Wood 13). As a consequence of this shift in perspective, America’s sense of identity and understanding of nationhood has changed as well: “the increasing multicultural diversity of the United States is diluting and blurring an old-fashioned unified sense of American identity” (Molho/Wood 14). Nonetheless, the lesser focus on national identity on the basis of an ethnically diverse society, along with a view of America in a global context, have only contributed to a more external than internal perspective in American historiography, which, however, continues to neglect a pre-Columbian history of North America and hence puts indigenous peoples of the Americas in the same category as ethnic groups who came to America as immigrants.

Moreover, it is important to note that throughout the changes in perspective that American historiography has undergone, the post-contact, colonial era, which doubtless
has been most painful for native peoples in America, has continuously been regarded as less important than the post-Federal era in the eyes of many historians. Gordon S. Wood, a colonial historian, remarks that “Americans have often thought the earlier colonial period to be less relevant, less historically significant than the later national period of American history. For many Americans the colonial era has lacked seriousness; it seems trivial and antique and shrouded in nostalgia” (144). Hence, this historical phase, which brought about loss of land, loss of life, and loss of a natural life style for indigenous peoples, is not only often overlooked by Americans and in the historical profession, it is also reduced to a “natural source of folklore and myth-making” (Wood 144), in short, a resource for Disney and other Hollywood productions¹⁰. By the same token, many historical figures of this era, including Indians, have entered the realm of myth and fairy tale. Wood notes:

Since Americans, unlike other Western nations, lack a misty past where the historical record is remote and obscure, they have tended to turn authentic historical figures and events of their colonial past into mythical characters and legends. In America there are no King Canutes, no King Arthurs, no Robin Hoods to spin tales and legends about. Instead, Americans have transformed John Smith and Pocahontas, the Pilgrim Fathers and Squanto—historical figures about whom we know a good deal—into fanciful and fabulous characters. (144)

Wood also points out that due to the lesser regard of colonial history, time takes on a different meaning as well, in that events of this historical past are summarized, compressed, and combined in single paragraphs in history textbooks, even in those written in the twentieth century; he says, “Two centuries are often collapsed into a few quasi-mythical events preceding the Revolution, when the real history of the United States presumably begins” (145).

The above-mentioned shift in perspective in American history writing—from an “exceptionalist” point of view to a “cosmopolitan,” or global, lens through which historical events were interpreted and contextualized—caused historians to interpret this historical phase in a different light, but ultimately did not help to make it seem more significant in the larger context of American history (Wood 150). The rise of movements in historiography, such as social and cultural history, did lead to a generally more multiculturally, or ethnically, oriented perspective, which, as pointed out before, reduced the importance of the idea of a national identity. However, this trend cannot necessarily be booked as a success for native people in America, as they are now merely noticed, but not really given the credit of being the first inhabitants of the continent, of being the “original Americans.” Gordon S. Wood notes that “The shift of perspective from the sources of American nationhood to the larger world has made the Indians especially visible” (159; emphasis added). He continues to explain that early historians, such as Frederick Jackson Turner, who originated the famous frontier thesis, were largely preoccupied with America’s national identity. Turner, who “scarcely acknowledged the existence of the Indian,” and for whom Europeans landed on “virgin soil” and in an “unexploited wilderness,” had a significant impact on the “‘interior perspectives’ of historians,” which contributed to a “neglect of the Indian in early American
historiography” (Wood 159). The move away from a concentration on nationhood and national identity, Wood states, has led to a different image and treatment of native peoples in historical narratives: “Today historians who have sought to get outside the national history of the United States have a very different appreciation of the presence of the Indians (159; emphasis added). The choice of language (“visibility” and “appreciation” of the Indian) is worth pointing out in this context. It seems to convey that while indigenous people are now finally recognized as an important ethnic group in the American society, they still remain in the realm of the foreign and unknown; they are the alien “other” whom historians now need to study and familiarize themselves with. Such treatment, however, continues to neglect native peoples’ pre-contact past and does not lessen the trivialization of their post-contact history.

Since historiography is a narrative process like fiction writing, many southwestern Native American writers, above all Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo) in her complex novel *Almanac of the Dead* (1991), have realized the potential of their novels to critique the prevalent version of the historical past and to write counter-narratives, which prepare the grounds on which history can be reimagined and reconstructed. In his book *History Made, History Imagined* (1999), David Price posits that history and fiction are dialectically related to one another in that historical facts only take shape and produce meaning in the context of a narrative. In that respect, all history is a product of language, like fiction, and since “it is made of language […], it is allusive, ambiguous, contradictory, semantically abundant—in short, creative in every sense of the word” (White qtd. in Price 23). Price has created the term “poietic history” to designate novels that are expressions of their authors’ poetic imagination to question history and, “in turn, [to] produc[e] a counternarrative to the popular and uncritically accepted referent that we take to be the historical past” (3). Price believes that, “If we live through imagination […], then these novels provide us with means to reimagine the reality of the past” (3). It is important for Price to stress that “poietic history, unlike much conventional history, does not concern itself exclusively with the past. On the contrary, a major goal of any poietic history is to reconfigure the past in ways that will help us to configure the future” (4).

Drawing upon Paul Ricœur’s *Time and Narrative* (1984), Price points out that whereas historians mostly stress the “victors of history,” novelists can give eyes and voice to the victims of history. They can open a second-order referential realm that examines and considers outcomes that were not realized; they can reimagine the past by reconstructing it, just as historians do, in order to speculate on the conditions of what those of us in the present accept as “what really happened” in that particular past. (29)

Especially this last point is of significance in this context because many novels by Native American and Chicano/a authors of the Southwest present precisely those kinds of narratives that give voice to the oppressed and colonized—the victims of history—and “reimagine” and “reconfigure” their historical past in order to envision ways to cope with the future.
Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead*, a disturbingly violent novel, is one such counternarrative in that it refocuses history by adopting the perspective of the conquered and colonized and by relating the shared fate of native peoples (mostly) in the Southwest and Mexico. The novel contests the popular rendition of the history of the colonization of North America through a variety of means, thus demonstrating the injustice and oppression indigenous people in the Southwest have suffered from. In doing so, Silko recreates a history of the Americas by drawing upon an ancient manuscript, “a fictional companion to the three actual Mayan codices or almanacs that survived the post-Conquest destruction of Mayan written culture” (Donnelly 247). This almanac is said to have predicted the arrival of Cortés, which points to its prophetic power, and Silko uses it in the novel as a source of hope and inspiration to imagine a future in which the native peoples of the Americas reclaim the land.

One important means to point to the relativity of history that Silko employs in her *Almanac* is storytelling. Drawing from a variety of sources and historical periods, Silko manipulates the reader’s understanding and interpretation of these stories and historical events. In *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit* (1996), Silko remarks that it was her conscious decision to shift the narrative of the novel in point of view and time, hence emulating the fragmented documents of the ancient Maya codices:

> I wrote the novel in […] sections because I could not think of the story of the *Almanac* as a single line moving from point A to point B to point C. I knew I wanted to shape time inside my *Almanac*. I wanted to use narrative to shift the reader’s experience of time and meaning of *history as stories* that mark certain points in time (when time is a long string of markers or points on the pages of a calendar). I had to figure out how to do this and still tell stories people could understand. Myths alter our experience of time and reality without disappointing our desire for a story. I knew *Almanac of the Dead* must be made of myths—all sorts of myths from the Americas, including the modern myths. (140; emphasis added)

It is important to note here that Silko refers to the common understanding among native peoples that “history” and “story” are quasi-synonymous, an idea that was discussed at the beginning of the chapter. She stresses that history is a narrative like a novel, and moreover, that it is comprised of an array of stories that are relative and changeable. As Silko explains in *Storyteller* (1981), stories always exist in as many versions as there are storytellers, as each teller will add and/or omit part of the story he/she wants to stress or deems more significant for the audience present and/or intended message (110; 227). Similarly, stories of the historical past may be told in a variety of versions and from different points of view—a fact that native peoples of the Southwest, and of the Americas in general, have painfully experienced first-hand. Thus, Silko plays with this idea and teases the Euro-American reader of her *Almanac*, for instance, with her story of the multiple Geronimos, the Apache leader whom in the late 19th century the white soldiers tried to hunt down and punish publicly to demonstrate their relentlessness in dealing with rebel Indians.

In the chapters “Mistaken Identity” and “Old Pancakes,” Silko describes a communal storytelling setting in which Yaqui tribal elders tell the story of the various Indians who
were taken to be—or claimed to be—Geronimo and the one man who was finally imprisoned as Geronimo, while the “real Geronimo” was never captured. The elders who tell the story as a communal effort in which several people contribute to the story, so that it “did not run in a line for the horizon but circled and spiraled instead like the red-tailed hawk” (224), even suggest that there never was a man by that name, but that it had been given to the “idea” of the desired man due to a misunderstanding: “‘Geronimo’ of course was the war cry Mexican soldiers made as they rode into battle, counting on help from St. Jerome. The U.S. soldiers had misunderstood just as they had misunderstood just about everything else they had found in this land. In time there were at least four Apache raiders who were called by the name Geronimo, either by the Mexican soldiers or the gringos” (224). Moreover, since they were incapable of realizing and ameliorating their mistake, the white soldiers were easily duped, as all that counted for them from then on was the name:

But once the whites had a name for a thing, they seemed unable ever again to recognize the thing itself.

The elders used to argue that this was one of the most dangerous qualities of the Europeans: Europeans suffered from a sort of blindness to the world. To them, a “rock” was just a “rock” wherever they found it, despite the obvious difference in shape, density, color, or the position of the rock relative to all things around it. (224)

Consequently, the elders narrate, the soldiers gladly arrested Old Pancakes, “the best customer the Tucson bootlegger ever had” (229), who claimed to be Geronimo in hopes of being fed and sheltered by the U.S. army before escaping again. While not succeeding in convincing the soldiers that an old man like him could not possibly be the fierce fighter they had tried to capture for so long, “Old Pancakes had finally been able to use his skills as a liar and a joker to seize the opportunity to save the others” (230).

Even photographs of the different “Geronimos,” taken by a traveling photographer employed by General Cook, did not “heal” the Euro-Americans’ affliction. When they compared photographic images of the different men thought to be Geronimo, and compared them with the man they held captured as Geronimo, they claimed to see a resemblance or explained any deviation with the natural aging process human beings undergo. Unable to understand such blatant ignorance and complacency, the Yaqui elders surmise that the “face in all the photographs had belonged to an ancestor, the soul of one long dead who knew the plight of the ‘Geronimos.’ […] The spirit could move in and out easily through the crystal rock,” which also proved that “a camera could not steal the soul as some people fear. A camera could not steal your soul unless you were already letting it go in the first place” (232).

As the story of the multiple Geronimos makes quite clear, there are versions of the historical past that the Euro-American reader might not be aware of, or might not want to know about for that matter. Not only does Silko criticize the reader who is oblivious to any other version of history than the prevalent Eurocentric one, she also draws attention in her rendition to Euro-American ignorance and arrogance by ridiculing the U.S. army, who are unable to detect the truth and are easily fooled and—to some extent—exploited due to their “blindness.”
Through the character of Angelita La Escapía, Silko further explores the idea of time’s being cyclical, so that historical events not only provide valuable lessons for the present and future, but may also be expected to repeat themselves. La Escapía, a Mexican Indian (of unspecified tribal affiliation), is one of the leaders of the “People’s Army” of indigenous people of the Americas who have joined to carry out their goal, the retaking of their ancestral land. Angelita studied Karl Marx at the Marxist school run by Cubans in Mexico City, and in her studies, realized the many parallels between (pure) Marxist beliefs and indigenous beliefs:

For hundreds of years white men had been telling the people of the Americas to forget the past; but now the white man Marx came along and he was telling people to remember. The old-time people had believed the same thing: they must reckon with the past because within it lay seeds of the present and future. They must reckon with the past because within it lay this present moment and also the future moment. (311)

La Escapía disagrees with her Cuban communist teachers and mentors because she feels that they misunderstand or misinterpret Marx, or distort his true teachings and, moreover, adopt a Eurocentric view of history. Claiming to be “friends of the Indians,” “[t]he clergy and the communists took credit for any good, however small, that had been done for the Indians since the arrival of the Europeans” (314); consequently, Angelita is “contemptuous of their ignorance of Marx, and she had clashed with the Cubans over which version, whose version, of history they would use” (314). Here again, Silko draws attention to the fact that historiography is a narrative process that is very much determined by point of view, that there might be different renditions of historical events, and that what has been taken to be a “fact” may very well be questioned and contested.

Furthermore, in contrast to most Europeans, Silko points out through Angelita, Marx was able to understand that indigenous people draw strength and meaning from their old stories, in fact, would be unable to survive without the teachings of their ancestors’ stories:

The stories of the people or their “history” had always been sacred, the source of their entire existence. If the people had not retold the stories, or if the stories had somehow been lost, then the people were lost; the ancestors’ spirits were summoned by the stories. This man Marx had understood that the stories or “histories” are sacred; that within “history” reside relentless forces, powerful spirits, vengeful, relentlessly seeking justice. (315–16)

Silko maintains in Almanac that to retell the stories of the oppression of indigenous peoples, the “stories of depravity and cruelty,” is the only way “to cure the suffering and evils of the world” (316) because it will help the people to recreate their own history and thus envision ways to create a future for themselves that, in a way, rectifies the past by eventually eradicating the white man and reclaiming the land.

It is particularly interesting to note Silko’s use of Karl Marx, a European, to enforce this idea. By claiming that Marx “stole his ideas from […] the Native Americans,” that he
“got his notions of egalitarian communism” (311) by studying tribal communities who have lived the concept of a “commune” for centuries (314), Silko’s character draws attention to a historical fact not known by many Europeans and Euro-Americans alike. As Jack Weatherford, in his book Indian Givers: How the Indians of the Americas Transformed the World (1988), explains, Karl Marx “developed a fascination with the political activities and economic lives of the Indians. […] The kinship states of the Indians became in Marxist thought exemplars of primitive communism. Living as they did without the ‘state’ or private ownership of property, the Indians knew neither exploitation nor social class” (161–62). However, Weatherford continues, “the image [of a Utopian future] quickly lost any connection with […] any Indian group. Marx and Engels translated the [Indian] image into a European one that fit their own materialist theories” (162).

Moreover, through Angelita Silko also subverts the common Eurocentric notion of the benefits and accomplishments of Western civilization and the Western civilizers’ education of the indigenous “savages.” She reminds her audience that the U.S. government as it exists today is actually modeled to a large extent after Native American forms of democratic government, especially the League of the Iroquois (Weatherford 135). Weatherford maintains that “Despite [the] civic myths surrounding the creation of American government, America’s settlers from Europe knew little of democracy” (134). Therefore, “The Founding Fathers of the United States judiciously assembled bits and pieces of many different systems to invent a completely new one. In fashioning a new system, they even borrowed some distinctive elements from the American Indians” (135).

Thus in Almanac, Silko writes a counternarrative, a “poietic history” in David Price’s words, which not only critiques the prevalent version of history “by making us aware that the past is a ‘fictive’ realm,” but also “spur[s] the reader’s recognition of the need to change current conditions and attitudes” (Price 46).

Another means to shift her audience’s perspective of history that Leslie Marmon Silko employs in Almanac of the Dead is chronologies of historical events such as Native American uprisings and revolutions (527–530; 742–746). While listings of historical events by date are most certainly familiar to any reader—native and non-native—from history books and classes, the chronologies in Almanac deconstruct familiar history book reading by focusing exclusively on revolts and rebellions by Indians of all tribes. Since it can be assumed that most readers will not have learned about this aspect of post-Conquest history—at least not in such detail—Silko presents unfamiliar material in a familiar way and thus demonstrates that the common and accepted version of history is incomplete at best, if not faulty and misleading, so that there is a need to provide a counterversion of history to do justice to indigenous peoples.

Rudolfo Anaya offers such new perspectives on history and also outlooks for the future in his novel Heart of Aztlan (1976). The novel not only documents more recent historical events such as the Chicano rights movement, it also alludes to previous struggles Chicanos/as had to undergo in their long history in the Southwest. In the novel, Clemente, the protagonist, who moves his family from Guadalupe to a barrio in Albuquerque in search of a more financially secure life, eventually becomes the savior of the whole Chicano community after a series of lay-offs at the local railroad yard and a consequent strike by the workers. Instead of fighting injustice with violence—an approach many of the unemployed workers want to take, Clemente finds a purpose for
his own life and, more importantly, the lives of the people of the barrio, by delving deep into the mythic past of his people to find guidance and (moral) support for his people. Crispín, an old and wise blind man, aids Clemente in his quest by providing him with spiritual guidance through the songs and corridos he plays on his guitar. Crispín’s songs remind Clemente and the people in the barrio of their rich heritage and thus allow them to improve their self-image, which has been shattered due to the unfair and cruel treatment they experience at their workplaces and in their everyday lives: “[Crispin] sang the corridos of prior revolutions, he sang of ancient heroes, men of the people. The mystery of his melody and the magic of his words carried them out of their present time and misery to a time of legends and myths, and in that time he made them encounter the truth of their being” (83). Moreover, Crispín’s songs invite the people to share their part in the history and thus contribute to the vision of a (better) future; Crispín explains, “‘Now I sing the songs of the past and the songs of the future, and the people listen, and as they listen each man and woman adds his piece and the song grows fuller, it blossoms under this kind of sun’” (28).

Because the people in the barrio, who are all affected by the railroad lay-offs, know that “the cuentos were a part of their heritage” (85), they listen to Clemente and his friend Crispín, showing that they are aware of the power of the stories and the strength they can draw from a retelling of the old stories in order to keep them alive. As Crispín points out, “There is a meaning in all the stories of the people […] that is why we cannot let those legends die” (84; emphasis in the text). Anaya stresses again and again in Heart of Aztlán that “the people,” i.e. Chicanos/as, are rooted in the land, as the ancient stories and legends document. Chicanos/as are “the fruit of the people who wandered from the mythical land of Aztlán, the first people of this land” (83), which points to their indigenousness to the Southwest and confirms their rights to the land. This right, however, has been denied by the U.S. government, and the land—referred to in the mythic term Aztlán—has been lost to them. At a meeting of workers in the Albuquerque barrio, the men discuss treaty and land grant violations that the U.S. government has committed:

‘[W]e lost the land […]. A new way of life and a new set of laws pushed us out of the land grants. We lost las mercedes [land grants] and the communal lands—’

‘We were dispersed from our own land, our way of life was destroyed, we had to recreate our pueblos in the slum-barrios of the cities!’

They told stories about the deeding of the land grants and the history behind the families who settled throughout the territory, and most important, they told in detail the aspects of the daily life of the people. And in the end they told how the government and men of power using the new laws for selfish gain encroached upon the land and finally wrenched it away. (103–104)

Anaya—through his protagonist Clemente—employs the term Aztlán to unite the people of the barrio to fight for their common cause, which is a direct reflection of the ideas and methods of the Chicano movimiento as put forth by activists such as César Chávez and Rodolfo Gonzales. Moreover, he goes beyond the more immediate goal of the people in
the barrio, the return of their jobs at the railroad, and posits that the Chicano must strive for a reversal of colonization by fighting to retake the land. In a passage that is strongly reminiscent of Silko’s message in *Almanac of the Dead*, Crispín exclaims:

> we are gatherings of old and feeble men and women, living in memories of a time past, but we still have the strength to fight this government for what is rightfully ours. We must regain the land, and we must teach our children that spiritual attachment to the earth, because—[...] [t]here is no other redeemer than our mother earth. Remember that. Only the earth can redeem our humanity, only she can renew our faith. (104)

Through Crispín, Rudolfo Anaya draws upon the ancestry of his people and emphasizes their rich tradition and culture to uplift his people’s spirits and encourage them to counteract the U.S. government’s attempts to present Chicanos/as as newcomers to the land, who will become a burden to the country. Moreover, it is important to note here that Anaya—like Leslie Marmon Silko—not only demands that the Southwest be returned to the native peoples and various tribes on the basis of legal rights, he emphasizes the people’s spiritual and religious attachment to the land and the earth, in fact notes that the land is sacred for the people and provides the very basis for their faith.
Chapter Two
Sacred Places, Holy Sites: The Connection of Religion and Landscape

Many scholars of North American indigenous history, culture, and religion have recognized and analyzed native peoples’ special connection to their homelands. Because of native peoples’ understanding of their creation and emergence into this world, along with the animist nature of their religion, the land is intrinsic to the tribes’ spiritual identity and their cultural survival. Marcia Pablo (Flathead) confirms this notion in her essay, “Preservation as Perpetuation,” published in a 2001 issue of American Indian Quarterly, stating that the First Nations of this continent did not have a written history in book form, as did the non-Indian peoples who came here. Our history is written in our unique and specific cultural landscapes. These places hold the memories of our ancestors, speak to us in the present, and are crucial to our survival, as Indian people, into the future. (18)

Acoma Pueblo poet and essayist Simon Ortiz in the introduction to his collection of poetry, Woven Stone (1992), asserts that Native Americans have always depended spiritually on the land and thus have a special relationship with it, which, however, has been ruptured by the Euro-American settlers. Ortiz maintains:

Native Americans had a religious belief that depended upon a spiritual and material relationship with creation and the earth. People got what they needed to live from the land-earth, and they gave back, with their work, responsibility, and careful use of natural resources, what the land needed. Their creators gave them life, and they, with prayer, meditation, and ritual, gave back life; they received and gave. This belief was a system of reciprocity in every respect, and the relationship they had with the creators and earth was the guiding rule which was applied to their social communal system. (29)

This passage demonstrates tribal people’s perspective of the interconnectedness of all elements of the earth, which determines their worldview and daily life.

As Ortiz’ use of the past tense makes clear, however, this outlook on life has not been shared by Euro-American conquistadors and settlers, who disregarded the tribes’ belief systems, assuming from their lack of churches and liturgy that Indians did not have any religion—an assumption that even in the late 19th century caused Euro-Americans to consider tribal religion unworthy of, or ineligible for, protection by the First Amendment.
to the U.S. Constitution (Niezen 128). This indifference to Indians’ religious beliefs has led and continues to lead to a devaluation of their sacred places, resulting in an indiscriminate exploitation of the land for commerce and “private property.” Indigenous people in North America must struggle to practice their religions and to establish and maintain a spiritual relationship with their homeland, from which they all too often have been forcibly separated. Moreover, since the European colonizers imposed their Christian religion upon the “faithless savages,” which in many cases led to full or partial conversions, tribal people today face the challenge of having to come to terms with a dual religious heritage in establishing their spiritual identity—a challenge that many of their literary works reflect.

The purpose of this chapter is twofold: first, it will show how works by both Native American and Chicano/a authors of the American Southwest reflect the writers’ ways of accommodating and merging their native beliefs and their colonizers’ religion in their quests to establish their bicultural religious identities; then, based on an exploration of southwestern indigenous peoples’ spiritual reverence for the land, the chapter will also demonstrate the authors’ pronounced efforts to (re)establish their ties to their homeland by protesting and fighting against a perpetuation of Euro-American appropriation and exploitation of the land, thereby reclaiming their ancestral birthright.

The chapter will begin with a historical and theoretical exploration of southwestern writers’ mediating between their native beliefs and Christianity, resulting in the establishment of a religious syncretism, and continue with an analysis of the documentation or reflection of this syncretism in these authors’ literary works. Focusing on native peoples’ reverence for the land, which is an essential element in the practice of their religion, the chapter will explore the basis of native people’s “spiritual environmentalism,” namely their creation and emergence stories, which are connected to particular locales, effecting a clear notion of “home” and providing the people with spiritual guidance. Finally, an analysis of select works by southwestern indigenous authors with a view to an expression of their spiritual environmentalism will shed light on these authors’ need to resist the perpetuation of Euro-American appropriation of the land and to reclaim it for themselves.

Indigenous works of the Southwest often document their writers’ (and their characters’) merging of native beliefs and Christianity, resulting in the adoption of a religious syncretism that shows traces of both religions. This hybridization of spirituality is not always smooth and varies in its emphasis and inclusion of each religion’s elements, symbols, and rituals. As has been discussed in the previous chapter, during the conquest of Mexico and what is now called the American Southwest, the conquistadors took advantage of the knowledge they had gained about the native tribes’ worldview and religions to be received on friendly terms, paving the way for their ruthless conquering practices. Moreover, due to native peoples’ polytheistic cosmology, tribes often had little trouble accepting Jesus Christ and including him as one more god into their pantheon.

The Ghost Dance religion, which was a “nativistic,” or religious “revitalization” movement (Zimmermann/Molyneaux 132) in the 19th century, is a prime example of tribal peoples’ assimilation of Jesus and his teachings into their religious beliefs and practices. As a nativistic movement, “aimed to reaffirm Native North American values where altered conditions may have rendered traditional ceremonies—such as those celebrating the landscape […]—meaningless or incongruous” (Zimmermann/Molyneaux
The Ghost Dance was fueled by tribes’ despair over their living situation; “it promised one desperate and final hope. The world would again be renewed […]. The dead would come alive again, brave men would walk once more in dignity, and the cruel and avaricious white man would vanish in the convulsions of the world of evil he had wrought” (Bailey 7). Wovoka, a Paiute Messiah, initiated the Ghost Dance in 1890—after experiencing “a trance in which he claimed to visit the land of the dead” (Zimmermann/Molyneaux 136), he preached to his followers that they should renounce violence and instead strive for peace and love. The Indian Messiah’s “gospel” was “as Christlike in concept as the Sermon on the Mount” (Bailey 8). Worship of the Messiah required his followers to participate in circle dances, which were intended to induce trances and visions out of sheer exhaustion from the continuous dancing, during which the people would “meet the dead and visit the former world” (Zimmermann/Molyneaux 136).

The “peyote way” of the Native American Church—which will be discussed in more detail further down—is another example of a nativistic movement that is syncretic in nature, adopting Christian religious practices, such as baptism and the Holy Communion, while at the same time seeking visions (through the consumption of the peyote cactus fruit) to renew the followers’ spiritual ties to their Creator and to the earth.

Another way to shed light on indigenous peoples’ acceptance of Christianity is to interpret it in a context of mythology and folklore: the “story” of Jesus could be fitted into the traditional narrative pattern of a mythical culture-hero story. Andrew Wiget points out in his introduction to Susan Scarberry-García’s Landmarks of Healing: A Study of House Made of Dawn (1990):

> While Jesus slew no monsters, he certainly could be made to look the part of a culture hero. This was an overt practice among some proselytizing orders who identified Jesus with the Culture Hero and Satan with the Trickster figure. Christian salvation could then be structured as tribal healing was, the conforming of oneself to the pattern of the hero’s death and rebirth. For this reason, many Indians, formerly and at present, have had little difficulty in incorporating Jesus into their religious belief and practice alongside their tribal religions, (xii)

This interpretation of Christianity in terms of native religion and culture is paralleled, for instance, in the Mexican tribes’ acceptance of and later enchantment with “la Virgen de Guadalupe.” Patron Saint of all Mexicans, the Virgin of Guadalupe has been celebrated and worshipped in Mexico since 1531 when she made her first appearance on a hill in Tepeyac outside of Mexico City. As Ana Castillo remarks, the legend of the Virgin’s appearance is part of “mythistory,” which means that there are multiple versions of this story, just as there are various interpretations and meanings of it (xviii). Despite these variations, several writers in the collection Goddess of the Americas (1996), all Chicanos/as such as Ana Castillo, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, and Richard Rodriguez, explain this virgin’s immense popularity by referring to her “other” name, Tonantzin (sometimes spelled Tonantsi), meaning “our mother” in the ancient Aztec language Nahuatl (Castillo xv–xvi). Leana Hicks (Nahua descent/mestizo), in her study of the Virgin of Guadalupe, also refers to this connection of the Virgin with Tonantzin, a
Totonac earth goddess. She writes that the Virgin of Guadalupe is not just a manifestation of Christ’s mother, but a “syncretic goddess” with a “large Indian following since [the] beginning” of her worship, oftentimes considered to represent a “spiritual aspect of protest against the colonial regime” (35), due specifically to her identification with the place in which she appeared. Hicks states:

Tepeyac was known to be the former site of a shrine to the ancient Aztec mother-goddess Tonantzin, which means “our mother” in Nahuatl. Tonantzin was one of several earth-mother goddesses worshiped by Aztecs, the most important being Coatlicue. Coatlicue herself was a product of syncretism within the multicultural fabric of Aztec religion and was often confused with Tonantzin. Tonantzin was originally a goddess of the Aztec-conquered Totonacs that was later acquired by the Aztecs as well. Coatlicue was the mother of all, as well as of the gods; this included the stars, moon, and sun, which grew to be stronger than their mother. The stars and moon were more identified with Tonantzin. (35)

According to the legend, a noblewoman appeared to a newly converted Aztec, Juan Diego, in 1531, the sacred number of four times, told him in Nahuatl that she was St. Mary of Guadalupe, the mother of God, and requested that a temple be erected in that very spot as a place of worship for all “peoples on this earth who love [her] and trust [her] and invoke [her] help” (Rengers 3). The bishop of the local community, the Franciscan friar Juan de Zumárraga (Burkhart 198), to whom Juan Diego turned, did not believe in the story at first, but after flowers started to grow on the rocky ground, Juan Diego’s uncle was cured from a deadly illness, and “the image of St. Mary miraculously appeared on [Juan Diego’s cloak]” (Hicks 34), a church was built at Tepeyac, near Tenochtitlán (Mexico City). The traditional image of Guadalupe is “that of a dark Virgin, standing on a crescent moon, wearing a star-studded greenish cloak, with rays of light surrounding her” (Hicks 35). Father Christopher Rengers remarks that “She is standing in a glowing halo as though before the sun. There are stars on her mantle and a moon at her feet. (This showed the Aztecs that the sun, the moon, and the stars are not gods to be worshipped)” (2), but subject to her superior powers.

“The shrine at Tepeyacac [later shortened to Tepeyac] was named after Spain’s most popular Marian devotion, Our Lady of Guadalupe, whose shrine lies near Cáceres in the province of Estremadura, homeland to many of Mexico’s conquerors and colonists” (Burkhart 205), including Cortés. Because of the virgin’s features, her appearance at an Aztec holy site, and the sacred number of four times that she appeared to Juan Diego, many scholars have interpreted the Virgin of Guadalupe as a Christianized version of Tonantzin. Louise Burkhart, in her study of “The Cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico,” explains that the “text’s localization,” its featuring of “prickly pear cactus plants,” “dry terrain,” and “local rocks” accommodates “Nahua religiosity” (216). She maintains that in the apparition story, “this sacred reality is tied explicitly to the local landscape and the winter dry season. The prickly pear, in particular, was associated with Mexico City, whose Nahuatl name, Tenochtitlán, means ‘by the prickly pear fruits’” (216–17). Moreover, Burkhart continues, another “important feature [of the apparition story] is the ascription of the events to a specific historical moment, with the naming of
Zumárraga as the reluctant prelate and the assigning of a name and community of origin to the Indian protagonist” (217). The legend contributed to a rising of Indian Christianity and “justifie[d] the fiction of spiritual conquest,” which was “useful fiction for Indians, who wished to be seen as legitimate Christian citizens of the colony, as well as for priests, few of whom wished any longer to worry about the orthodoxy of Indian belief. It was also potentially very appealing to […] mestizos in search of a legitimate identity as Mexicans” (Burkhart 217).

It is impossible to determine with any certainty which interpretation of the amazing apparition in Tepeyac, which happened forty years after the beginning of the Spanish conquest, is the more “correct” or “valid” one: to regard the Virgin as a manifestation of Mary, mother of Christ, or to see her as an originally pagan goddess who was Christianized. However, in the face of the violent and ruthless nature of the conquest and the determined efforts for conversion by the Spanish missionaries, the claim that the appearance of the Virgin Mary with Mexican features and Nahuatl language skills at a site of Nahua worship is a “fabrication” by the conquerors (Camacho 2) seems plausible. Leana Hicks states as well that “It was common practice for the missionaries in Mexico to build their churches on or near the sites of pre-Columbian shrines,” replacing whatever traditional items were there. In fact, Hicks continues, “The constitutions of the first council of Lima, written in 1552, directly state: ‘We order that all the cult idols and edifices found in the village where Christians reside be burned or destroyed, and if the site is suitable, a church or at least a cross should be planted there’” (36).

While some Chicanos/as maintain that the establishment of the Guadalupe cult led to a “mass conversion of Indians to Catholicism” (Rodriguez 23), others claim that “Méxicanos were worshipping Tonantzin, goddess of fertility” despite Christians’ “propagandistic work of making this new imposition widely accepted” (Camacho 2). It seems to be a fair conclusion, however, that the worship and celebration of the Virgin of Guadalupe among Mexicans and Chicanos/as is quite diverse and takes on numerous dimensions. She seems to have evolved into a figure with an array of characteristics and meanings. The essays in the collection Goddess of the Americas demonstrate that “la Virgen” has a unique and individual significance in each writer’s life, from “Sex Goddess” (Sandra Cisneros 46–51) to reminder of Mexican oppression and exploitation and “symbol of our rebellion against the rich, upper and middle class; against their subjugation of the poor and the indio” (Anzaldúa 54). Both Pat Mora and Gloria Anzaldúa, for instance, make a connection between the Virgin of Guadalupe and two other important figures in the Chicano/a world: La Malinche and La Llorona. Anzaldúa states,

La gente chicana tiene tres madres. All three are mediators: Guadalupe, the virgin mother who has not abandoned us; la Chingada (Malinche), the raped mother whom we have abandoned; and la Llorona, the mother who seeks her lost children and is a combination of the other two.

Ambiguity surrounds the symbols of these three “Our Mothers.” Guadalupe has been used by the Church to mete out institutionalized oppression: to placate the Indians and mexicanos and Chicanos. In part, the true identity of all three has been subverted—Guadalupe to make us docile and enduring, la Chingada to make us ashamed of our Indian side,
and la Llorona to make us long-suffering people. This obscuring has encouraged the virgen/puta (whore) dichotomy. (54)

However, Anzaldúa claims, Chicanas fight against this negative interpretation of their important female figures and the Church’s use of them for its subjugating purposes. She maintains that “we have not all embraced this dichotomy. In the U.S. Southwest, Mexico, Central and South America the indio and the mestizo continue to worship the old spirit entities (including Guadalupe) and their supernatural power, under the guise of Christian saints” (55). This last statement is important, as it seems to sum up and to make clear a common practice among Chicanos/as and Native Americans in the past and today. Anzaldúa explains that her “family, like most Chicanos, did not practice Roman Catholicism but a folk Catholicism with many pagan elements” (52).

The worship of Nuestro Señor de Esquipúlas, the “Black Christ,” in New Mexico is another expression of an embedded or syncretic religion, which is tied to a particular locale. New Mexicans’ devotion to Our Lord of Esquipúlas is rooted in the veneration of the Church of the Black Christ in Esquipúlas, Guatemala, where in 1595 a statue of the crucified Christ, carved from dark wood, was installed in the local church. The legend holds that the “santero” who sculpted the statue chose the dark wood at the request of the indigenous population to resemble the color of their own skin (“The Lord of Esquipúlas” par. 1). There are two versions of how the devotion to the Black Christ came to New Mexico during the first half of the nineteenth century: in one rendition, “a miraculous crucifix of Our Lord of Esquipúlas was found in Chimayó [a settlement near Santa Cruz] sometime around 1810” by a penitent who “saw a light springing from the ground nearby” and “started to dig up the ground with his hands where he found a crucifix” (“El Santuario” par. 2). The other version of the story holds that “a priest from Guatemala came to Chimayó with the first settlers. He carried a large crucifix with him when he would minister to the surrounding Indians and pueblos. Eventually he was killed by the Indians and buried with his cross at El Potrero” (“El Santuario” par. 5).

It is important to note that in both versions of the legend, the devotion to Our Lord of Esquipúlas did not begin until the arrival of Catholic priests and missionaries in the Southwest and that the location of the shrine, or “santuario,” dedicated to the Black Christ precisely corresponds with a place which the Tewa Pueblo Indians have held as sacred for a long time. In his study on Our Lord of Esquipúlas, Charles Carillo states that “[c]lose to the colonial settlement of Chimayó, the Tewa Pueblo Indians are known to have maintained a shrine at a site where hot waters had belched forming a sacred pool. This place was called Tsimayó. The waters at the shrine were used for magical curative purposes” (par. 34). After the water receded and the pool dried out, the earth was considered to have curative powers and was used for such (“El Santuario” par. 1). Analyzing these healing powers of the earth, Carillo maintains that in present-day New Mexico,

the devotion to Our Lord of Esquipúlas encapsulates a doctrine in which Christ is understood primarily as a healer. Specifically the healing powers of Christ are found in the form of “holy earth—tierra bendita” that he has provided for the faithful at the Santuario at Potrero de Chimayó. […] The
miraculous healing powers associated with Our Lord of Esquipúlas come from the holy earth found in the “posito” in the Santuario. (par. 1–2)

The veneration of Our Lord of Esquipúlas in New Mexico bears striking parallels to the devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe in both the statues’ appearances and the origin of their location. Not only do the images of both figures resemble the indigenous population’s outward appearance, the fact that the sanctuaries erected in their honor are located at places of native religious worship does not seem coincidental and points to the colonizers’ attempts to eradicate native religious symbols and practices by overlaying them with Christian ones. That these attempts were only partially successful, however, leading to a hybridization of Catholic and pagan religion can be seen in the emphasis of these figures’ connection to the earth, in the case of Our Lord of Esquipúlas specifically the healing powers of the earth at his shrine at Chimayó. The narrator in Ana Castillo’s novel So Far from God (1993), describing Doña Felicia, a curandera, and her apprentice Caridad’s pilgrimage to Chimayó, refers to this connection and to the “coincidence” of the appearance of the Black Christ at a place of Tewa worship:

Now, of course there are a lot of amazing aspects to this legend because Nuestro Señor de Esquipúlas was the black Christ of the far-off land of the converted Indians of Esquipúlas, Guatemala, and how He got to the land of the Tewa is anybody’s guess! But he most certainly had a mission, which was to let people know of the healing powers of the sacred earth of Tsimayó—just like he had done in Esquipúlas—so shortly after his appearance, the Catholic Church endorsed as sacred what the Native peoples had known all along since the beginning of time. (73)

Charles Carillo concludes as well that the worship of Our Lord of Esquipúlas combines Catholic and pagan traditions. He states that “At this New Mexican site, the Guatemalan devotion parallels the Tewa Indian tradition, adding a new spin on the Esquipulan tradition. The shrine remains today a visible reminder of the past, yet more importantly it serves as ‘memory bridge’ between the faithful of the past and the faithful of the present” (par. 35). Moreover, the practice of the worship of the Black Christ—the pilgrimage to his shrine at Chimayó and the gathering of a pinch of holy earth—points to the inclusion of both Christian and native religious elements in the practice of religion, which is common to both Native Americans and Chicanos/as, and which becomes evident in a variety of rituals.

James Wilson in his historical study of Native North America, The Earth Shall Weep (1998), refers to this amalgamation of religious rituals as well when he remarks about the Pueblos after the revolt of 1680 that “over the centuries, the Pueblos have learnt to live simultaneously in two realities, each governed by its own calendar and its own understanding of the universe.” It is important to note that “both of these worlds are valued and given their due: when a Pueblo person dies, for instance, a Catholic wake and a Requiem Mass are followed by a traditional ceremony conducted by family members and clan and community officials” (205).

Documents of this kind of syncretic religious practice can be found in works by Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo), Rudolfo Anaya (Chicano), N.Scott Momaday (Kiowa),
and Ana Castillo (Chicana). Both Silko and Momaday describe funeral scenes, Silko in her story “The Man to Send Rain Clouds” from Storyteller (1981) and Momaday in his novel House Made of Dawn (1968), in which a priest is called after the traditional native rites (e.g. sprinkling of corn meal and pollen, painting of the face, dressing of the body in new clothes) have been performed (thus reversing the order described by Wilson). However, in the Silko story, the Catholic rite of the sprinkling of holy water onto the body and into the grave is not merely added, but rather built into the native ritual. While the family in Silko’s story does not consider calling the priest to perform the Last Rites or read a funeral mass after Teofilo’s death, they appreciate the priest’s holy water because they believe that their grandfather might get thirsty, and they want him to have plenty of water. Moreover, since he will be leaving their world, they hope that he will become a powerful “holy person” and send them rain clouds for their crops: “Leon turned to look up at the high blue mountains in the deep snow that reflected a faint red light from the west. He felt good because it was finished, and he was happy about the sprinkling of the holy water; now the old man could send them big thunderclouds for sure” (186).

According to many Pueblo religious traditions, the deceased join their ancestors in the spirit world, hence becoming spirits themselves. They may never return to the human world as human beings, but may visit in spirit form, for example as clouds. Dennis Tedlock, who explores the Zuñis’ view of death (1975), explains that the Zuñis believe that the dead go to live at Kachina village, where they “depend on the living for their whole existence; they have no other source of food and clothing than the pinanne or ‘spirit’ of the sacrifices made to them” (266). In return for the donations, however, they give the living the gift of rain:

Anyone at Kachina Village may return among the living as a cloud, most happily in a whole group of rainclouds, but a person who seldom participated in dances in life or who never went to see the dances will be alone in the sky, a “lying” cloud that gives no rain. When the living pilgrims to Kachina Village come back to Zuñi walking in the rain, there is weeping all over the village because they have truly brought the dead back with them. (Tedlock 266)

In Silko’s story, the deceased Teofilo is aided in his return to the human world as a cloud, hence benefiting his relatives, by the priest’s holy water—a clear sign of a form of embedded, or syncretic, religion.

Similarly, Antonio Luna y Márez, the protagonist of Rudolfo Anaya’s Bless Me, Ultima (1972), comes to represent a harmonious coexistence of Catholicism and native religion in his character by the end of the book. The novel portrays Antonio’s rite of passage with a focus on his difficulty mediating between the dual heritage of his mother’s and his father’s families, farmers and cattlemen respectively, and—connected with that—of two religions, Catholicism and a native, “pagan,” religion. The latter is further represented by Antonio’s friends Samuel and Cico, who introduce him to the legend of the Golden Carp (79–81; 115–119), which Samuel’s father has heard from “the only Indian of the town” (10) and which in itself has syncretic elements. The story holds that the Golden Carp is a pagan god, who returned to his people after their valley had been flooded and they had been turned to fish as a punishment for their misbehavior. Out of
compassion for his people, the god becomes flesh in the form of a golden carp and swims among them to watch over them and remind them of their creator; indeed, the parallels to Christianity and Jesus’ appearance among the people as God’s son are striking—a fact that Antonio might not consciously be aware of, but which may facilitate his acceptance of the legend and the pagan god.

Antonio, who begins to have serious doubts about the validity and practical usefulness of Catholicism after his first communion, during which he vainly hoped for a sign from God, is drawn to the tale of the Golden Carp despite his fear of the Christian god’s wrath. However, he slowly realizes the need for a new, syncretic religion, which may be a combination of Christianity and native beliefs. In the passage following Antonio’s explaining God’s failure to respond to his and his peers’ prayers on the basis of the indigenous, cyclical world view (quoted in Chapter 1, page 16), Antonio ponders the possibility of the need for alternative gods in case of one god’s absence from the pantheon: “‘[W]hat if there were different gods to rule in his absence? […] What if the Virgin Mary or the Golden Carp ruled instead of—!’” (198). Although he still doesn’t dare finish the sentence, fearing the Christian god’s punishment for what is deemed a blasphemous statement, Antonio considers the possibilities that there might be a variety of gods for people’s various needs.

He discusses the idea of the need for a syncretic religion with his father as well, maintaining that the changes and demands of the modern U.S. society must be accommodated in a new way. In a very significant dialogue between Antonio and his father, the boy realizes how he is “so much a part of the past” (247). His father agrees, replying that “every generation, every man is a part of his past. He cannot escape it, but he may reform the old materials and make something new—.” Antonio ponders, “Take the llano and the river valley, the moon and the sea, God and the golden carp—and make something new […]. That is what Ultima meant by building strength from life” (247). Hence, religion needs to be adjusted or reformed, since the religion of the colonizers is not apt to fulfill the people’s needs, especially those representing the future—the children:

[T]he priest that came with the first colonizers to the valley of El Puerto had raised a family, and it was the branches of this family that now ruled the valley. Somehow everything changed. The priest had changed, so perhaps his religion could be made to change. If the old religion could no longer answer the questions of the children then perhaps it was time to change too. (247–48)

Ultima, who, despite her occasional prayers to the Virgin of Guadalupe (although the latter, as we have seen, is a syncretic figure herself), possesses a spirituality that is rooted in the natural world, is the most influential person in Antonio’s spiritual growth. It is she who gives him the final blessing at the end of the book, shortly before she dies. Touching his forehead, she says, “I bless you in the name of all that is good and strong and beautiful, Antonio” (261). And although she will be buried according to Catholic custom, Antonio knows that her spirit is united with the land, the llano, and the earth, represented by her owl that he buried for her under the forked jumper tree (261–62). Ultima, who, throughout the novel, is both a mother and a teacher figure for Antonio, is united with the
land she comes from and with the earth, which is considered sacred because it is the origin of all being (Mother Earth).

By the end of the novel it seems that Antonio has accepted the idea of a harmonious coexistence of the two beliefs while at the same time realizing the “practicality” or more “concrete” nature of the pagan belief. For him, the wake following Ultima’s death, the funeral mass, and her burial in the cemetery of Las Pasturas are but Catholic rituals. He states, “all that would only be the ceremony that was prescribed by custom. Ultima was really buried here [the llano]. Tonight” (262). That he now diminishes the value of these Catholic customs that were instilled in him by his mother and the local priest points to his ultimate appreciation and recognition of a natural spirituality and religion.

Likewise, in Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn*, the Indians at Jemez Pueblo accept the presence of the Franciscan priests, but they only partially acknowledge the efficacy of Catholic religious customs. As in Silko’s “The Man to Send Rain Clouds,” the priests are not immediately called to the deathbed or a family’s home whose relative has passed to perform any last rites. They do, however, let the priests take over the actual burial. Both Fray Nicolás and Father Olguín, several decades apart from each other, have this personally disappointing experience of being called after the pagan ceremonies—Fray Nicolás with the death of Tomacita Fragua (48) and Father Olguín with the death of Francisco, Abel’s grandfather (210). For Abel, who, throughout the book, undergoes a spiritual journey paralleling Antonio’s, the death of his grandfather marks an important step in this quest, which is determined by diverse religious influences through an array of characters with whom he comes in contact.

Most significantly, Abel is spiritually affected by his grandfather Francisco, his Navajo friend Ben Benally, and the “Priest of the Sun,” Tosamah. Francisco, who as a child and adolescent was quite involved in the local church community—he served as an altar boy and sacristan for Fray Nicolás—was nonetheless practicing the tribal religion at the same time, as the priest bitterly remarks in an unsent letter to his (biological) brother:

Listen I told you of Francisco & was right to say it. He is evil & desires to do me some injury & this after I befriended him all his life. […] He is one of them & goes often in the kiva & puts on their horns & hides & does worship that Serpent which even is the One our most ancient enemy. Yet he is unashamed to make one of my sacristans & brother I am most fearful to forbid it. You will be reviled I believe to hear that he lays hold of the paten & the Host & so defiles me in the sight of my enemies. Where is the Most Holy Spirit that he is not struck down at that moment? (51)

Fray Nicolás obviously does not understand nor accept “imperfect conversion” to Christianity, as this simultaneous practice of Catholic and native religious rituals and customs must seem to him; conversely, he interprets it as vile and even spiteful behavior on the part of Francisco. At the same time, however, Fray Nicolás demonstrates his own imperfection through his fathering of both Francisco and Porcingula, thus paralleling and reinforcing Antonio’s remarks about the first priest of the “valley of El Puerto” who had also ignored the Church’s teachings and started a family.

Abel, who after the death of his mother and due to the absence of his father grows up with his grandfather, is certainly influenced by Francisco’s eclectic, or syncretic,
approach to religion. According to Alan Velie, Francisco is not alone in his take on religion; rather, he is a representative of the “Jemez Catholicism” that existed in the 1940s and 1950s, and which was

a thorough combination of two very different belief systems, the Kachina Cult of the Pueblos, and the Catholicism brought in by the Conquistadors and Spanish missionaries. For years the priests simply sought to suppress the native religion, but although the Jemez became Christians they refused to abandon their old beliefs, and as the Church became more tolerant in the twentieth century, the religion of the Indians emerged as a blend of Christian and Tanoan elements. (“Return of the Native” 136)

Evidence of this thorough blending of tribal religion and Catholicism in House Made of Dawn, as Velie notes, is found in the two depicted festivals on the Jemez Pueblo reservation, the Fiesta of our Lady of the Angels and the “feast of Santiago,” both of which Father Olguin attends and even takes visitors to observe (136–38).

Even if the reader can’t be sure that Abel himself will adopt—or has adopted—Francisco’s beliefs, the fact that he calls Father Olguin after Francisco’s passing demonstrates his recognition of and respect for his grandfather’s religious practices. It actually seems that at the end of the novel, Abel, with the help of his Navajo friend Benally, has rediscovered the value of his people’s natural spirituality, manifested in his return to Jemez Pueblo after living in Los Angeles, and his participation in the dawn run at the end of the novel. While through the application of an eclectic understanding of religion he does find his way home, and thus his sense of self after being terribly lost, it is not so much through a combination of Christian and native elements, as of different indigenous components (i.e. Jemez and Navajo), that he heals.

In Los Angeles, Abel meets the Reverend John Big Bluff Tosamah, “Priest of the Sun” and pastor of the “Holiness Pan-Indian Rescue Mission” (89) of the Native American Church. Tosamah, of Kiowa (and probably European) descent, sees himself as a spiritual leader for all Indians in the city. Although he does call himself “pastor” and “reverend” and his meeting hall “mission,” and although he preaches on a biblical text, the Gospel of John (91–103), he also incorporates Kiowa thought into his sermons, such as the story of the sun dance doll Tai-me, and applies native religious practices, such as the consumption of peyote at a prayer meeting (109–14). In fact, at this particular prayer meeting, the Priest of the Sun is dressed, painted, and equipped with the paraphernalia of a peyote priest, thus reminding the reader of the long and controversial history of peyotism and the Native American Church.

Peyote cactus buttons have been consumed sacramentally by native tribes for thousands of years. Their use is said to go back to the Huichol Indians of northwestern Mexico (Fikes 167), and from there it spread north, but was largely restricted to the area of the cactus’ natural habitat (Niezen 141). Before it became the center of the “Peyote cult” or “Peyote way,” the plant was used for medicinal purposes and as a “source of visionary inspiration” when taken by individuals, or for “inducing] trance states during dancing rites” when consumed in a group (Niezen 141). Jay C. Fikes explains in a collection of personal testimonies by members of the Native American Church, One Nation Under God: The Triumph of the Native American Church (1996) that in the
Huichol religion, Peyote was considered to embody the resurrected incarnation of the Creator, so that the consumption of the heart of the cactus plant parallels Christians’ sacramental consumption of bread and wine as God’s flesh and blood (Fikes 168). Anthropologist and psychoanalyst Weston La Barre, who published the first extensive study on peyotism in 1938, entitled *The Peyote Cult*, also compares the consumption of peyote buttons to the “Christian partaking of the Host” (53).

The use of peyote in native religious ceremonies became increasingly more popular and spread over the North American continent, reaching tribes and reservations far away from the plant’s natural habitat. From its first documentation by Franciscans in 1620, the use of peyote was met with severe opposition by Euro-Americans and was made illegal shortly thereafter (Fikes 168–69). The anthropologist James Mooney, who had been researching peyotism since the 1890s, encouraged leaders of the Peyote way to institutionalize the religion, so that in 1918 “the Native American Church was officially incorporated” (Fikes 169). However, Peyotists continued to struggle with their colonizers and the government until as recently as 1994, when President Clinton—after many legal battles—signed the *American Indian Religious Freedom Act Amendments of 1994*, and “the centuries-long era of persecution and oppression of Native American peyotism was ended” (Botsford/Echo-Hawk 141).

The reason that the Indians’ use of peyote was so violently opposed is that Euro-American politicians and judges have categorized it as a hallucinatory and narcotic drug. La Barre states that consumption of the plant “produces profound sensory and psychic derangements lasting twenty-four hours”; there are, however, “no ill after-effects and peyote is not known to be habit-forming” (7). In many of the legal battles that took place on both the state and the federal level, Peyotists and opponents bitterly argued over the religious purpose of the plant. Followers of peyotism maintain that it is considered a medicine and a sacrament, that it is a sacred plant and divine, for it was given to the people by the Creator. The late Reuben Snake, a Winnebago political leader and activist of the Native American Church, who decisively contributed to the passage of the *American Indian Religious Freedom Act Amendments of 1994*, explained:

> My people have a story about this herb. They talk about its power. They say that this particular herb is the most powerful of all the plants because God endowed it with his love and compassion. He put those qualities into this lowly herb so that when we eat it we can feel that the love that God is—I emphasize the love that God is, not that God has—is physically inside us. (18; emphasis in the text)

Peyotists further testify that in their religion, peyote is never taken “for kicks,” that it would be a sacrilege to do so (and few would want to because it is so bitter), and that in the religious context it does not produce hallucinations, but “visions”—similar to the ones induced by extensive Ghost dancing—that enable them to see the path that the Creator has laid out for them, namely to respect, honor, and love other people as well as the Great Spirit and Grandmother Earth (Snake 18; 25).

Besides worship of a Messiah—a creator and savior—there are other parallels between revitalization movements, like the Ghost Dance and the Native American Church, and Christianity, in their rituals and practices, which may merge Christian and native
elements. In fact, the Native American Church has grown exponentially and has developed into many chapters and “ways,” which vary in their inclusion of Christian elements. At some meetings, followers have replaced traditional ceremonial elements such as the sacred pipe with the Bible as a “catalyst for prayer” (Fike 172); others have included baptism in their ceremonies (Snake 26). Hence, peyotism is clearly a syncretic religion that today is not only widely practiced among Native Americans—“The Native American Church (NAC) is the spiritual bulwark of a quarter million of the original inhabitants of this continent” (Smith 9)—but is also a truly pan-tribal religion, bringing together Indians of various tribes and nations.23 The teaching of the Native American Church unites all its followers in their reverence for the natural world—the earth and all its inhabitants—thus, resulting in a spiritual environmentalism.

A spiritual attachment to and reverence for the natural world is intrinsic to all indigenous peoples of the American Southwest, rooted in their origin (creation and emergence) stories as well as the belief in their ancestors’ spirits. Joe Watkins (Choctaw), in his essay entitled “Place-meant,” explains tribal peoples’ “metaphysical attachment” and their “cultural-historical relationship with the land” as an intertwining of their past and their future, as the land “reminds them […] of their ancestors and their offspring, their spirit and their obligations” (42). This veneration of the land, Watkins asserts, goes hand and hand with an awareness of obligations and responsibilities toward the earth, leading to a spiritual environmentalism, which many southwestern indigenous literary works reflect.

In House Made of Dawn, this spiritual attachment to and concern for the natural world is represented most clearly in Tosamah’s second sermon (127–136). This speech, which—save a few omissions and changes—is a verbatim reproduction of Momaday’s introduction to his The Way to Rainy Mountain (1969), tells the Kiowa origin myth according to which the tribe emerged into this world “through a hollow log” (House Made of Dawn 129), and the tribe’s migration to the Great Plains. Moreover, Momaday/Tosamah describes his deceased grandmother, Aho, whose grave as a young man he set out to visit. During his journey to his grandmother’s grave at Rainy Mountain in southwestern Oklahoma, Momaday/Tosamah retraces and reconstructs the migration of his tribe and his ancestors as he tries “to see in reality what she had seen more perfectly in the mind’s eye” (129). Momaday/Tosamah calls his journey to the land of his ancestors a “pilgrimage” (129), and takes great care to describe in minute detail the features of the landscape and geographical markers, such as “Bighorn River” in the “land of the Crows,” where the Kiowas paused on their journey before moving on further south (130), or “Devil’s Tower,” which represents the mythical story about the seven sisters who, after being chased up a tree trunk by their brother who turned into a bear, “were borne into the sky, and […] became the stars of the Big Dipper” (131). These markers represent the Kiowas’ tribal history and demonstrate their attachment to the land on which they have suffered so immensely. Through the memory of his grandmother, who had great reverence for the land, the sun, and all natural elements, Momaday/Tosamah understands the sacredness of his homeland and how it is “the center of the world’s being” (136) for himself and his tribe. He describes this moment of realization at the end of his speech:
I went out on the dirt road to Rainy Mountain. It was already hot, and the grasshoppers began to fill the air. Still, it was early in the morning, and the birds sang out of the shadows. The long yellow grass on the mountain shone in the bright light, and a scissortail hied above the land. There, where it ought to be, at the end of a long and legendary way, was my grandmother’s grave. She had at last succeeded to that holy ground. Here and there on the dark stones were the dear ancestral names. Looking back once, I saw the mountain and came away. (136)

Momaday’s/Tosamah’s description not only reveals his deep emotional and spiritual ties to his homeland, but also expresses his epiphany about this connection and about the land’s capacity in orienting or guiding people spiritually.

Leslie Marmon Silko expresses this reverence for the land and thus a natural (and spiritual) environmentalism in her much anthologized essay, “Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination,” stating that “Ancient Pueblos took the modest view that the thing itself (the landscape) could not be improved upon. The ancients did not presume to tamper with what had already been created” (85). The land is considered alive, a notion different from the “western” perception, which explains the animate nature of the relationship native peoples have with it. Joseph Epes Brown remarks in his book *Teaching Spirits: Understanding Native American Religious Traditions* (2001) that “Every particular form of the land is experienced as the locus of qualitatively different spirit beings. Their presence sanctifies and gives meaning to the land in all its details and contours” (24). Furthermore, all elements of the landscape are interconnected and are spiritually connected to one another; Brown states that “[a]ll created forms of the landscape have spiritual essence. All are alive. […] There is a unity, a series of relationships that binds all places together” (31). The interconnectedness of all things, therefore, denies the Euro-American, or western, dichotomies of animate vs. inanimate, secular vs. profane. Gloria Anzaldúa confirms this notion as well in her *Borderlands* (1987), stating that “my people, the Indians, did not split the artistic from the functional, the sacred from the secular, art from everyday life. The religious, social and aesthetic purposes of art were all intertwined” (88). Hence, the relationship tribal people have with the land is similar to that between human beings; the land is deserving of respect, reverence, and thanks for what it gives. This idea is the basis of many religious ceremonies and actions like praying and dancing, or making offerings of tobacco to symbolize native peoples’ natural understanding that the land should not be “tampered with,” exploited, or polluted.

Unfortunately, this tampering is precisely what the colonizers have been doing to the land in North America. Dams have rerouted rivers, such as the Hoover Dam which “tames” the Colorado River; mines and drilling sites, such as the one on the Navajo and Hopi reservations in Utah and Arizona, to extract uranium, oil, gas, and other valuable natural resources, unearth tribal burial sites, or disturb sacred *sipapus* (points of origin); whole tribes, like the Oklahoma Choctaw and the Cherokee, have been removed from their lands along the Mississippi River, thus separating them from their natural habitat and their holy sites, so that the land could be exploited. Ronald Niezen, in his book *Spirit Wars: Native North American Religions in the Age of Nation Building* (2000), analyzes this disregard of the sacredness of tribal land by pointing to the different perception the
colonizers have of the land and to the ways it should be used, which “largely overlook[s] native patterns of land use and attachment to sites of spiritual significance” (151). He further points out that in the Euro-American view of the land, “[m]aterial evidence of human achievement, separating the sacred from the profane, seems to be necessary before a location can attain public importance” (150). In other words, lacking any markers of human interaction, such as “buildings, altars, shrines, and monuments” which “a widespread ethnocentric bias” associates with religion (Niezen 152), tribal sacred sites are largely unrecognized, and thus can be exploited economically.

Because of the Euro-American culture and government’s denigration and devaluation of tribal religions—referring back to the colonial assumption that Indians did not seem to have any religion—indigenous peoples are assigned reservation land that often is not only thousands of miles away from their ancestral homelands, but in addition does not provide them with the necessary qualities for the free exercise of their religious ceremonies. Tourists are free to enter the reservations for recreational purposes, often encouraged by the tribes themselves who have built ski resorts (e.g. the White Mountain Apache in Arizona; Lewis 438), or resort marinas and tribal parks (like the Navajo on Lake Powell and Monument Valley; Lewis 438), which leads to intrusion and inhibition of religious ceremonial grounds. Vine Deloria, Jr., a practicing Sioux lawyer and activist writer, also states:

One of the primary aspects of traditional tribal religions has been the secret ceremonies, particularly the vision quests, the fasting in the wilderness, and the isolation of the individual for religious purposes. This type of religious practice is nearly impossible today. The places currently available to people for vision quests are hardly isolated. Jet planes pass overhead. Some traditional holy places are the scene of strip-mining, others are adjacent to superhighways, others are parts of ranches, farms, shopping centers, and national parks and forests. (246–47)

Joseph Epes Brown also notes that because of the U.S. courts’ failure to recognize and understand the sacredness of the land to Native Americans, tribal people’s traditions suffer, and they are unable to conduct their rituals and ceremonies (23–25). Moreover, even the protection of a few places reserved for tribal people on reservations does not help to promote the preservation of the religious traditions because the unity, the interconnectedness of the spirit landscapes, is “fractured when pieces of it are destroyed” (Brown 32). The consequence has been portrayed by Native Americans as the tribes’ spiritual death.

Tribal people’s need to practice their religion in a specific landscape, at a specific geographical location (which often does not correspond with the government’s assignment of land for their reservation), is explained by their attachment to their homelands, often identified by the tribes as their point of origin, as well as the burial sites of their ancestors, and hence the entrance to the spirit world. Tribal creation, emergence, and migration stories identify and describe each group’s place of origin, thus underlining the significance of the land and landscape for the formation of their spiritual identity. Robert Nelson writes in his essay, “Place, Vision, and Identity,” that “In many Native American origin stories, [sipapu, the place of emergence] is the place where the People
first emerged into the Earth Surface world. Unlike the origin places of some other cultural traditions (Christianity’s Eden, for instance), Native American sipapus are usually located, known sites” (269–70). Leslie Marmon Silko explains as well that “each Pueblo culture designates a specific Emergence Place—usually a small natural spring edged with mossy sandstone and full of cattails and wild watercress” out of which “all human beings, with all the animals and plants, emerged at the same place and at the same time” (“Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination” 91); this sacred spring is represented in both her novels *Ceremony* (1977) and *Gardens in the Dunes* (1999).25

The Chicanos/as’ mythic place of origin, Aztlán, is just as well defined—even if it comprises the larger area of the American Southwest—and this is what makes Chicanos/as indigenous to the area. Chicano/a writers who are conscious (and proud) of their Indian heritage, such as Gloria Anzaldúa and Rudolfo Anaya, have declared “Aztlán as the ancestral homeland” (Anaya, “Aztlán” 232) and point to the Chicano Movement of the 1960s as the time when Chicanos/as reflected upon their Indian past by identifying themselves as “indio,” and by “reviving the history, myths, spiritual thought, legends, and symbols from Native America which were a part of the Chicano’s collective history” (Anaya, “Aztlán” 234). In fact, this search and acknowledgment of their Indian roots can be seen as a “rebirth of indigenous heritage,” as Alesia García does, interpreting it as a “contemporary creation myth” (15).

In his novel *Heart of Aztlán* (1976), Rudolfo Anaya tells two perspectives of the creation story of Aztlán and its inhabitants, the Chicanos/as, through the character of Crispin, an old wise man:

> It is said that the people were the first human beings to walk on the shores of Aztlán. Where they came from is not recorded in the annals of the sun, and the stories have been so eroded by the waters of the stream of time that only a sentence or two remain to give an intimation of the entire story. Some say the people were a wandering tribe of the ancient world, spared during the drowning of the earth so that they might establish a civilization of peace in the new world. Other versions go further back and say that Aztlán was a floating continent that settled north of Mexico when the earth was young. There are seven springs on the sacred mountain, and the Indians call this the sipapu, the place of origin. The rays of the sun penetrated the dark waters of those sacred lakes and from this intercourse the people emerged. That is why there is so much power in that place; it is the source. (123; emphasis in the text)

This passage demonstrates Anaya’s view of the influence of the Judeo-Christian tradition on native religion and on Chicanos/as’ understanding of their place of origin, thus showing their hybrid spiritual identity. The first version of the story that Crispín relates may be read as an allusion to the story of the flood in the Old Testament (Gen. 6–8), in which God floods the earth to destroy all forms of corrupted and evil life, save Noah and his family, and to start a new civilization on the basis of his family; even though Crispín’s version of the story does not name the reason for the flood, his mentioning that the ancient tribe was “spared” suggests a punishment of the ones who perished. The second version of the Chicanos/as’ creation story is the Indian version, which Anaya
claims to be older, hence emphasizing the ancient roots of Chicanos/as and Indians. This version features springs as the place of emergence, the sipapus, thus connecting it to the Pueblo tribes, but also relates a lake as the point of origin for the people. This element of the story suggests that Anaya merges not only Christian and native elements of creation stories, but also different tribal traditions, in which the lake and earth-divers play an important role.

Many Northeastern and Plains Indian creation stories (e.g. Mohawk, Chippewa, and Iroquois) feature a turtle, which provided a landing and resting place for Sky Woman, who fell through a hole in the sky; other water animals, such as a duck, a beaver, and a muskrat, dove to the bottom of the lake to bring up mud, which they placed on the back of the turtle. The turtle’s back grew larger and larger, and evolved into the earth that Sky Woman then planted and populated. This is why in these native traditions the North American continent is called “Turtle Island.” In the Lakota version of the story, the turtle is the only animal that succeeds in bringing up mud from the water that was caused by a big flood to punish the previous world’s inhabitants for their misdemeanor. The Creating Power then “named the new land Turtle Continent in honor of the turtle who provided the mud from which it was formed” (“World Mythology”).

In his rendition of the legend of Aztlán in Heart of Aztlán, Anaya alludes to both these versions of the creation of the earth, just as he does in his version of a tribal emergence story he tells in his collection of folk tales, My Land Sings (1999). “Coyote and Raven” narrates the story of First Man and First Woman, who live unhappily in the dark and damp underworld. “First Man and First Woman believed the earth was a turtle swimming around the sun. They had heard stories that in the turtle’s shell existed a very different world. Badgers and moles who dug holes through the shell had brought word that the surface was bathed in light” (161). With the help of the tricksters Coyote and Raven, First Man and First Woman eventually reach the surface of the earth, and as a payment or reward for the tricksters’ service, the couple promise to tell stories about their greatness to their children. Even against the evil of the sorcerers, who try to sow jealousy and discord among the tribes First Woman and First Man have created, the people retain their stories which they continue to tell their children. “We must never stop telling the children our stories,” the elders say. “This is the only way they have to learn our history, traditions, and religion” (170).

This version of an emergence story clearly merges different tribal traditions: the northeastern tribes’ version of the creation of the earth and the people with the southwestern tribes’ notion of an emergence from a world below. The story of “Coyote and Raven” features a turtle that is the earth, and out of whose belly First Woman and First Man emerge. Many southwestern tribes believe in the existence of four underworlds out of which the people—with the help of various (trickster) animals (e.g. Hummingbird or Badger)—emerged into the Fifth World, in which we live now (cf. Silko, “Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination” 90–92). While the “creation by emergence”-stories are common to Indians of the American South-west and Mexico (Leeming 58), they vary in the nature of the people in the underworlds (sometimes they are animals, as in the Navajo creation story), in the kind of the supreme being that helps them find their way into the upper world, and in the number of underworlds the people emerge from. According to Silko, the Pueblos believe in the existence of four underworlds, like the Navajo, who believe that they transformed from insects into human beings on their
journey through the underworlds, and “evolv[ed] by the fourth world into people as we
know them. Above our present world there is thought to be a sixth world of perfect
harmony” (Leeming 204); for the Hopi, in contrast, “there are three worlds before this
one [the present]” (Leeming/Page 91), making the present world the fourth world.

Anaya’s story of “Coyote and Raven,” and even more so his novel Tortuga (1979),
seem to make references to the Tewa Pueblo creation story as well, and considering the
setting of Anaya’s works in New Mexico along the Rio Grande, it is likely that it
influenced his writing. In the Tewa origin story, the people are led out of the underworld
by Mole, who digs the place of emergence for them and guides them into the blinding
light of the new world, where the people are met by Spider Woman. She points the
people to the sacred mountains and tells them to settle near Turtle Mountain (which is
Sandia Mountain near Albuquerque, as Leeming points out [268]), where they will find
her again as well as their friend Mole. However, the people don’t listen to her and instead
settle near the closer Red Mountain, where many of them are killed by Comanches. Only
two people, a man and a woman, survive and travel further south through a great desert
until they find the Rio Grande, where they are welcomed by a tiny turtle in the sand, the
turtle of Turtle Mountain. Thus, the man and the woman know that this is the right place
and settle there, and that way establish the Tewas’ home (Leeming 266–69).

In Anaya’s novel, Tortuga, the turtle gives name to both a mountain and the
protagonist (“tortuga” is the Spanish word for turtle as well as for tortoise, the land-
dweller). The novel depicts the adolescent protagonist’s struggle with, and eventual
successful fight against, a complete body paralysis, which seems to be an effect of his
affliction with polio early in his life. At the beginning of the novel, the protagonist and
first person narrator is moved to the “Crippled Children and Orphans Hospital” near
“Tortuga Mountain,” a”volcanic mountain loom[ing] over the otherwise empty desert”
(3) in the shape of a turtle; this mountain strongly evokes the image of Turtle Mountain
from the Tewa creation story. Filomón, the ambulance driver who brings him to the
hospital, tells him about the mountain’s magic powers and healing springs that are said to
have cured many illnesses (5). Placed in a full body cast for several months, the
protagonist soon is given the nickname “Tortuga” (his real name is never mentioned in
the novel) because he resembles a turtle and is safe in his cast as in a shell. Through
Filomón, and above all Ismelda, a young nurse’s aide and modern curandera, he
continues to hear about the magic of the mountain and its surrounding desert, which he
can see from his window in the hospital. Ismelda tells him about hidden secrets of the
mountain, such as the life of plants and animals that many people would not expect to
find in this infertile land:

Like the mountain, the desert seems barren at first, but it isn’t. When you
look close you can see the life which lives in it: Small, hardy plants which
hang on for dear life, cactus which blooms in bright, lush colors, lizards
and birds which look like the color of the landscape. […] All the places
around here were once so holy. There are writings and signs carved into
the huge boulders of the mountain […]. (165)

Tortuga realizes:
She talked about the mountain as if it were a living being, a giant turtle she had climbed in the ocean of the desert, a creature alive with history and old memories, and as she talked she brought the time of the past into the time of the present, and the stories she told seemed equally to fit people as well as the birds, the lizards and coyotes. (165)

These two passages are strongly reminiscent of the Anaya’s emergence story in My Land Sings—the image of the earth on the back of the turtle that carries all life while being surrounded by water—and also remind the reader of the old, ancestral stories that are passed on to the children to provide guidance for their lives. Moreover, through Ismelda, Anaya emphasizes the animate nature, the “aliveness,” of the mountain and the desert and thus the whole landscape, and points to the relationship human beings enter with it.

Tortuga, the protagonist, has adopted the name of the mountain and associates with it through the stories he hears about it, so that he symbolically is the mountain, he is the land. Here, Anaya expresses precisely the kinds of relationship tribal people have with the land and that defines their spiritual identity. In The Sacred Hoop (1986), Pueblo writer Paula Gunn Allen states that “We are the land. To the best of my understanding, that is the fundamental ideal that permeates American Indian life; the land (Mother) and the people (mothers) are the same.” Hence, “for American Indians […], the earth is being, as all creatures are also being: aware, palpable, intelligent, alive” (119; emphasis in the text). Tortuga demonstrates or manifests this ideal of interchangeability between earth and humankind.

Like Tortuga, Clemente, the protagonist of Heart of Aztlán, realizes his identification with the homeland. Reaching the end of his spiritual journey to the heart of Aztlán, he cries out, “I AM AZTLÁN! My heart is the heart of the earth! I am the earth and I am the blue sky! I am the water and I am the wind! I walk in legends told today, and turn and recreate the past…” (131). Anaya clearly presents Clemente as an embodiment of the land and of the Chicanos/as’ origin and history, who through his function in the novel perpetuates his people’s attachment to and relationship with their homeland. By merging variations of tribal creation stories, especially those of the southwestern tribes, Anaya assembles the Chicanos/as’ origin story, which he sets in the mythic homeland of Aztlán, and thus asserts their indigenousness to the Southwest.

Ana Castillo (Chicana) accomplishes the same feat in her novel, So Far from God (1993). Set in Tome, New Mexico, the novel revolves around Sofi and her four daughters, Esperanza, Caridad, and Fe—whose names evoke the Christian virtues of hope, charity, and faith—, and La Loca (the Madwoman)—who, in the eyes of her family and the local community, shows abnormal behavior after rising from the dead as a child, and whose real name nobody remembers. By the end of the novel, all four daughters will have died under dramatic, mysterious, and violent circumstances. Most interesting in this context is Caridad, who after being horribly attacked and mutilated miraculously recovers from her injuries without even so much as a scar, and develops supernatural, prophetic powers. She is taken under the wing by Doña Felicia, a wise woman and Caridad’s landlady who is at least ninety years old, to learn the magical healing skills of a curandera. One day at Acoma Sky City, a community on a high, steep-sided mesa, where she accompanied Esmeralda, a mixed blood Indian she is secretly in love with and whose grandmother lives at Acoma, Caridad and Esmeralda hear the calling of “Tsichtinako”
and jump off the mesa without leaving any trace, not even their shattered bodies, behind at its bottom. While the tourists, their tour guide, and the local priest are dumbfounded, the people of Acoma Pueblo understand what happened because they “heard it and knew it was the voice of the Invisible One who had nourished the first two humans, who were also both female, although no one had heard it in a long time and some had never heard it before. But all still knew who It was.” They know it was “the spirit deity Tsichtinako calling loudly with a voice like the wind, guiding the two women back, not out toward the sun’s rays or up to the clouds but down, deep within the soft, moist dark earth where Esmeralda and Caridad would be safe and live forever” (211).

Ralph E. Rodriguez, who explores Ana Castillo’s novel as a piece of “contestation literature,” has pointed out that in So Far from God, “Castillo recuperates the Acoma creation myth to demonstrate the availability of alternative originary narratives and their usefulness in critiquing social domination” (78). What he does not discuss, however, is how Caridad and Esmeralda reenact the Acoma Pueblo creation story to underline their belief of being of the earth, of having emerged from it as from the womb of the mother to which they now return. “[T]he Acoma creation is orchestrated by a female spirit and is representative of the emergence type of creation myth, a birth process that begins in the earth womb” (Leeming 3). In this creation story, Tsichtinako, who in other Pueblo tribal stories is known as Spider Woman or Thought Woman (cf. the beginning of Silko’s Ceremony), nourishes and teaches two sister-spirits in the underworld by telling them to gather seeds of plants and models of animals in their baskets to take to the world above. With the help of Locust and Badger, the sisters find their way into the upper world, also guided by Tsichtinako, who had taught them the four directions and the direction of the sun’s rising. The sisters take on the names “Iatiku” (Life-Bringer) and “Nautsiti” (Full Basket) and complete the creation by planting the seeds and breathing life into the animals they brought with them (Leeming 3–4). By hearing (and listening to) the call of Tsichtinako, Caridad and Esmeralda show their belief in the tribal origin story and demonstrate their attachment to their homeland when they know where to enter the emergence place. Hence, despite her acknowledgment of the influence of Christianity on the Chicanos/as in her novel—above all demonstrated in the character of Doña Felicia, who used to be “suspicious of the religion that did not help the destitute all around despite their devotion,” but then “did develop faith, based not on institution but on bits and pieces of the souls and knowledge of the wise teachers she met along the way” (60)—Ana Castillo emphasizes the eclectic approach many Chicanos/as have toward religion and the way they connect this belief to their homeland.

Leslie Marmon Silko’s novel, Ceremony, demonstrates her understanding of a particular landscape as the tribe’s place of origin through the character of Ts’eh, who plays a crucial role in Tayo’s healing ceremony. Robert Nelson argues in his study Place and Vision (1993) that Ts’eh, whom Tayo meets for the first time at the foot of Mount Taylor (though at that time he does not learn her name), must be “understood as a ‘spirit of place,’ a more-than-human being who represents the land’s own life, who knows How Things Work and who is willing to share this knowledge with the People” (15). As Nelson notes, the “energy” of Ts’eh permeates the entire novel; in the beginning of the novel she is Ts’its’tsi’nakó, Thought Woman, the Creator of the “Universe/this world/and the four worlds below” (Ceremony 1). At a crucial point in Tayo’s healing ceremony, she is the woman Tayo encounters first at one of the four sacred mountains, and then again
by a mountain spring; it is here that he asks for her name and she answers, “I’m a Montaño. […] You can call me Ts’eh. That’s my nickname because my Indian name is so long” (Ceremony 223). The fact that her last name is Montaño, the Spanish word for mountain, already hints at her affiliation with Mount Taylor. Her name Ts’eh, then, which she says is a nickname, could be short for Tse-pi’na, which means “Woman Veiled in Clouds” and is the Laguna name for Mount Taylor (Allen 121; Nelson 21).28 Ts’eh could also be short for Ts’its’tsi’nako (Nelson 21), which relates her again to the creation of the earth, an idea underlined by the location where Tayo meets her the second time, the spring, which, as discussed above, is a common place associated with the emergence of Pueblo tribes from the Fourth World below.

Ts’eh helps Tayo in his search for (and eventual finding of) the lost spotted Mexican cattle, which is representative of his search for his sense of self and his connection to his homeland29—both of which he lost due to his participation in the Second World War. Robert Nelson notes:

The connection between the woman and the land becomes manifest in the account (filtered through Tayo’s evolving awareness) of his lovemaking with her, an event during which her body takes shape in Tayo’s consciousness as a landscape, while his sense of his own relationship to her takes shape in the language of geographical awareness: ‘He was afraid of being lost, so he repeated trail marks to himself: this is my mouth tasting the salt of her brown breasts; this is my voice calling out to her’ [180]. (21)

After (and through) his union with her, Tayo has a dream vision that tells him where he will find the cattle, so he sets out to climb the mountain, where he will come one step closer to achieving a union with the landscape, thus emulating the union he had achieved with Ts’eh as a representative of the land.

Tayo succeeds in bringing back the cattle, which symbolizes that he—for himself—has recovered his sense of place and is now participating in, and even becoming one with the landscape. “The healing of Tayo and the land results from the reunification of land and person” (Allen 120). However, he needs to go back to find Ts’eh to “bring this spirit back to the land for all the People” at Laguna (Nelson 28), for they all have suffered from a sense of being disconnected from the natural world, as can be seen in the drought they have been experiencing. His grandmother reminds Tayo that he needs to see the elders of Laguna to tell them about his experiences (Ceremony 218), but he leaves to find Ts’eh again before he can do that.

After Tayo finds Ts’eh by the spring, he becomes even closer to the land and the environment by learning from her “about the roots and plants she had gathered” (Ceremony 224). He is completing the last steps of the ceremony, which includes learning to gather strength from the land and from the old stories, so that he may become able to resist the evil that those people, who are ignorant of the fact that “the stories and the land are about the same thing” (Allen 120), are trying to do. Ts’eh warns him, “The end of the story. They want to change it. They want it to end here, the way all their stories end, encircling slowly to choke the life away” (231–32). That Tayo has learned to counteract those people can be seen in the episode following Ts’eh’s and his parting. He
witnesses the brutal torture of one of his former friends while hiding in the old uranium mine—the epitome of people’s violating the earth and thus destroying their connection with the land (Tayo notes that “this was their place” and that is why he is feeling weak [243])—but he resists killing the aggressor (249–53). Instead he goes back to the elders at Laguna.

When Tayo meets with the elders,

It took him a long time to tell the story; they stopped him frequently with questions about the location and the time of day; they asked about the direction she had come from and the color of her eyes. It was while he was sitting there, facing southeast, that he noticed how the four windows along the south wall of the kiva had a particular relationship to this late autumn position of the sun. (257)

It becomes clear in this passage how important the landscape, the geographical location of places, their relation to the four directions and the sun’s position are for a complete understanding of a tribal, in this case Pueblo, worldview. Nelson confirms that “Part of the appeal of Tayo’s story to the kiva elders is that it reestablishes the Pueblo as the geographical (and hence spiritual) center of the visible world, a particular landscape that contains within itself the power to heal and make whole and sustain life in the face of those destructive forces […] that cohabit the universe” (39). Through a precise analysis of Tayo’s story, the people at Laguna Pueblo can learn from Tayo’s experience and develop the skills to better withstand those harmful influences by renewing their spiritual ties to the land.

Sterling, the Laguna Pueblo character in Silko’s massive novel, *Almanac of the Dead* (1991), manages to escape those “destructive forces” Nelson refers to in the context of *Ceremony* by leaving the corrupt city of Tucson and finding his way back to Laguna, his home and place of origin, so that he is able to renew his spiritual ties to the land. Silko presents Tucson as the epitome of evil and corruption, full of Euro-Americans who contribute to the destruction of the earth and its inhabitants. There are, for instance, Max Blue, a drug dealer, and his wife Leah Blue, a real estate business owner who wants to turn arid Tucson into a modern Venice; and Trigg, the paraplegic founder of “Bio-Materials, Inc.” and Leah’s lover who “harvests” homeless people for their blood and organs. None of these people has any consideration for the indigenous rights to and spiritual relationship with the land and each indiscriminately contributes to the rape of the earth. They are opposed by Indian (and Chicano/a) characters such as Zeta and Lecha, the twin sisters with whom Sterling lives on their ranch, and Calabazas, Mosca, and Root, all of whom have their own share of illegal activities. Zeta smuggles explosives and weapons, and Calabazas, Mosca, and Root are drug dealers, but they carry out their activities in support of the twin brothers Taço (Wacah) and El Feo (supported by Angelita La Escapía) in Mexico, who unite their followers in their march north, attempting to reclaim their ancestral homeland.

The indigenous opponents of the destroyers of the earth come together at the “International Holistic Healers Convention” (709–40), which takes place under the motto of reversing the destruction of the earth by following the tribal way of living on the earth. In order to achieve that, the twins Wacah and El Feo explain, the people have to “let go
of all the greed and the selfishness in [their] heart[s]. [They] must be able to let go of a great many comforts and all things European; but the reward would be peace and harmony with all living things. All they had to do was return to Mother Earth. No more blasting, digging, or burning” (710). As a result of this (re)turn to an earth-conscious and spiritual way of living, “tribal people would retake the Americas; tribal people would retake ancestral land all over the world. This is what the earth’s spirits wanted: her indigenous children who loved her and did not harm her” (712). Indeed, in this affirmation the twin brothers Wacah and El Feo allude to the promise of the Ghost Dance religion as proclaimed by the Messiah Wovoka.

However, the twin brothers and the healers at the conference know that although this revolutionary change is inevitable, it might not necessarily be imminent and may take “five or ten years of great violence and conflict. It might require a hundred years of spirit voices and simple population growth” (711–12). By the end of the novel, death and destruction still prevail, so that Lecha, her “secretary” and “nurse,” Seese, and Sterling flee the ranch and Tucson under gunfire. While Lecha and Seese are headed for South Dakota to join fellow revolutionaries to plot further actions, Sterling declines the offer to come along and returns to his native New Mexico to live at his family’s sheep camp near Laguna.

Catching a “glimpse of the distant blue peaks of Mt. Taylor, his throat tightened and tears ran down his cheeks. Woman Veiled in Clouds was what the old people had called the mountain. Sterling was home” (756). Just thinking the word “home” makes him cry, and walking on the land of his ancestors, the familiar sand hills, the sandstone cliffs, causes a great change in him. So far in his life, Sterling had been influenced by the dominant culture’s outlook on life. He had enjoyed his subscriptions to magazines such as Reader’s Digest, Police Gazette, and True Detective, and “used to say that he only believed in beer and big women bouncing in water beds” (761), never paying “much attention to the old-time ways because he had always thought the old beliefs were dying out” (762). Moreover, after failing to prevent a Hollywood movie crew from invading sacred land and sites, he was banished from Laguna (25; 31–35). Now, however, Sterling realizes that he has “left forever” the world as portrayed in those magazines, “a world that was gone, that safe old world that had never really existed except on the pages of Reader’s Digest” (757). Sterling spends several days just sitting by the sheep camp observing the land and all tiny living creatures, and becomes aware of the fact that “He had never spent so much time before alone with the earth” (757).

In these last pages of the book, it becomes clear that Sterling (re)establishes his spiritual relationship with his homeland and undergoes a rebirth of sorts when he bathes “in the shallow creek Laguna people call ‘the river’” (758). Although it is not a spring out of which he emerges made whole again or made new, his bath represents his reconnection with the land, a kind of “baptism” that reunites him with his Laguna community. Moreover, the creek is close to the actual holy place of emergence near the uranium mine, which is where Sterling heads after his cleansing ritual. It is the place where Mother Earth had been ripped open for exploitation, which excavated a giant stone snake that “[r]eligious people from all the pueblos and even the distant tribes had come to see” (762), as it is believed to embody a message to the people. Here, Sterling realizes that the destruction of the earth will eventually come to an end: the snake, he believes, in its looking toward the south from where the twin brothers and his followers will be
coming, underlines the necessity of a spiritual connection to the land so that death and destruction (and the destroyers) will be stopped, and the people may survive (763).

Back at Laguna on his ancestral homeland, Sterling can imagine the return of a life on earth as it had been “a thousand years ago, when the rain clouds were plentiful and the grass and wildflowers had been belly high on the buffalo that had occasionally wandered off the South Plains” (758). Here at his home, Sterling has the spiritual support and guidance he needs to feel assured that there is hope for the people as long as they remember the old stories and return to their belief system of reciprocity between land and man, a belief that Indigo and Sister Salt, the Sand Lizard sisters in Silko’s latest novel, Gardens in the Dunes (1999), also hold and value.

Indigo and Sister Salt of the fictitious tribe of the Sand Lizards were born and grew up in their tribal home at the turn of the 20th century in the old gardens in the desert at the border of southeast California and western Arizona near the end of the nineteenth century. theirs is an idyllic place in which they plant and harvest a variety of edible plants, fruits, and beans, based on an understanding of the system of reverence and reciprocity. The sisters learn from their grandmother how to care for the plants as if they were human beings who listen and can understand; she tells them, “Always greet each plant respectfully. Don’t argue or fight around the plants—hard feelings cause the plants to wither” (16). Moreover, by listening to their tribe’s origin story, the sisters learn about the circle of life and the interconnectedness of all living things:

Grandma Fleet told them the old gardens had always been there. The old-time people found the gardens already growing, planted by the Sand Lizard, a relative of Grandfather Snake, who invited his niece to settle there and cultivate her seeds. Sand Lizard warned her children to share: Don’t be greedy. The first ripe fruit of each harvest belongs to the spirits of our beloved ancestors, who come to us as rain; the second ripe fruit should go to the birds and wild animals, in gratitude for their restraint in sparing the seeds and sprouts earlier in the season. Give the third ripe fruit to the bees, ants, mantises, and others who cared for the plants. A few choice pumpkins, squash, and bean plants were simply left on the sand beneath the mother plants to shrivel dry and return to the earth. (16–17)

The snake is the tribe’s ancestor and lives at the spring, the source of life, hence implicitly the tribe’s holy place of emergence. The sisters learn from their grandmother that the snake may never be disturbed or offended, or else it will go away and the water will disappear (38).

In the course of the novel, Indigo and Sister Salt are several times forced to leave their home in the gardens; first they leave with their grandmother and mother to live in the town of Needles, when they can’t support themselves any more in the gardens due to a large number of Indian refugees who are fleeing the Indian police to avoid being forced to live on a reservation. After the breakup of a Ghost Dance celebration by police and soldiers, the sisters take refuge in the gardens, but they leave again to look for their mother who had remained missing after she had fled the police. During their search, they are captured by the Indian police and split up—Sister Salt is forced to settle on the Parker Reservation while Indigo is sent to the Sherman Institute, an Indian boarding school, in
Riverside, California. Although it takes them a long time to be reunited again in the end and though they have to overcome many adverse circumstances, the sisters always strive to find each other and to return to their home in the gardens, their “sanctuary” (17).

Silko’s use of the word “sanctuary” demonstrates the idea of a refuge to which the sisters can turn to escape the “destructive forces” of the dominant culture, which Tayo and Sterling also have to fight and flee, and which the sisters each have come to confront: Sister Salt witnesses the construction of a fictional dam precursor to the Hoover Dam in the Colorado River near Parker Canyon in Arizona; and Indigo escapes the school authorities to live with Edward Palmer and his wife, a Euro-American couple, in Riverside, California. Silko shows the Euro-Americans’ indiscriminate exploitation and appropriation of nature through Edward, who “collects” specimen of various plants from all over the world and brings them to the U.S., or even sells them in Europe, and through Edward’s sister Susan, who moves trees, uproots plants, and brings in flowers to create an “English landscape” in her garden when she tires of her “Italian garden” (163; 188) and prepares for the “Masque of the Blue Garden,” an annual social ball. Hence, the Sand Lizard sisters’ consideration of the plants in their gardens in the dunes stands in sharp contrast to the Euro-American disrespect of nature. Moreover, Indigo and Sister Salt’s return to their home in the gardens represents much more than their merely seeking a safeguard against imminent physical danger. Rather, they retreat to the gardens to find their spiritual center and renew their ties to the land. The gardens are their sanctuary, their sacred place, in the religious sense of the word.

The novel ends with the sisters’ return to and restoration of the gardens, which had been destroyed by strange intruders, who also slaughtered the old resident rattlesnake of their spring. However, one morning Sister Salt goes to the spring with her baby son, whom she calls “little grandfather” because he always has a very wise and understanding look on his face, and discovers a new rattlesnake drinking at the pool. Thus, Sister Salt knows that this is a new beginning: “something terrible struck there [in the gardens], but whatever or whoever, it was gone now; Sister Salt could feel the change. […] Old Snake’s beautiful daughter moved back home” (479).

All three of Leslie Marmon Silko’s novels demonstrate the sacredness of particular places in the landscape on the basis of the people’s history and their emergence into this world, and explain how these holy places help them to orient themselves geographically and guide them spiritually in the world. Luci Tapahonso (Navajo) refers to this function of her homeland as spiritual guidance and as a center to orient herself in the world, explaining that regardless of where she moves, she takes her home, the prayers and songs that are rooted in the land and the community with her—similar to Anzaldúa’s statement about being a turtle with her home on her back—because that is the way she was raised. In her essay, “Come into the Shade” (1994), Tapahonso states:

These things [the care, the prayers and songs, and our lives as Navajos] were practiced for a long time, and they were very important and guaranteed that one would return to their home. The emphasis is on family, the home, and the land. […] [B]eing raised in this way serves as one’s center, and it serves as a foundation for life so that distance—where one travels, where one goes—is not really important. (80)
Joy Harjo (Muscogee), who was born in Oklahoma and lived much of her life in New Mexico, and whose poetry is often set in the Southwest, expresses this idea of the Southwest as the center of her life in her poem “3 AM”:

in the albuquerque airport
trying to find a flight
to old oraibi, third mesa
TWA
is the only desk open
bright lights outline new york,
chicago
and the attendant doesn’t know
that third mesa
is a part of the center
of the world
and who are we
just two indians
at three in the morning
trying to find a way back

and then i remember
that time simon
took a yellow cab
out to ácoma from albuquerque
a twenty-five dollar ride
to the center of himself

3 AM is not too late
to find the way back

(the last song)

In this poem, Joy Harjo underlines the strong hold the land has over its indigenous people and the urgency for them to return to their center by demonstrating that even the odd time for their travel, or the (then) enormous price for taxi fare, does not compel them to postpone or reconsider their trip. The airline employee might not understand the reason for their needing to find a means of transportation to their home at this time, oblivious to the fact that “third mesa” is their spiritual heart, but for the “two indians” of the poem it is never “too late/to find the way back.”

N.Scott Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn* demonstrates the importance of a geographical orientation in and spiritual connection to the land most prominently through
the protagonist, Abel, who, similar to Silko’s Tayo, has lost his attachment to the land and thus his spiritual center, and needs to find his “way back” home like the speaker in Harjo’s poem. From the beginning of the novel, Momaday takes great care in describing the exact location of geographical markers around the Jemez Pueblo reservation. As Robert Nelson notes in *Place and Vision*, all these descriptions of the landscape are written in the simple present tense to show “the land’s permanence and eternality” (45). Throughout the novel, however, Abel is disconnected from this landscape as is shown in his awkward and detached behavior on the reservation when he returns from the Army: “newly sunburned,” he participates in the traditional ritual of the Santiago rooster pull, but makes “a poor showing” and is humiliated by another man (42–45); hiking in the canyon, he feels “almost […] at peace” and wants to sing a creation song, but cannot remember the words to it (59); relocated to Los Angeles, he lies on the beach, beat up and disoriented, surrounded by—and like—grunion, dead “silversided” fish out of their natural element (98).

It is not until the end of the novel that Abel can go home through the help of his Navajo friend Ben Benally, who can relate to Abel because he is familiar with the land Abel comes from: “It’s a pretty good place; there are mountains and canyons around there, and there’s a lot of red in the rocks. Except for the mountains, it’s like the land south of Wide Ruins, where I come from, full of gullies and brush and red rocks” (153–54). Returning to Jemez Pueblo, Abel can finally reestablish a connection with the land that will provide him with the necessary guidance and spiritual center. Even though Benally seems to be unable to go home and reunite with his homeland himself, his fond memories of his home and the stories he tells Abel of his childhood spent at the sheep camp with his grandfather demonstrate his belief in the spiritual healing power of the land that he succeeds in conveying to Abel. Through memories of his own childhood, he reminds Abel of how “you were little and right there in the center of everything, the sacred mountains, the snow-covered mountains and the hills, the gullies and the flats, the sundown and the night, everything—where you were little, where you were and had to be” (157; emphasis added). Clearly, Benally is aware of the importance of an orientation toward one’s homeland to find or regain one’s spiritual center; his shared memories and his application of the Navajo Night Chant ceremony help Abel to return to his homeland.

That Abel indeed has reconnected himself with the land is demonstrated in his participation in the ceremonial dawn run at the very end of the novel, during which he becomes a part of the landscape by covering his body with ashes and running into the rising sun. Abel knows that “there was no reason to run but the running itself and the land and the dawn appearing” (211), and “he could see at last without having to think. He could see the canyon and the mountains and the sky. He could see the rain and the river and the fields beyond. He could see the dark hills at dawn” (212). Through his connection to the landscape, Abel has become whole again; Robert Nelson notes as well that “Abel’s participation in the dawn race not only confirms the healing power of identity with the land […] , but more importantly also grounds the possibility of healing in a specific place” (*Place and Vision* 88; emphasis added). By “re-enter[ing] the life of this particular landscape,” Abel “confirms the wholeness of the life of this place” (88), a wholeness he did not recognize before and lacked himself.

This union with the land that Abel had to find through painful experiences, N. Scott Momaday claims to have had all his life, first becoming aware of it when he was a young
boy on the Jemez Pueblo reservation. In his collection of essays and stories, *The Man Made of Words* (1997), Momaday remembers the cacique (chief) of the Pueblos, who every morning would go to observe the rising sun, and would record the exact location of its rising on the horizon. According to his solar calendar, he would tell the people when to plant and harvest, and when to perform certain ceremonies. Momaday was very impressed with this dignified man and “This image of him in my mind’s eye—the old man gazing each morning after the ranging sun—came to represent for me the epitome of that real harmony between man and land that signifies the Indian world” (37). Moreover, the cacique, who is provided with food by the people who work his fields and the hunters who give him a share of the hunted meat, is considered “the translation of man, every man, into the landscape” (37).

Momaday remembers how one day when he worked in the cacique’s fields himself, he ran the warm earth through his fingers, felt “the smooth texture of seeds in my hands,” and watched the “brown water moving slowly and irresistibly among the rows,” thus fully realizing the “spirit of communion, of the life of every man in relation to the life of the planet and of the infinite distance and silence in which it moves” (38). This sacred connection to the land has since determined his life and his spirituality, as it has become the worldview he lives by. In the same essay he states:

> Very old in the Native American worldview is the conviction that the earth is vital, that there is a spiritual dimension to it, a dimension in which man rightly exists. It follows logically that there are ethical imperatives in this matter. [...] Inasmuch as I am in the land, it is appropriate that I should affirm myself in the spirit of the land. I shall celebrate my life in the world and the world in my life. In the natural order man invests himself in the landscape and at the same time incorporates the landscape into his own most fundamental experience. This trust is sacred. (39)

Leslie Marmon Silko has remarked as well that “The land, the sky, and all that is within them—the landscape—includes human beings” (“Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination” 85).

This sacred relationship with the land, the idea of being immersed in the landscape, and of finding guidance through the land by orienting oneself toward one’s home, may also become evident in the photographs of the landscape that some authors include in their works, and which they intersperse in their writing to complement their words. Both Leslie Marmon Silko and N.Scott Momaday include personal photographs of their childhood, their families, but also pictures of the Southwest landscape in their books *Storyteller* (1981) and *The Names*, a memoir (1976) respectively. Joy Harjo (Muscogee), in her collection of (untitled) prose poetry *Secrets from the Center of the World* (1989), alternates her poems with photographs by Stephen Strom. In the preface to the book, Harjo points out that “All landscapes have a history, much the same as people exist within cultures, even tribes. There are distinct voices, languages that belong to particular areas. There are voices inside rocks, shallow washes, shifting skies; they are not silent” (n. pag.). By referring to voices and languages attached to specific landscapes, Harjo draws the connection between land and people, suggesting that the land is native to people just as their language is. She comments on the quality of Strom’s photographs as
complements of her poetry by emphasizing how they manage to tell “powerful stories” about the land and the way the people settled on it. She writes, “You can look at the photograph called ‘White Mesa Overlook’ and know something of the way the land speaks, of the way the Navajo people respond to it. There is something about the way the settlement of people is arranged that is internal, that comes out of a landscape” (n. pag.). Harjo’s image of an emergence out of the land again evokes the idea of a tribe’s place of origin.

In one poem-photograph pair, Harjo reminds the reader of the ancient ties tribal people have with the land. Next to a photo of a prairie on the Fort Defiance Plateau, Harjo writes, “Anything that matters is here. Anything that will continue to matter in the next several thousand years will continue to be here. Approaching in the distance is the child you were some years ago. See her laughing as she chases a white butterfly” (32). Reinforced by the picture of the plateau, Harjo’s prose poem expresses an idea similar to Momaday’s in his present-tense descriptions of the land in House Made of Dawn. Nelson’s observation about Momaday’s use of the present tense to underline the eternality and also eternal value of the land can also be applied to Harjo; by evoking the image of the child that every reader can imagine to have been in the past while at the same time referring to the present and the future, Harjo also emphasizes the worth and significance of their native land in people’s lives.

Paired with a photograph of a landscape south of Bluff, Utah, another Harjo poem once more demonstrates indigenous people’s need of the land for an establishment of a sense of spiritual identity. She writes, “I have lost my way many times in this world, only to return to these rounded, shimmering hills and see myself recreated more beautiful than I could ever believe” (52). Here, Joy Harjo refers to the healing powers of the land to make her whole or make her new after having lost her spiritual center through her absence from her native land. By returning to the landscape that provides her spiritual strength, Harjo is able to experience a rebirth of sorts (even without mention of the life-giving source of a spring), which will not only make her whole again, but even “more beautiful” than before. Like Momaday and Silko, and their protagonists Abel, Tayo, Sterling, and the Sand Lizard sisters, Harjo draws strength from the land and sees it as her sanctuary to which she can turn for spiritual guidance.

Looking at the complexity of relationships indigenous people have with the land, the need they have of it for their daily spiritual life, it is not difficult to understand some writers’ rather strong words and provocative actions not only to draw attention to the dominant culture’s abuse of the land, but also to their attempts to reclaim it and regain control of it. Leslie Marmon Silko is very explicit in her novel Almanac of the Dead, in which she uses an old Mayan scripture, and the characters of the twin brothers Tacho and El Feo, to prophesize the end of the Euro-American rule and the vanishing of the white man. Not only does Silko convey an assertive stance in Almanac to make clear to the reader that in the context of her novel this revolution and the return to old times and circumstances are imminent and realistic, she also describes concrete ways of how the indigenous peoples of the Americas are going to go about achieving their goal. This confidence expressed in her novel tells the reader about the urgency of the situation and underlines the determination to overcome the injustice native peoples have suffered from for centuries.
Gloria Anzaldúa makes a similar claim in her *Borderlands*. Describing the injustice and cruelty of the Mexican-American border in a poem, she writes, “This land was Mexican once/was Indian always/and is./And will be again” (25). By using strong images related to physical pain and injury, Anzaldúa underlines the artificiality and wrongfulness of the border that separates one culture, one people. She describes the border between Texas and Mexico as a “1,950 mile-long wound/dividing a pueblo, a culture./running down the length of my body./staking fence rods in my flesh./[that] splits me/me raja me raja/This is my home/this thin edge of/barbwire” (24–25). Stressing the idea that this division is not only wrong, but also unnatural, Anzaldúa describes the earth’s and the ocean’s resistance of borders and artificial separations in the next stanza: “But the skin of the earth is seamless./The sea cannot be fenced,/el mar does not stop at borders./To show the white man what she thought of his arrogance,/Yemayá blew that wire fence down” (25). Anzaldúa opens the book with this poem, then repeats the last stanza, which claims that the land has always been and will again be Indian, at the end of part I of the book, entitled “Atravesando Fronteras/Crossing Borders.” Thus, Anzaldúa adopts the cyclical narrative structure, reflecting the cyclical tribal worldview, one that Momaday and Silko employ in their works as well. This structure further reinforces the significance of the land, of Mother Earth, which is the origin of all life, in native people’s lives.

One does not have to adopt a tribal religion to recognize the value of indigenous people’s appreciation of and respect for the earth. In fact, many Euro-Americans have become more aware of the earth’s limited resources and have become more environmentally aware and conscious. N.Scott Momaday has pointed out that “None of us lives apart from the land entirely; such an isolation is unimaginable” (Man Made of Words 47). He has realized that many tribal people have strayed from their traditional ways and have become detached from the land (as shown, for instance, in his character Abel), so he clearly includes all Americans, not just Euro-Americans when he writes, “One effect of the technological revolution has been to uproot us from the soil. We have become disoriented” (47). Therefore, he claims, “Americans must come again to a moral comprehension of the earth and the air. We must live according to the principle of a land ethic. The alternative is that we shall not live at all” (49).

Vine Deloria, Jr., in his book *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion* (1994), uses somewhat stronger words to draw attention to the ongoing destruction of the earth and the violation of land rights and treaties in North America. While Momaday seems to address all Americans and does not require a spiritual reverence for and attachment to the land as a prerequisite for environmental consciousness, Deloria clearly singles out Euro-Americans and specifically Christians in his analysis of the current deplorable situation in North America and of who is to blame. Not only were abominable crimes committed against tribal peoples under the banner of Christianity, with the justification that they were savages without any religion, “[t]he Christian Church was also eager to exploit the new lands,” thereby “couching” the “confiscation of lands” in “quasi-religious sentiments” (Deloria 255).

Deloria also acknowledges the fact that “the mainstream of Christianity [now] begins to face ecology,” but points out that due to problems in Christian thinking, most prominently the lack of understanding that “a fundamental element of religion is an intimate relationship with the land on which the religion is practiced” (289), an ecological
vein cannot simply be implanted or grafted on. Deloria continues, “[o]ne cannot separate the spiritual problems of a people from their religion; particularly the tribal religions treat healing as a major part of religious life” (290). Because Christians fail to share this belief in the healing power of the land, their religious leaders do not give any consideration “to the people’s cultural practices or the particular spirits of the land on which they live” (290); therefore, to “come to grips with the lands now occupied,” Christians need to understand that part of religious thought includes “relating to a place’s spirit or alternatively bringing a spiritual reality to a particular place” (290).

Emphasizing the idea of healing, Deloria refers to the recent trend of Indian tribal religions’ revival, stating that more and more young Indians are returning to their tribe’s religious ceremonies for spiritual and healing purposes: “On the reservations we see amazing resiliency in restoring the old ceremonies. A massive shift in allegiance is occurring in most tribes away from Christianity and secularism and back towards the traditional ways” (253). Joseph Epes Brown confirms this notion in his study of Native American religious traditions, Teaching Spirits, stating:

Underlying many Native Americans’ renewed interest in their own traditions is their increasing disenchantment with a society that for centuries has been presented as the ultimate model of true civilization. Paralleling the disenchantment of Native Americans is the non-Native Americans’ questioning of many of the basic premises of their own civilization. (3)

This increasing interest in indigenous religions and tribal healing ceremonies—which seems to correspond with a global trend in new religious movements—becomes evident, for example, in the trend in “New Age shamanism,” or “whiteshamanism” as it is called by true tribal healers and American Indian scholars, such as anthropologist and poet Wendy Rose (Hopi/Miwok) (qtd. in Jocks 65). Christopher Ronwaniënte Jocks (Mohawk), devotes an entire essay to the appropriation and exploitation of Native American spirituality and religious practices by Euro-Americans. In his recent essay “Spirituality for Sale. Sacred Knowledge in the Consumer Age” (2000), he states that “[t]oday an entire industry has sprung in which Indigenous spirituality is appropriated, distorted, used, and sold without respect or permission, even while physical assaults on Native people, lands, and ways of life, continue” (62; emphasis in the text), an ironic contrast that Vine Deloria, Jr. already commented on in his 1994 study God Is Red (246). Emphasizing the overwhelming disrespect that some Euro-Americans, who indiscriminately adopt and appropriate native religious rituals and ceremonies, demonstrate, Christopher Ronwaniënte Jocks cites (Euro-American) Thomas Mails’ book Secret Native American Pathways: A Guide to Inner Peace (1988), “an almost unbelievable display of either ignorance or arrogance” (Jocks 75), in which the author encourages readers to “shop around” and collect bits and pieces of different tribal religious traditions to fit their individual tastes and needs; Mails writes, “Remember that different approaches will suit different people. In this respect, we are more fortunate than the native Americans were, for while they had only their own pathways to follow, we can choose from […] different tribes. […] Test the ways and make your own choices” (qtd. in Jocks 75).
Clearly, this is an absurd path to follow, as it is entirely based on whim. Deloria concludes that in order for people around the globe, but especially North Americans, to stand any chance of surviving spiritually, they need to finally recognize and understand the value of tribes’ spirituality that attaches them to the land, thus creating a natural environmentalism, and that contributes to their persistence in “preserving their communities, lands, and religions” (292). He writes in his conclusion to *God Is Red*:

> Who will listen to the trees, animals and birds, the voices of the places of the land? As the long-forgotten peoples of the respective continents rise and begin to reclaim their ancient heritage, they will discover the meaning of the lands of their ancestors. That is when the invaders of the North American continent will finally discover that for this land, God is red. (292)

Simon Ortiz makes a similar claim in the introduction to *Woven Stone* when he discusses the value of Native American writing for “social, cultural, political-economic health and […] progressive development” in the United States. He maintains that it is not enough for a people to aim for mere “survival,” but that instead it should strive for “continuance” (32). And this goal, Ortiz asserts, can only be reached by recognizing indigenous writers’ contributions through their works that express “honest and basic love of land and people and their struggles” (32). Therefore, he concludes, “The United States will not be able to survive unless it comes to truly know and accept its indigenous reality, and this is its continuance. Through our poetry, prose, and other written works that evoke love, respect, and responsibility, Native Americans may be able to help the United States of America to go beyond mere survival” (32–33).

The works by both Native Americans and Chicanos/as discussed here all reflect Ortiz’s attitude. Even though many authors acknowledge the influence of Christianity (or Catholicism) in their writing, it does become clear that their native religious traditions, their understanding of their creation and origin, and their reverence for the land, determine their outlook on life, especially on the natural world that surrounds them and the land they call home. The land and the landscape are indivisibly tied to southwestern indigenous authors’ lives—Native American and Chicano/a—informing their understanding of religion and profoundly shaping their spiritual identity. Moreover, through an affirmation of their spiritual ties to the land, southwestern indigenous authors form a unified cultural group against the Euro-American culture, which, as they demonstrate in their works, lacks this holistic worldview.
Chapter Three
Who’s the Other Now? Postcolonial Dialectics and Social Identity

The establishment of a cultural nationalism and hence an ethnic consciousness and identity in the postcolonial world is often explained with reference to the Hegelian theory that human beings acquire identity or self-consciousness only through contact with and recognition of an Other, of the realization of the self confronted with another self (Gandhi 16). The thoughts of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich von Hegel (1770–1831) on the construction of identity and his assumption of the creation of identity through the dialectic of one person’s concept of the other as self have had a significant impact on postcolonial theory. In fact, Hegel’s model of the master-slave-relationship underlies many postcolonial theories to explain the relationship between colonizer and colonized and to shed light on the slave’s (colonized’s) existence as shaped by the conquering other and the slave’s consequent attempt to reject the master’s (colonizer’s) dominance. At the same time, however, Hegel proposed that the slave (colonized) will imitate the master (colonizer) in the simultaneous process of refusal or rejection—for instance, in the “mimicry” (Gandhi 148) of the colonizer’s language—while trying to “rehumanize” himself and develop a sense of self and identity. Homi Bhabha defines “colonial mimicry” as “the desire for a reformed and recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence” (361). It is important to note, however, that both colonized and colonizer have these ambivalent and conflicting feelings of attraction and repulsion toward one another that reflect the give and take of the dialectic between their selves and hence determine the creation of their respective but intertwined identities.

Many works of Native American and Chicano literatures of the Southwest are preoccupied with precisely this recognition and interaction with an Other as a part of the necessary adaptation to the changed parameters of late 20th-century U.S. society, as they strive to sustain their distinct culture within the majority “other.” Works by southwestern indigenous authors reflect this dialectic in a variety of ways, one of which is evident in their attempts to define themselves as distinct social and cultural groups through which they achieve their sense of self precisely within the group and as a group.

For a practical extrapolation of this postcolonial theory, it is useful to explore it in light of Social Identity Theory (as established by Henri Tajfel, e.g. in his The Social Psychology of Minorities [1978], and extended and complemented by John Turner and others). This is a social psychological theory which connects individual and social processes of cognition and behavior, and which helps to explain the minority’s “attempt to retain their own identity and separateness while at the same time becoming more like the majority in their opportunities for achieving goals and marks of respect which are generally valued by the society at large” (Social Psychology of Minorities 16). Tajfel
defines minority ethnic groups as a “distinct category of the population in a larger society whose culture is usually different from its own. Members of ethnic groups are, or feel themselves, or are thought to be, bound together by common ties of race or nationality or culture” (Social Psychology of Minorities 4). Henri Tajfel operates on the premise that all human beings need and want to be members of social groups and has called the process of group formation “social categorization” (“Social Categorization” 63). He maintains that a positive social identity can only be achieved by individuals’ defining themselves through their membership in social group(s) and their awareness of the “value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (“Social Categorization” 63), hence arriving at their individual self-concept, which he calls “social identity” because it cannot exist apart from the group’s. If the minority individual cannot achieve a synthesis of the ethnic “roots” with the main social body, an integrated “social identity” cannot be formed. Through the process of social categorization and comparison, individuals create their place in society by evaluating their own as well as other social groups “in terms of valued characteristics and behavior (e.g. wealth, skin colour, power, abilities)” (Turner/Brown 204), hence creating “ingroups and outgroups” against which they set themselves apart: “The ingroup’s prestige depends on the outcome of comparisons between ingroup and relevant outgroups” (Turner/Brown 204). Tajfel states:

These social categorizations enable us to draw conclusions about people (rightly or wrongly), even when little is known about them apart from their category ‘membership’, to attribute some ‘causal’ meaning to their behaviour, to make predictions about their future behaviour; these categorizations also help us to find our own place in the confusing network of social relationships. (Social Psychology of Minorities 5)

Tajfel assumes that both individuals and groups will always strive to define themselves positively, as a consequence of which their ultimate goal is a “positively valued distinctiveness” (Turner/Brown 204) from relevant comparison groups in order to preserve (or obtain) the self-esteem of their own group members. Positive distinctiveness is also the main motivation for group members to take action in case of an unsatisfactory social identity.

John Turner differentiates three steps a group member may take in order to alter his or her unfavorable (i.e. “outsider”) self-image (cf. Turner/Brown 204). The first step, called “individual mobility,” refers to people’s leaving their original group if the negative social identity is associated with the group; the individuals will “disidentify” themselves with the ingroup and orient themselves toward a more positively perceived outgroup (which will then become their ingroup). Another step is called “social creativity” and designates the group members’ achieving positive distinctiveness through “altering or redefining the elements of the comparative situation”; they may either compare “the ingroup on some new dimension,” change their “values so that the previously negative comparisons are perceived as positive,”33 or change “the outgroup with which the ingroup is compared, in particular ceasing to use the dominant group as a relevant comparison group” (Turner/Brown 205). A final step for group members may be to obtain positive distinctiveness “through direct competition with the outgroup”; Turner calls this action “social competition” (Turner/Brown 204). These last two steps are of particular interest and
importance in this context as they elucidate the problems minorities face of being defined and evaluated (and defining and evaluating themselves) in terms of values and criteria dictated by the dominant group. Consequently, any social behavior is evaluated as “normal” or deviant on the basis of the majority’s criteria.

Serge Moscovici, an important figure in the discipline of social psychology who has done extensive research in the field of minority group identity, has also found that deviant behavior is not “just an accident which happens to the social organization—it is a product of that organization, the sign of an environment which is encroaching and evading control” (4). Hence, any “deviance” found on the part of a minority is not necessarily an actual, or deliberate, deviant behavioral pattern but rather the majority’s interpretation of that behavior according to the assigned social positions. In their striving for a positive social identity and distinctiveness, minorities will show social behavior which is perceived as deviant by the majority but which is a reflection of their trying to distinguish themselves from the others. “Differentiation from others is, by definition, a comparison with others. The creation of something new is not possible unless there is something old which serves as a criterion for the establishment of a difference from it” (Social Psychology of Minorities 17; emphasis in the text). To use Hegel’s terms, then, the dialectic of minority and majority (thesis and antithesis) may lead to the creation of a new, distinct cultural identity for the minority (synthesis).

Works by southwestern indigenous authors show a variety of means to deal with an overwhelming, assimilationist majority. Some works display an approach that aims at promoting understanding between different social groups and interaction of the minority with the dominant oppressor group, hence favoring mediation and compromise. Others, however, take a more radical stance and instead call for resistance by barricading themselves against the majority group to remain a social and ethnic entity against the oppressing outgroup, thus emphasizing differentiation and separatism and, in a way, rejecting or refusing a “synthesis.” Chicano critic Juan Bruce-Novoa has pointed out that the “rhetorical strategies to accomplish” the “political and cultural goals of the […] Chicano movement” represented in many works of Chicano literature reflect the strife for “inner union” among the Chicano community, “which could then be turned into opposition to the exterior other, the majority of U.S. society” (“Dialogical Strategies, Monological Goals” 225). Chicano/a activists, Bruce-Novoa maintains, “tried to radicalize the perception of the assimilation process,” which “required a clear confrontation of We versus They along the lines of tribal cosmicization into distinctly opposed groups each with its own space” (228). In the parlance of Social Identity Theory, one could say that he is referring to the processes of social comparison and social competition. Using Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism, Bruce-Novoa analyzes this structuring process as a dialogic operation, which is ultimately monological in its goal: “to catalyze unity based on the strict adherence to communal customs and the modes of behavior defined as distinct from those of the Other” (229). In other words, the goal of the dialogic operation is social categorization and comparison with no plan for group mobility: the minority groups want to remain distinct and separate and attempt to achieve positive distinctiveness through social creativity. Since they are considered inferior or even deviant from the majority according to the latter’s criteria, they must redefine the social comparison situation and the values on which basis they are being evaluated.
Rodolfo Gonzales’ openly polemical poem and Chicano manifesto *I Am Joaquin/Yo Soy Joaquin* (1972)\(^{34}\)—initially not a published poem but a “mimeo sheet recited as a form of agitprop at Movimiento rallies” (Pérez-Torres 69)—is a good example of a dialogical relationship between majority and minority groups and the minorities’ attempt to obtain a positive social identity through altering elements of the comparison situation. Rafael Pérez-Torres explains that “Rodolfo Gonzales, a community organizer, a founder of the Crusade for Justice, a candidate for mayor of Denver, Colorado, wrote the poem in 1967 as a catalyst for galvanizing political action. Attempting to fortify the image of the community, the poem seeks to represent an empowering vision of Chican[O] subjectivity” (69). Clearly, the poem must be read as a call for action, a call to the Chicano/a community to raise awareness of their rich cultural heritage and identity, and consequently a call to resist the dominant group’s assimilationist tendencies.

Throughout the poem, Gonzales demonstrates the binary opposition of They versus We, portraying the Chicano/a as the marginalized Other who is stuck in a situation in which all power lies in the center with the majority and none on the periphery with the minority. From the beginning of the poem, the reader feels the oppression inflicted upon the minority by the dominant culture and the speaker’s attempt to find support in his own community, knowing that he will nevertheless have to live in the world of the dominant group. Cordelia Candelaria, in her study *Chicano Poetry. A Critical Introduction* (1986), maintains that *Joaquin* begins “in medias res (in mid action, in the middle of things) with the poet stating the work’s theme and invoking a muse,” in that regard following the tradition of epic poems (Candelaria 44). The poem’s first stanzas introduce the theme by setting up a catalog of oppression, putting the unitary “I” against an undifferentiated mass of oppressors, against whom, by virtue of their resistance, Joaquin’s forefathers have won—despite their economic and political defeat. The source of inspiration, or muse, is invoked in these first lines as well, as Candelaria notes: “[Joaquin’s] muse is nothing less than the entire social matrix of Chicano society” (44).

I am Joaquin,
lost in a world of confusion,
called up in the whirl of a
  gringo society,
confused by the rules,
scorned by attitudes,
suppressed by manipulation,

and destroyed by modern society.
  My fathers
have lost the economic battle
and won
  the struggle of cultural survival.

And now!
I must choose
between
the paradox of
victory of the spirit,
despite physical hunger,
or
to exist in the grasp of social neurosis,
sterilization of the soul
and a full stomach.

Yes,
I have come a long way to nowhere,
unwillingly dragged by that
monstrous, technical,
industrial giant called
Progress
and Anglo success….

I look at myself.
I watch my brothers.
I shed tears of sorrow.
I sow seeds of hate.
I withdraw to the safety within the
circle of life—
MY OWN PEOPLE.

(I Am Joaquín/Yo Soy Joaquín 6–10)

These first stanzas demonstrate the helplessness and emotional and physical bind the speaker feels under the circumstances of his situation. The first lines create the image of a feather in a tornado: Joaquín is “lost” and “caught” in the “whirl of a gringo [hence oppressive] society,” unable to pull himself to safety. The repetition of phrases that begin with a past participle (“lost,” “caught,” “confused,” “scorned,” “suppressed,” “destroyed”) support the description of his dire living situation, which is marked by powerlessness and despair. He clearly holds the victim role; everything is done to him and he can’t escape. The last two lines of the first stanza then introduce the predicament he and his ethnic group face: the ambivalence of desiring the majority group’s economic success while at the same time resisting it for psychological and spiritual reasons. The speaker also alludes to the historical aspect of this struggle in naming his “fathers” who had already fought in this war: they “have lost the economic battle/and won/the struggle of cultural survival.” Hence, despite the failure and loss on the economic front, the stanza
ends with the people’s triumph and gain: they have retained a distinct ethnic and cultural identity by rejecting certain assimilational aspects of the majority group and by focusing on their own merits and characteristics. Although they are poor economically, they are rich culturally; even though the people are physically hungry, they are spiritually satisfied. Gonzales uses the image of the circle (of life and of his people) not only to reveal his native worldview, but also his retreating into the circle of his social group, thereby rejecting any form of interaction between his social group and the dominant culture. Bruce-Novoa also points out:

[T]he opening section culminates with a withdrawal into the circle of Joaquín’s people […]. Joaquín returns to his origins, to a centering of our world of order and security, to the source of power from which he can cosmicize space. The drawing of the circle also implies that breaking it is dangerous. This concept is central to the poem; further miscegenation is taboo. The circle is the people and the space they occupy. Within the circumference the space is theirs. (Chicano Poetry 52; emphasis in the text)

The next stanza brings the speaker’s task to the fore: “And now!/I must choose/between/the paradox of/victory of the spirit,/despite physical hunger,” Joaquín says. Apparently, there is no middle path. Pérez-Torres notes as well that the speaker faces the dilemma of “having to choose between two worlds. He can either ally himself with the world of his fathers” or exist in “a world that seeks to wipe out [his] cultural identity and history” (72). In other words, if Joaquín relinquishes his distinct social identity, which is based on the assumption of the cultural and spiritual superiority of his “race,” he may go with a “full stomach.” Hence, there is the possibility of renouncing the psychological power he feels and instead being physically satisfied, but it leads to the “sterilization of the soul,” i.e. a state of being assimilated into the dominant group, and thus no longer distinct or unique.

The third stanza refers back to the first in suggesting that the speaker has tried to live in the dominant culture’s society, but that his attempt was futile. Trying to fit into the oppressor group doesn’t lead anywhere (“I have come a long way to nowhere”). Driven by his ambivalent feelings toward the dominant culture, he let himself be “dragged” among whites and lured by their technological progress, but was only exploited as labor to contribute to “Anglo success,” not his own. Joaquín thus suggests that even if his social group were to open itself to the dominant group, to allow fluidity of boundaries between groups, a true synthesis wouldn’t be possible because of the oppressors’ dominance and their already established victory in the process of social competition. Pérez-Torres concurs, stating that the “United States represents a land in which the heritage and culture that have made [Chicanos/as] strong is erased, the land in which the Chicana/o works is stolen, and the sterility of technology consumes the Chicana/o in a fruitless process of work and token reward” (74).

Repetition is again the predominant poetic device in the fourth stanza, which foregrounds the initial use and purpose of the poem, for, Pérez-Torres points out, “the performative function of the poem inflects its language and style” (70). Bruce-Novoa agrees, stating that “the writing [of Joaquin] is simple, free of complicated poetic tropes;
the language easily accessible, communicating a readily memorable impression. Hence repetition is a key element. As in oral tradition, reiteration insures listeners’ retention” (Chicano Poetry 48). In this stanza, the speaker describes three kinds of attitudes a member of his group may take in the face of this situation: first, he takes a passive stance (“I look,” “I watch”), then he reacts (“I shed tears”), and finally he adopts an attitude that implies action (“I sow seeds of hate”). However, despite these three stances, or phases he may go through, he ends up falling back upon his own social group: “I withdraw to the safety within the/circle of life—/MY OWN PEOPLE.” Joaquin seems to have realized that even if he dared venture out into the “world of confusion” and “whirl of society” the “gringos” have created, even if he tried to adapt to the Anglo society, he would still not be at ease or find peace of mind; his own community constitutes a protective shield against the dangers of the Euro-American world. Clearly, the Chicano culture is presented here as “the last realm of spirituality, the embodiment of the absent homeland that allows for a space of resistance against Anglo incursion” (Pérez-Torres 74).

Gonzales moves on to portray the process of required assimilation if one wanted to live in the Euro-American society, which is presented by the dominant culture as a cultural “exchange,” but which turns out to be a situation in which Chicanos/as sacrifice themselves in the Anglo-American wars (62), work in degrading, menial jobs without earning enough money or respect (66), never experience the promise of equality, but instead find their land “lost and stolen” and their culture “raped” (66). Consequently, Joaquin reflects on and resorts to his community and the knowledge of his rich heritage as consolation. The poem ends with an exclamation of and a call for protest:

La Raza!
Méjicano!
Español!
Latino!
Chicano!
or whatever I call myself,
I look the same
I feel the same
I cry
and
sing the same.

I am the masses of my people and
I refuse to be absorbed.
I am Joaquín.
The odds are great
but my spirit is strong,
my faith is unbreakable,
my blood is pure.
I am Aztec prince and Christian Christ.
I SHALL ENDURE!
I WILL ENDURE!

(I Am Joaquin/Yo Soy Joaquin 98–100)

These last two stanzas demonstrate that Joaquin distinguishes himself from the dominant Euro-American majority while at the same time acknowledging its inevitable influence on him (“I am Aztec prince and Christian Christ”). Even though there may not be one single “correct” name or label for his social group and members of his group may choose to call themselves a variety of things (“La Raza,” “Méjicano,” etc.), they still are one distinct, close-knit group. They share the same fate and life, looks and characteristics.

The last stanza sheds light on the ambivalence of the postcolonial subject, in this case Joaquin’s realization that despite all efforts and resistance, his self or identity is a creation of the dialectic with an Other, hence a synthesis determined by the relationship between colonizer and colonized. On one hand, he refers to the purity of his blood, hence “not accept [ing] the obvious truth that the mestizaje that he acknowledges with pride is by definition not ‘pure’ as he asserts” (Candelaria 49; emphasis in the text); on the other hand, he does admit that his heritage, which he so frequently refers to, is, in fact, “contaminated“by the colonizers—in this context through their religion. Consequently, Joaquin not only admits that the oppressor group has had an impact on his identity that he cannot renounce, he even explains that in his identity he combines both social groups. Candelaria maintains:

Part of the hero’s social schizophrenia derives from his characterization […] as the composite Chicano everyman, the mestizo who is quintessentially a blending of opposites, […] a condition conducive of feelings of unresolved polarity. In other words, Joaquin’s dilemma is caused by both internal and external factors: the internal relate to the genetic fact of mestizaje and its cultural implications, and the external relate to la raza mestiza living in the margins of the U.S. American society, especially on the periphery of the Anglo “mainstream.” Joaquin thus embodies the socially fractured experience of the minority citizen as victim of bicultural marginality. (46)

However, by mentioning both sides of his heritage within the same line, by setting “Aztec prince” back to back with “Christian Christ,” Joaquin emphasizes the power he has in appropriating the dominant group’s symbol of their faith and their savior. Moreover, he presents himself as the savior of his own community. Bruce-Novoa concurs, stating that “The last ten lines state the refusal to be devoured by the modern giant” and summarize “Joaquin’s essence: resistance against a strong enemy through spirit, faith and pure blood. […] Joaquin’s last affirmation of identity flows from that essence: he claims to be both the prince of the Aztecs and the Christ of Christianity, a historical and religious mestizaje of heroes willing to die for their people in a bloody, sacred sacrifice” (Chicano Poetry 66).
Nonetheless, the overall message the poem seems to convey is segregationist in nature and appears to promote a countering of any assimilationist efforts on the part of the dominant culture, which has led Bruce-Novoa to conclude that the poem is, overall, monological in its goal (“Dialogical Strategies, Monological Goals” 229). Joaquín reiterates that his is by no means a singular situation, that he is indeed a representative of his social group (“I am the masses of my people”), and as a member of his unique group (and as every member of his group would), he refuses “to be absorbed,” to be assimilated into the “melting pot” of U.S. society. Although the risk of falling to the oppressor group is great and the temptation to make the move to the majority is looming, he is able to withstand being swallowed by the dominant group (“The odds are great but my spirit is strong”). Here, it becomes clear how he has resolved the dilemma he described in the beginning of the poem; his choice or decision—to be physically hungry, but spiritually content, rather than be physically and economically satisfied, but mentally and spiritually empty—is made. Through withdrawal into his own group, he gains (or retains) mental power and satisfaction even if it means going with an empty stomach.

Moreover, not only does Joaquin choose to remain in his original group, he clearly achieves a positive social identity through direct social competition with the majority group. He emphasizes the characteristics and values that distinguish his social group from the outgroup (pride in rich historical and cultural heritage, pride in their language that is different from the majority’s), and presents them as a reason for his group’s prevailing against any assimilationist threats. Consequently, Juan Bruce-Novoa has concluded as well that “I Am Joaquin’s version of the appearance of the Chicano people as a nation […] should not mistakenly be read as yet one more ethnic dialogue with the Anglo American Other within the great tradition of U.S. assimilation, but as the opposite, a rejection of any proposal to dialogue” (232–33).

The refusal of dialogue that Bruce-Novoa refers to can also be seen in the poem’s exclusivity of audience. Clearly, the function of the poem is to “arouse cultural pride among Mexican-Americans and to rouse the group to united action against what the poet calls ‘the muck of exploitation’ caused by the dominant society” (Candelaria 43), so that it is safe to assume that the poem focuses on a Chicano/a audience. Hence, through its selection of audience, I am Joaquin can be read as an attempt to contribute to the creation of a national (Chicano) literature. Frantz Fanon, a postcolonial theorist, explains that “While at the beginning the native intellectual used to produce his work to be read exclusively by the oppressor, whether with the intention of charming him or of denouncing him through ethnic or subjectivist means, now the native writer progressively takes on the habit of addressing his own people. It is only from that moment that we can speak of a national literature” (155). Moreover, Fanon continues, nationalist literature is selective in its themes in order to create awareness of the importance and status of the nation: “[T]here is, at the level of literary creation, the taking up and clarification of themes which are typically nationalist. This may be properly called a literature of combat, in the sense that it calls on the whole people to fight for their existence as a nation” (155). Throughout the poem, Gonzales idealizes Chicano culture and denigrates Anglo society (Candelaria 46); furthermore, Gonzales was considered the “genius of the cultural nation, one who both related and embodied the spirit of Aztlán” (Arteaga 146). Consequently, by emphasizing Chicanos/as’ rich cultural and historical heritage and evoking a Chicano nation state through alluding to the Chicanos/as’ homeland Aztlán, Gonzales attempts to
empower his social group in the process of social competition and thus to create a positive social identity through distinctiveness from the dominant group, the colonial oppressor.

Aztlán as the Chicano homeland is also invoked in Jimmy Santiago Baca’s poems. Baca, who experienced first-hand the “terrible interplay between historical and contemporary political oppression” (Pérrez-Torres 77), grew up illiterate in orphanages in New Mexico, faced violence on a daily basis, and eventually turned to drug-dealing when he was unable to find a regular job. He ended up spending the better part of his life in prison, much of it in solitary confinement, where he eventually learned to read and write and began to write poetry. Since he had “grown up in an American society filled with stereotypical labels that discredited my people as inferior and lesser in moral character” (Place to Stand 225), Baca developed a keen interest in Chicano/a history and culture to create a more positive sense of identity and “to explore how [the history] tied into my own family” (224–25). Learning that “our people, the indigenous people of this continent, the Mayans, Olmecs, and Mexican tribes, were hundreds of years ahead of the Europeans in mathematics, agriculture, astronomy, literature, medicine, engineering, and aqueduct systems,” Baca “began to see who I was in a new context, with a deeper sense of responsibility and love for my people” (225).

Not surprisingly, then, Baca’s poetry collection, Black Mesa Poems (1989), demonstrates the necessity for Chicanos/as to inhabit and own a spiritual place which not only documents their history of invasion, oppression, and violence through the conquistadors and later the U.S. society, but which, at the same time, goes beyond its mythical significance and allows them to (re)create their sense of self. Rafael Pérrez-Torres also notes:

The poems [in the Black Mesa collection] construct a sense of history not, as in Gonzales’ poem [I am Joaquín], as an inertia-driven inevitability. History in Baca’s poetry is dynamic and developing. It represents several currents within which Chicanos move and function. Rather than a singular trajectory leading directly from pre-Cortesian civilization through Mexican nationalism to contemporary struggle, history in Black Mesa Poems is a varied terrain marked by heterogeneity, a mosaic of violence and beauty that crystallizes in the land of the Black Mesa, a contemporary realm of Aztlán. (78)

However, although considered “Movimiento poetry,” Baca’s poems—unlike Gonzales’ polemical piece—“mov[e] beyond simply casting blame on ‘America’ or ‘the system.’ The forms of oppression scrutinized by his poetry result from specific historical regimes in which indigenous values and peoples are erased through violence and malevolent neglect” (Pérez-Torres 77). This idea is confirmed in the fact that—in contrast to Gonzales—Baca uses a more traditionally lyric, or meditative approach in his poetry to move between a present moment and history.

The poem “Invasions,” for instance, illustrates the connection between Chicanos/as’ history and their land, and the perpetuation of this history in contemporary America. It describes a speaker who goes to fish the Jemez River in the morning, contemplating there the significance of this particular spot in history; as Pérez-Torres notes, this is a “terrain
[...] marked by history, infused with the reality of the human activity that has led to the violence and disruption of cultural confrontation” (78). Moreover, the speaker realizes his own place in this history when he sees the parallel between his situation and that of the indigenous peoples of the Southwest during the conquest of “Aztlán.” He says: “I walk south/like the Jemez and Pecos pueblos/during the 1690 uprisings,/when Spanish came north/to avenge their dead./Indians fled/canyon rock shelters/settling in present day/open plains” (71). Although he admits that “[p]eace [resides] here now” (72), the violent oppression through the hands of the dominant culture has still not ended, even though it has taken on a different form. Stopping to “check my sneaker prints/in the moist sandy bank,” the speaker notices a manifestation of modern day encroachment of his homeland: “I clamber up an incline,/crouch in bushes/as my ancestors did,/peer at vacation houses/built on rock shelves,/sun decks and travel trailers—the new invasion” (72). Hence, the situation of his people has not much changed in modern day America; through invasion of their land, they are faced with cultural elimination as their living space is slowly being taken away from them by the U.S. imperialist attitude as expressed in “Manifest Destiny.”

However, while the speaker does emphasize a violent “history of invasion and conquest, of conflict and bloodshed, of repression and resistance” against the dominant Other (Pérez-Torres 81), he acknowledges that he is not only a victim of this history, but a necessary “product” of it who combines various ethnicities in his identity. Standing thigh-deep in the river, the speaker realizes that he is “the end result/of Conquistadores,/Black Moors,/ American Indians,/and Europeans,/bloods rainhbowing/and scintillating/in me/like the trout’s flurrying/flank scales/shimmering a fight/as I reel in” (71). Hence, his very “mestizo-ness” is what has made him strong and gives him positive social distinctiveness in comparison with the dominant culture. Like Joaquin in Gonzales’ poem, the speaker of Baca’s “Invasions” characterizes the relationship between Euro-Americans and Chicanos/as (and Indians for that matter) as strained and marked by antagonism and racism, putting the blame for the latter’s dire situation on the Anglo society. Unlike Gonzales, however, who portrays his people as “passive inheritors of a history of resistance and self-empowerment,” Baca presents his speaker as “an active player within his world,” who participates “in the processes of history” (Pérez-Torres 79–80).

The poem “Knowing the Snow Another Way” in the same collection takes a more critical and separatist stance than does the poem “Invasions.” In it, the speaker contemplates the relationship between the “White Man” (25) and his own people while watching the snow fall from his window. He compares Euro-Americans to the snow and its most prominent characteristic, its coldness. Moreover, the snow covering the land and the people can be smothering and oppressive just as the dominant culture of the colonizers represses and possibly leads to the eventual elimination of the minority if faced with no resistance. Using the image of a child playing in the snow and enjoying the feeling of the snowflakes on its face, the speaker acknowledges that one might embrace the dominant group and desire to be(come) a part of it if one had no real sense of identity and belonging: “Snow can be pleasing for a child/with no home or family: it means all/that never was,/that whatever you do is imprinted,/it is a soothing voice that understands the scars/and covers the ugly sights/with a frill of happiness, light and glittering” (25). However, snow can be deadly and has proven to be so in the past:
And yet, each winter we see what too much snow does. My own people, trying to obtain Justice and Peace, are like those people wrecked on a mountain, Wrapped in beggar’s clothing, struggling up steep cliffs. In the frozen faces there is a grim knowledge, in the moustache sprinkled with snow, the open eyes and snow-laden eyelashes, *Indios y Chicanos* have that stolid death in their features from knowing the snow’s cold, cold extremes.

By establishing this contrast between what one may take snow to be, an attractive and beautiful phenomenon one might desire if it comes in moderation, and what it turns out to be if really confronted with it, a cold and deadly thing, Baca implicitly warns his people against interaction with the dominant group and calls for resistance against their assimilationist tendencies. Hence, while Jimmy Santiago Baca’s poetry must certainly be considered literature of social protest, his pieces are by no means as radical as Rodolfo Gonzales’ *I am Joaquin*. Nonetheless, both authors stress the importance of achieving positive social distinctiveness for their social group through “social creativity” by “redefining the elements of the comparative situation” (Turner/Brown 205); both authors suggest that the group members become aware of and take pride in their cultural and historical heritage instead of assessing their value on the basis of the dominant group’s standards.

Cherokee novelist and literary scholar Betty Louise Bell’s novel *Faces in the Moon* (1994) presents a slightly less radical stance than Rodolfo Gonzales’ and Jimmy Santiago Baca’s works. In her biographical abstract in the anthology *Reinventing the Enemy’s Language: Contemporary Women’s Writings of North America* (1997), Bell describes her mother’s influence on her outlook on life and on the way she leads her own life. Her mother’s stories, she says, “always circled around the manners and behavior of Indians. Who was Indian and who wasn’t Indian was determined, for her and then for us, by the way a person behaved” (74). Bell’s novel, a work with many autobiographical influences, reflects the adoption of her mother’s teachings, as Bell’s protagonist needs to discover the “correct” way of behaving as an Indian in the course of the novel before she can accept (and be accepted in) her own social group. Although *Faces in the Moon* does express the minority’s frustration over having to fight for a positive social identity due to an unbalanced social competition and hence a call for reflection upon, or contemplation of, one’s own social group, this attitude doesn’t become clear until the very end of the novel.

Up until the last few pages, *Faces in the Moon* presents an “objective” first person narrator, who seems to be a mere recorder of events, although the subject matter is her own childhood and adolescence; the narrator tells her own story as a Cherokee woman against that of her mother and grandmother. Summoned back to her native Oklahoma because of her mother’s dying, Lucie relives her experiences of growing up with an
alcoholic mother and an abusive stepfather, of being raised in part by her great-aunt, and of being able to escape her dire surroundings through education and a marriage to a white man. As a child and adolescent, Lucie was considered by her family an “uppity Indian,” who regarded herself better than her family on the basis of her education; her decision to marry a non-Indian man appears to have been another attempt at distinguishing herself from her impoverished, lower-class, uneducated family. Clearly, she wanted to dissociate herself from her own group, as she was not able to achieve a positive social identity as its member. As a child, Lucie was ashamed of her mother, Gracie, in front of strangers and friends from school:

Go on…shoo! I keep my eyes down and wish her away. I had wished her away many times before. Once, to a schoolmate, who told her mother, who told Gracie, I said I had been adopted. The short fat woman, working in the cafeteria, was not my real mother, my real mother lived in New York, the daughter of an industrialist, forced to give up her only child because of a teenage pregnancy. (48–49)

Lucie not only wants to disidentify herself from her own, negatively evaluated group, but makes the move to the dominant, Euro-American group by imagining herself as an abandoned child of a white woman, and by embracing Christianity and having herself baptized at the age of ten (49). The ultimate rejection of her ethnic background and social group, however, comes when she eventually marries into the majority group. She is embarrassed, disturbed, and even hateful toward her mother when the latter appears at her wedding in a gaudy dress and hat, gorges down a plateful of shrimp and talks loudly and proudly about her own mother. Even in hindsight, Lucie recalls and justifies her negative feelings for her mother; however, now, she also realizes that despite her efforts, she was never able to truly leave her original group. She says:

It wasn’t my fault that I hated her then. A child would have had more sense [than she]. And the wedding was not the end of it. The next morning Gracie had called to meet me for breakfast. Melvin’s father told her to check out of the hotel and take a cab to the airport. No one told me she had called. Indeed, my new family was too polite to mention my mother; even the wedding album graciously ignored her. And I was grateful, as grateful as an orphan, for their good manners. It took me many bad years to realize I was an unmentionable too. (51)

Now divorced, and forced to face the ghosts of her childhood, Lucie becomes more self-reflective and seems to realize who she is and where she “belongs.” Although she does not so much appear to mourn her mother’s death as feel relief upon hearing about her passing on (“I felt myself open to the light. I almost dropped to my knees in gratitude.” [175]), she understands now that a mere rejection of her mother and family is not possible and that her attempt to belong to the dominant group has failed. Alone in her mother’s house, she tries to find her roots and her identity through the stories she recalls, told by the women in her family. In the very end—several years after her mother’s death—she also seeks to prove her identity in a more formal way, namely through documents filed at
the Oklahoma Historical Society, which are supposed to prove her belonging to the Cherokee tribe. Confronted with contempt and derision by the (Euro-American) librarian who seemingly denies that she’s an Indian when he asks her, “Who do you think you are?” and hence questions her tribal selfhood, Lucie affirms her social and ethnic identity when she lashes out at the white man. Grabbing him by the collar, she shouts:

“I ain’t asking you to tell me who I think I am. I am the great-granddaughter of Robert Henry Evers, I am the granddaughter of Hellen Evers Jeeters, I am the daughter of Grade Evers, the niece of Rozella Evers, and the grandniece of Lizzie Sixkiller Evers.”

My hands almost relax, but I catch the grin forming at the corners of his pale thin mouth.

“Let me put it this way. I am a follower of stories, a negotiator of histories, a wild dog of many lives. I am Quanah Parker swooping down from the hills into your bedroom in the middle of the night. And I am centuries of Indian women who lost their husbands, their children, their minds so you could sit here and grin your shit-eating grin.” (192; emphasis in the text)

This outburst demonstrates her newly found pride in her heritage—an important aspect of minority identity that Rodolfo Gonzales’ poem also highly emphasizes, which becomes manifest when she recites her family lineage and stresses the circumstances under which members of her group, especially the female members, have had to live. However, Lucie shows an even more radical stance toward the oppressive majority group when she draws attention to the fact that the minority is not as powerless as the majority might think. On the contrary, she and members of her group may enter into direct competition with the dominant group and even turn into a real threat to them—even if only through writing and hence documentation and testimony of the colonizers’ sins against Indians. Waving a pen at the white librarian, Lucie exclaims, “I am your worst nightmare: I am an Indian with a pen” (192). On her way out of the Oklahoma Historical Society, she once again establishes the cause and effect relationship between the oppressors’ dominance and her social group’s consequent reflection upon and development of its own unique strength and power. She tells the librarian, “Look, […] it’s nothing personal. I’ve just had one too many white men in my life” (192). And finally she gives him the advice that has been passed on to her “by the old people”: “Don’t mess with Indian women” (193). Thus in writing her story in relation to her ancestors and elders in her family, Lucie not only documents her family’s—and tribe’s—history of oppression, but—like the speakers in Jimmy Santiago Baca’s poems—also becomes an active participant in the history-making process.

Abel, the protagonist of N.Scott Momaday’s complex novel, House Made of Dawn (1968), has to find his place in history before he can become part of it and contribute to the process of history-making. Momaday, a Kiowa Indian from Oklahoma, moved to New Mexico with his parents when he was two years old, where he grew up first on the Navajo, then the Jemez Pueblo reservation. His protagonist Abel is a young Jemez Pueblo Indian, who has lived both in the world of his fathers and—as a member of the U.S. Army—the world of the dominant white culture. Even his name, as Louis Owens
has noted, “with its loud biblical resonance, emphasizes his position in tension between Indian and Euroamerican cultures” (98).

Abel has served in the army and has fought in World War II, and in the course of the novel he lives in Walatowa Pueblo in New Mexico\(^3\) as well as in the Euro-American metropolis of Los Angeles. Until nearly the end of the novel, Abel proves to be unable to live in either world. James Ruppert notes that “Partly because of his personal background and partly because of his war experiences, he is devastated in Walatowa Pueblo and in Los Angeles. He loses whatever clear sense of identity he had as a young man” (51). From Abel’s memories as related in the first chapter of the novel, the reader can gather that despite his mixed-blood heritage (his parents are from two different Indian tribes), which might have contributed to his fragmented identity, his sense of a social identity was more defined as rooted in the ways of his social group. One might even conjecture that if he had never left the Pueblo, he might not have lost that sense of identity, that if he had not had any contact with the oppressive culture and remained in his own social and ethnic entity, he might have remained whole. The narrator in *House Made of Dawn* points out that “This—everything in advance of his going [to war]—he could remember whole and in detail. It was the recent past, the intervention of days and years without meaning, of awful calm and collision, time always immediate and confused, that he could not pull together in his mind” (23).

Hence, the negative influences of the dominant Euro-American culture have had a destructive effect on his sense of selfhood so that he is no longer able even to live in his native group. His ritualistic murder of the albino, the literal epitome of the white man even though the albino is by birth an Indian, is one manifestation of his negative personal, but also social, identity. Lawrence Evers concurs, stating that “Abel appears to kill the albino then as a frustrated response to the White Man and Christianity, but he does so more in accordance with Anglo tradition than Indian tradition. Indeed, he has been trained in the Army to be a killer” (219). So Abel’s murder of the albino can be seen as a symptom of his disturbed, or even lacking, sense of belonging. While on one hand, he might try to defend his group and himself against white (Euro-American) infiltration and colonization—Susan Castillo calls the murder a possible “act of self-defense, an affirmation of integrity “(165)—one must recognize that, on the other hand, Abel kills a member of his own social group, even though he might not accept the albino as such. Hence, Evers summarizes that the albino is “the White Man in the Indian; perhaps even the White Man in Abel himself. When Abel kills the albino, in a real sense he kills a part of himself and his culture which he can no longer recognize and control” (220). It must also be noted that Abel—as well as his grandfather Francisco—believes that the albino is a witch, or the incarnation of evil, which is the reason that Abel kills him—not hurt pride for being defeated during the rooster pull. In the act of murder, therefore, Abel seems to be attempting to eradicate the evil, which he has incorporated into his own identity by participating in the war, from his own persona. However, he soon finds out that he can’t accomplish this goal through violence, more of which he experiences first-hand in Los Angeles, and he has to understand that evil can’t be fought with violence, before he can become whole again.

At the same time as the conflict with the Indian white man (or the white Indian) occurs—beginning with his being humiliated by the albino at the game of the rooster pull...
and culminating in Abel’s murder of him—Abel becomes involved with Angela St. John, a member of the dominant Euro-American group. S.K. Aithal notes:

Whatever may have been his experiences during his association with whites, Abel appears to have developed feelings of both love and hate towards the whites as is evidenced by his involvement in love with a white woman and murder of a white man within days of his arrival in Walatowa. […] The episodes of love and murder enacted with the white dramatis personae stress Abel’s alienation from his own community by showing how the whites dominate his life and thought. (162)

While the white majority group dominates Abel’s life, it also contributes to his negative social identity. It becomes clear that he belongs to neither his original social group nor the dominant social group when he lives in Los Angeles—relocated there after his release from prison. Knowing that he is an outsider who cannot and does not want to fit into and adjust to the assimilationist group, he almost purposely appears to show deviant behavior according to the dominant group’s standards and interpretation. At the same time, however, he does not get along with other minorities either, with the exception of his friend Benally, a young Navajo. James Ruppert also notes:

[T]he outsider, the returned war veteran, fails to adjust to a normal life and relationships as defined by the dominant non-Native society. Every relationship he attempts breaks down. His alcoholism combines with acute alienation from the dominant society and his past to keep him from feeling comfortable in either Native or non-Native society. He is torn between two worlds and defeated by the social forces that push him to war, to jail, and to relocation in the city. He cannot and does not wish to measure up to the dominant society’s definition of who he is and he does not know what his social role in Walatowa is. (52)

In the long run, however, it becomes clear that he needs to reject the oppressive Euro-American society in order to become whole again. Reinforced by the narrative device of fragmentation, the section of the novel describing Abel’s stay in Los Angeles demonstrates that he cannot live in the white society: it mentally and physically breaks him. “Disposed of” in the language of the whites (House Made of Dawn 102), psychologically and physically injured (by the Chicano police officer Martinez, who seems to be aware of his own minority group membership and who, by beating Abel, appears to attempt to achieve a more positive social distinctiveness himself), Abel returns to the Pueblo in time to reunite with his grandfather before the latter passes away. With the help of his Navajo friend Benally, Abel has learned to “return to the stories and to connection with the stories” (Ruppert 40). He understands the need to reflect upon his own cultural and social group. Moreover, Abel’s “final act of joining the dawn runners […] may be interpreted as a rejection of modern, dominant society and a search for identity in a smaller group, even though the group has not asked this of him” (Ruppert 52).
While it is not clear whether his original group will embrace him again, Abel has made the decision to identify himself through this group, as he has realized that only membership in this group can lead to a positive identity. Or, in other words, Abel obtains a positive identity by imagining himself as being part of his native social group, the Jemez Pueblo. Momaday has explained that due to their ethnic diversity, Native Americans have a more difficult time identifying themselves, which explains why Momaday uses Benally to help Abel find the group to which he belongs. Momaday states that Native Americans’ “ethnic definition, whatever it is, consists in an intricate complex of experience” (qtd. in Owens 92), out of which a sense of identity must be developed; Louis Owens, who is of Choctaw-Cherokee-Irish descent, concurs: “identity is acquired through an act of self-imagination” (93).

While Abel must ultimately reject the dominant culture (even his sympathetic Anglo girlfriend Milly) and eventually close himself off against its assimilationist influences in his own social group, his friend Ben Benally represents a more moderate, and inclusive, stance towards the majority. Abel meets Benally, a young Navajo, in Los Angeles, and the two become friends after Benally has offered to let Abel room with him in his apartment. It becomes clear from the beginning of their friendship on that Benally feels protective of Abel, as he understands the difficulties of making the move from the reservation to the city. He has been in the same situation himself and thus knows how much time and pain it takes to get adjusted; in addition, Abel has to deal with parole officers and Relocation administrators. Benally understands that changing environments is similar to moving to a foreign country where a different language is spoken. He states:

You have to get used to everything, you know; it’s like starting out someplace where you’ve never been before, and you don’t know where you’re going or why or when you have to get there, and everybody’s looking at you, waiting for you, wondering why you don’t hurry up. And they can’t help you because you don’t know how to talk to them. They have a lot of words, and you know they mean something, but you don’t know what, and your own words are no good because they’re not the same; they’re different, and they’re the only words you’ve got. (158; emphasis in the text)

However, although Benally can relate to Abel’s problems and hence is willing to be forgiving and accommodating when Abel causes him inconvenience and pain due to his failure to go to work and his alcoholism, he has sufficiently adapted to the Euro-American society to live in it. In fact, he even seems to think that this is the only solution, the only possible or acceptable way of living—at least for himself. He continues (from the quotation above):

You see the way it is, how everything is going on without you, and you start to worry about it. You wonder how you can get yourself into the swing of it, you know? And you don’t know how, but you’ve got to do it because there is nothing else. And you want to do it, because you can see how good it is. It’s better than anything you’ve ever had; it’s money and clothes and having plans and going someplace fast. […] It’s hard and you
want to give up. You think about getting out and going home. You want to think that you belong someplace, I guess. You go up there on the hill and you hear the singing and the talk and you think about going home. But the next day you know it’s no use; you know that if you went home there would be nothing there, just the empty land and a lot of people, going no-place and dying off. And you’ve got to forget about that too.

(158–59)

Hence, Benally seems to have accepted the Euro-American culture’s dominance, or at least to have resigned himself to it, unlike “Joaquín” in Gonzales’ poem, who vows to resist it and calls to his people to do the same. Benally apparently doesn’t think that there is any real chance to close oneself off from the dominant group and to live a lifestyle without its influence, preserving a traditional way of living; he believes that Indians are an “endangered species.” In that regard, his opinion is shared by Napoleon Kills-in-the-Timber, who during a prayer meeting at Tosamah’s mission, calls upon a god:

Great Spirit be with us. We gone crazy for you to be with us poor Indi’ns. We been bad long time ‘go, just raise it hell and an’ kill each others all the time. An’ that’s why you ‘bandon us, turn you back on us. Now we pray to you for help. Help us! We been suffer like hell some time now. Long, long time ‘go we throw it in the towel. Gee whiz, we want to be frens with white mans. Now I talk to you Great Spirit. I am sad because we die.

(113)

While Benally’s attitude toward the white majority might initially have been merely one of resignation and frustrated acceptance of its dominance and power, or one determined by the realization of the fact that compliance with the Euro-American groups’ standards is necessary for survival, he now seems to have embraced their values and is even sympathetic towards a selection of its members. Milly, the white social worker who approaches Abel and Benally to conduct a survey and later befriends them, is an example of a member of the dominant culture with whom Benally has friendly contact. He does not approve when Abel takes advantage of her, takes her money and treats her badly by making fun of her (163). He looks at her as a person, a caring, generous and vulnerable woman, and not as a representative of an oppressive group.

Despite Benally’s affinity for the majority group, however, he has still retained enough understanding and knowledge of the values and characteristics of his original group to be not only sympathetic to Abel, but also to help him on his way to find wholeness and a sense of identity. In fact, Benally provides an important step in Abel’s ceremony for finding emotional peace and unity by telling him “about the old ways, the stories and sings, Beautyway and Night Chant. I sang some of those things, and I told him what they meant, what I thought they were about” (146). As Louis Owens and others have noted, the Night Chant is a Navajo healing ceremony, “focused upon restoring harmony or balance within the individual and among natural, human, and supernatural elements that make up the world” (105). Hence, Benally has recognized the root of Abel’s problem and applies the appropriate ceremony. In addition, he makes plans with Abel to meet again some day, even though he initially does not really believe in the plan
and only tries to make Abel feel better. However, because of Abel’s taking the plan so seriously, Benally begins to believe in it too and regards it as a special bond between them. He says:

We were going to meet someplace, maybe in a year or two, maybe more. He was going home, and he was going to be all right again. And someday I was going home, too, and we were going to meet someplace out there on the reservation and get drunk together. It was going to be the last time, and it was something we had to do. We were going on the hills on horses and alone. It was going to be early in the morning, and we were going to see the sun coming up. It was going to be good again, you know? We were going to get drunk for the last time, and we were going to sing the old songs. We were going to sing about the way it used to be, how there was nothing all around but the hills and the sunrise and the clouds. […] It was a plan we had, just the two of us, and we weren’t ever going to tell anybody about it. (145–46)

In short, the character of Benally is quite complex in that he seems to be able to move back and forth between the majority and minority groups. On the one hand, he is well adapted to the Euro-American society and follows their rules; on the other hand, he still associates with his original group by having contact with its members. Although he does apply the dominant culture’s standards to evaluate Abel’s behavior as deviant, he does not use them to judge Abel negatively or to obtain a more positive social identity through competition with him.

The Right Reverend John Big Bluff Tosamah, Priest of the Sun and Pastor of the “Holiness Pan-Indian Rescue Mission” (House Made of Dawn 89), is another figure in the novel who combines aspects of both minority and majority groups within his character—even though his stance toward either is much different from Benally’s. As has been pointed out by many critics (e.g. Owens 108–12), Tosamah is a trickster and as such, he attacks and ridicules both cultures. He belongs to both groups but also to neither; he is advocate for and adversary to both native and Euro-American societies. James Ruppert has stated:

While Tosamah voices what appears to be a progressive, proacculturation position, he has attacked the dominant society. He is a kind of Christian, but he takes peyote and encourages a native sense of community. He lives in Los Angeles, but he is a descendent of a “lordly and dangerous society of fighters and thieves, hunters and priests of the sun” (129), who believe in the sacredness of the world. He is a walking bag of contradictions, alien enough to hold the non-Native reader off from identifying him. (48)

Already his sign at the door to his “church” reveals that Tosamah combines many conflicting ideas in his identity and approach to life. On the one hand, he calls himself “Pastor” and his spiritual gathering place a “mission”; in his sermons, he makes references to the Bible, even preaches on stories from the Bible (the Gospel of John, 1:1), thus revealing his association with Christianity. On the other hand, he sees himself as a
spiritual leader for all Indians, not just those of one tribe, who live in the city, away from their natural environment and who are in need of guidance; he wants to “rescue” them. This fact demonstrates that Tosamah recognizes the majority group’s negative effects on the minority—fellow Indians—and that he wants to provide them with a place to turn to, where their (spiritual) needs will be met and where their personal value will not be contested. The latter idea is suggested by the last phrase on his door sign, which seems to be the motto of his mission: “Be kind to a white man today” (90). With this imperative, Tosamah suggest that whites are, in fact, in need of kindness, and that—despite the long history of injustice and oppression—Indians are still capable of showing kindness towards their colonizers because they are the bigger people, the superior group. In other words, Tosamah attempts to achieve a positive social identity for the Indians by comparing their social group with the majority group on a different dimension, not by the latter’s standards.

In one of his sermons, Tosamah actually compares the two opposing social groups, thus characterizing and evaluating both. Using the Gospel as a basis—“In the beginning was the Word” (House Made of Dawn 92)—to emphasize the contrast between the two groups’ understanding of words and language, Tosamah states that “the white man has his way. Oh gracious me, he has his ways. He talks about the Word. He talks through it and around it. He builds upon it with syllables, with prefixes and suffixes and hyphens and accents. He adds and divides and multiplies the Word. And in all of this he subtracts the Truth. And brothers and sisters, you have come here to live in the white man’s world” (94); consequently, they need to be aware of this way of using language and live by this standard, or—like Tosamah—they have to learn to use the majority group’s language to their advantage and thus to “beat them at their own game.”

What Tosamah claims about the way the white man makes use of language, how he uses it not only to his advantage but also to distort, or omit, the truth, is reminiscent of Abel’s trial after his murder of the albino. While listening to the lawyers and the judge, Abel realizes that they are using an entirely different language to talk about him and what they consider his crime; although he understands what they are saying, he does not think that they are coming even close to describing why he killed the albino. “Word by word by word these men were disposing of him in language, their language, and they were making a bad job of it” (102; emphasis in the text). In fact, this realization of language difference is later confirmed by Benally when he states that “they have a lot of words, and you know they mean something, but you don’t know what” (158). Tosamah points out that the dominant group’s use of language is, in fact, an impure, or imperfect, one, although they are not aware of it:

The white man takes such things as words and literatures for granted, as indeed he must, for nothing in his world is so commonplace. On every side of him there are words by the millions, an unending succession of pamphlets and papers, letters and books, bills and bulletins, commentaries and conversations. He has diluted and multiplied the Word, and words have begun to close in upon him. He is sated and insensitive; his regard for language—for the Word itself—as an instrument of creation has diminished nearly to the point of no return. It may be that he will perish by the Word. (95)
In stark contrast to how the white man is “sated and insensitive,” Tosamah attributes a great deal of meaning and power to the word; it has the capacity to connect speaker and listener by inviting the latter into the former’s mind and soul. Referring to his grandmother’s role as storyteller, Tosamah asserts that “she had learned that in words and in language, and there only, she could have whole and consummate being.” Moreover, “the simple act of listening is crucial to the concept of language, more crucial even than reading and writing, and language in turn is crucial to human society” (94). When he listened to his grandmother’s stories, “something strange and good and powerful was going on. I was a child and that old woman was asking me to come directly into the presence of her mind and spirit” (95). Contrary to the white man’s language, which is “diluted” and hence corrupted, “multiplied” by the proliferation of presented texts and hence worthless, Indians’ language is strong: “You see, for her [Tosamah’s grandmother! words were medicine; they were magic and invisible. They came from nothing into sound and meaning. They were beyond price; they could neither be bought nor sold. And she never threw words away” (96).

Significantly, however, Tosamah is in command of, and is associated with, the white man’s language himself. Louis Owens, in fact, maintains that he is a manipulator of language the import of which is undercut systematically by a cynical superficiality that reduces his words at times to mere jingles or turns them against themselves. This aspect of Tosamah is hinted at in the description of paraphernalia for the peyote ceremony, the first of which is the alliteratively ludicrous “fine fan of fancy pheasant feathers.” (108)

Moreover, “Tosamah’s voice functions primarily as an example of what Bakhtin would label ‘hybridization,’ defined as ‘a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, and encounter, within the arena of utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses’” (Owens 110). This fact is another manifestation of the duality of Tosamah’s character and his inclusion of both the majority and minority’s values in his identity, and hence his acceptance of a “synthetic” social identity.

One must keep in mind, however, that Tosamah does not merely mock and attack the Euro-American society in order to show its inferiority compared to the minority group. His use of a biblical text and his appropriation of a Christian sermon also suggest that there may be a need for inclusion of certain aspects of Christianity for the modern, urban Indian. Owens also refers to the “burden of a new, syncretic American Indian spirituality” that Tosamah bears (108–09). Similar to his appropriation of the dominant group’s language is his appropriation of their religion as well—which is reminiscent of Joaquin’s effort in his calling himself “Christ.” Tosamah thus illustrates the dialogic interaction between the two social groups, hence representing the attempt of the colonized to adopt aspects of the colonizer’s identity, which results in a hybrid identity—a synthesis of self and other.

Tosamah’s conviction that it is necessary for the modern (urban) Indian to adapt to the changed parameters of the society he lives in becomes apparent as well in his attack on a “poor” representative of his group. He ridicules Abel, who is unable to adjust to the new environment he finds himself in, calls him a “longhair” and criticizes the way he has
become a social outcast by Euro-American standards; at the same time, however, his sarcasm can’t be overlooked:

You take that poor cat [...]. They gave him every advantage. They gave him a pair of shoes and told him to go to school. They deloused him and gave him a lot of free haircuts and let him fight on their side. But was he grateful? Hell, no, man. He was too damn dumb to be civilized. So what happened? They let him alone at last. They thought he was harmless. They thought he was going to plant some beans, man, and live off the fat of the land. Oh, he was going to make his way, all right. He would get some fat little squaw all knocked up, and they would lie around all day and get drunk and raise a lot of little government wards. They would make some pottery, man, and boost the economy. But it didn’t turn out that way. He turned out to be a real primitive sonuvabitch, and the first time he got hold of a knife he killed a man. That must have embarrassed the hell out of them. (148–49)

Claiming to accept and represent the dominant culture’s values and standards, Tosamah endorses the treatment Abel got after murdering the albino, stressing the opposition between the two groups:

They put that cat away, man. They had to. [...]

They, man. They put all of us renegades, us diehards, away sooner or later. They’ve got the right idea. They put us away before we’re born. They’re an almighty wise and cautious bunch, those cats, full of discretion. You’ve got to admire them, man; they know the score. (149; emphasis in the text)

Louis Owens has claimed that by mocking Abel, Tosamah reveals his envy of him as he has something Tosamah has not: “a center [the Pueblo] to which he can return, a cultural heritage intact and deeply imprinted upon him even in his most desperate circumstances” (112). So while Tosamah is critical of both cultures’ characteristics and values, he is also unable to belong to either and attempts to find a positive, hybrid identity by mediation of the two in his “church,” with its emphasis on visions brought about through peyote.

By presenting an array of characters who all have their own view of and attitude toward the oppressive Euro-American group, House Made of Dawn clearly portrays a more complex and nuanced picture of the relationship between minority and majority groups than Rodolfo Gonzales does, and thus offers a variety of approaches of how to establish a positive social identity despite assimilationist threats by the dominant society. Rudolfo Anaya’s novel Alburquerque (1992), written two decades after the publication of his landmark novel Bless Me, Ultima (1972), is a Chicano example of a novel that achieves a similar goal. The novel centers around Abrán González, a young Chicano who grew up in the barrio of Albuquerque. At the beginning of the novel, he finds out that his biological mother was a rich Anglo woman and that he was adopted and raised by a Chicano couple who used to work for his birthmother’s white parents. Dying of cancer, his mother sends him a letter from the hospital because she wants to see him before she dies, but Abrán only makes it to the hospital in time to witness her passing. Disturbed by
the news, he sets out to search for his father in order to find out who he is. He only knows that his father must be Chicano, as his mother was forced to give up her baby when her financially and politically powerful father learned that she was pregnant while in high school. Assisted by his girlfriend Lucinda, a modern day curandera, and his Jemez Pueblo friend, Joe, Abrán eventually finds his father, the writer Ben Chávez, and makes peace with himself and his environment through accepting his new mestizo identity.

Alburquerque presents several instances of tense relations between the majority and minority groups, many of which even occur within the characters. Abrán grew up knowing that he was different from the other children in the barrio who teased him because of his fair complexion and called him “güero” (blond), and hence developed an even stronger sense of his ethnicity because he had to constantly prove it.

“I’ll show you I’m Mexican,” was his battle cry, and he cursed with his best barrio Spanish he knew and went in swinging. He grew tough, and by the time he was in middle school, they no longer teased. He had become intensely proud of his Mexicanness by having to prove it, and during those crucial years of puberty he became the leader of a gang called Los Gatos. (21–22)

Consequently, his shock at finding out that Anglo blood flows through his veins is even greater, even though his deceased biological mother is the famous painter, Cynthia Johnson, whose works are known and admired among Chicanos/as and Indians alike for realistically and sensitively portraying their people and scenes from their ceremonies and fiestas. Through reading her diary, Abrán finds out that his mother felt much closer to the minority group, had attempted to dissociate herself from her original group, the dominant Caucasian society—even had been rejected by her social group through her father, a powerful representative of the group, since she could not and would not fit in. This has become manifest not only in her conceiving a child with a Chicano, but also in her fascination and love for the native people. She writes in her diary:

It was my first trip into the South Valley. I was a gringita from the Country Club; I had been protected from the world. But the valley was to become my valley. I would visit the villages of the Río Grande again and again, until the old residents got to know well the sunburned gringa who tramped around with easel, paint, and brushes. I earned their respect. They invited me into their homes, and later invited me to their fiestas. Their acceptance kept me alive. (95–96)

Ben Chávez, Abrán’s biological father, is also aware of the negative influences of the dominant white society not only through his personal experience of having been involved with an Anglo woman and having the relationship destroyed by her father, but also through the observations he sets out to make in the barrio, in bars and on the streets, which he uses in his novels and poems. He has realized the need for modern Chicanos/as to find a sense of identity through reflection upon their rich cultural past, which in terms of social identity theory equals the process of social competition, in which the members of the minority group redefine “the elements of the comparative situation”
(Turner/Brown 205): instead of being evaluated on the basis of the dominant group’s standards, the members of the oppressed group evaluate themselves and find a positive social identity on the basis of their historical and cultural roots. In fact, Ben Chávez’s realization is similar to “Joaquin’s,” although he does not voice it as radically as the speaker of Gonzales’ poem.

Ben Chávez’s understanding of the significance of the Chicanos/as’ rich heritage becomes apparent in the epic poem he works on at the beginning of the novel and completes by the end of the novel, which “explored the Mesoamerican mythic elements Chicanos had incorporated into their heritage. Juan and Al, two plain homeboys from the barrio, took a journey into the Aztec past, and what they found […] would help create a new consciousness for the people. A new identity for the downtrodden” (60). This last sentence is of utmost importance as it demonstrates the difference between Anaya’s and Gonzales’ takes on the relationship between minority and majority groups and their call to their people to resist the assimilationist majority. On one hand, Anaya—like Gonzales—points to past sins against his social group that have been committed by the colonizers by evoking “Coatlicue, […] who warned them that the Spaniards were coming to destroy Tenochtitlán, the sacred city of the Mexicanos” (214) through Ben Chávez’s poem. On the other hand, he acknowledges the inevitable need for change in the modern U.S. society and even evaluates the result of mediation between the two groups as positive. Unlike Gonzales, who rejects the formation of identity through synthesis, Anaya seems to almost embrace it by drawing attention to Chicanos/as’ “bi-identity.”

Later in the novel, this stance is reiterated when Ben Chávez reads the poem in his local bar to fellow Chicanos/as, among whom is also his son Abrán, although the latter at this point still doesn’t know that the writer is his father. The audience is fascinated by the story of Juan and Al, who search and find the mythic Aztlán, and on their journey meet gods and goddesses of the Aztecs. While reading, Ben gets carried away and loses himself in the poem:

He was on a roll, deep into the story, and in his heart he dedicated the poem to Abrán. In the beginning was the word, then flesh followed. Each man could create himself in his own image. Abrán could find himself in the brotherhood of all men. Juan and Al were his brothers, all cholos [mestizos] were brothers, and finally Abrán could know him, the writer, as the father.

Abrán, born of the Mexican father and gringa mother, was the new Chicano, and he could create his own image, drawing the two worlds together, not letting them tear him apart. Abrán, the new mestizo. (214–15)

What becomes apparent here is that Ben does not merely acknowledge the dominant culture’s impact on his social group; instead he seems to want to use it to the advantage of the group by demonstrating that the combination of characteristics of the two groups can result in something new and good, namely a “synthetic,” mestizo/a identity. Moreover, he seems to say that everybody has the identity he/she creates for him/herself. “I am who I create,” Ben says and his son Abrán understands (Alburquerque 215). In fact, the allusion to the Bible and the idea that words embody creation is significantly
reminiscent of Tosamah’s sermon in *House Made of Dawn*. However, while the latter uses this reference to underscore the way the colonizers define the minority through their corrupted and diluted use of language, Ben Chávez seems to have a more reconciliatory stance in claiming that the power lies with the minority group: its members are influenced by the dominant group, yet they are not being defined by the majority. Identity is a matter that lies within each individual.

Moreover, Rudolfo Anaya’s novel does not merely paint a black and white picture; *Alburquerque* does not simply portray the dominant Euro-American culture in negative ways while all the members of the Chicano community are good and flawless. There are positive figures who represent the majority, such as Cynthia Johnson, Abrán’s mother, and negative examples of corrupt Chicanos, such as Franc Dominic who wants to become mayor and in his campaign proposes a plan to turn the city into a southwestern Venice (which is strikingly similar to what Leah Blue wants to create in Tucson in Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead*), thus attempting to attract tourists and make Albuquerque commercially successful without any concern for the environment or the people living in the region. Through his characters in *Alburquerque* and their various viewpoints, Anaya demonstrates that dialogic interaction between the two groups is not only inevitable but may also lead to a positive social identity for the minority in the process of social competition.

Clearly, Leslie Marmon Silko’s latest novel, *Gardens in the Dunes* (1999), even goes a step farther than *Alburquerque* in investigating the possibilities of dialogic interaction. The Laguna Pueblo author’s novel presents a situation in which the minority group not only “wins” the social competition with the majority group and establishes a positive social identity through that process; it even becomes the desired “Other” in the eyes of (one member of) the majority. *Gardens in the Dunes* is set at the turn of the 20th century and presents the struggle between minority and majority in the Southwest, and the minority’s realization of the necessity to partially (or temporarily) adapt to changed parameters, through the character of Indigo, a young girl of the fictional Sand Lizard tribe. At the beginning of the book, Indigo lives with her grandmother, mother and sister at the edge of the town of Needles, at the border of southeast California and western Arizona, tolerated by the white townspeople only as long as they do not draw too much attention to themselves or make a “nuisance” of themselves in the eyes of the whites. A four-day Ghost Dance celebration, a dancing ceremony intended to establish communications with their ancestors and to attract the appearance of the Indian Messiah, has the effect of gathering together too many Indians for the whites to be comfortable so that they send soldiers to break up the dance and the celebration shortly after the “Messiah” has arrived (34). As a consequence, Indigo and her sister, Sister Salt, are separated from their grandmother and mother. While the sisters are later reunited with their Grandmother Fleet in their home in the old gardens in the sand dunes of the desert, their mother, who followed the Messiah and his family, remains missing for the rest of the novel.

After the death of Grandmother Fleet, Indigo and Sister Salt are captured by Indian police on their journey to search for their mother (64). They are separated from each other; Indigo is sent to the Sherman Institute, an Indian boarding school, in Riverside, California, while Sister Salt, who is considered too old to be successfully educated and converted to white people’s ways, is placed in the custody of the Indian agency on the
Parker Reservation (69), a reservation that holds a variety of tribes “who used to live along the Colorado River before the white people came” and who were not granted their own reservation (206).

The institute in Riverside is mostly run by Indians who not only have adopted Euro-American attitudes and behaviors but, even more, seem to have forgotten about their own background. There is a “big Pomo Indian” woman (70) who is the matron of the school and who treats the children cruelly and unfairly; when Indigo recites the few words she knows in English, some of which are swear words, the matron washes her mouth with soap and locks her in the mop closet all night. One of the janitors is described as “one of those mission Indians” (70). Both have accepted Christianity and speak only English. Clearly, with these characters, Silko gives examples of Indians who have completely dissociated themselves from their original social group and have rejected that group’s religion, values and characteristics in their conviction that in order to be successful in the Euro-American world, they need to mimic the dominant group’s ways; since their affiliation with their original social group has not allowed them to develop a positive social identity, they are trying to achieve it by making the move to the majority group.

After managing to escape from school, Indigo is taken in and “adopted” by a white, newlywed American couple, Hattie and Edward Palmer. Although she desperately tries to run away from them too, Indigo eventually realizes that she needs to adapt to their ways and comply with their rules for at least a little while before she can return to her people and her natural way of life. Despite her young age, Indigo thinks quite rationally. Understanding that she will need Hattie’s help to avoid the authorities, Indigo agrees to accompany the white couple on their trip to Europe, hence traveling not only with her colonizers but also to the place from which they originated. However, Hattie promises to help her find her mother and sister upon their return from their journey, which appeases Indigo and contributes to her decision to consent to come along: “She had a better chance of finding the Messiah and his followers if she continued to the east [where she expected to find the Messiah]. Besides, Hattie promised, as soon as they returned from abroad, she’d take Indigo to Arizona to look for Sister Salt and Mama” (156).

Consequently, Indigo slowly, and temporarily, accepts her new environment, even takes advantage of it by learning to read and write, by learning as much as she can about gardening from her white guardians, and by collecting seeds she wants to plant in the old gardens. However, she never fully succumbs to the white culture’s dominance; she adapts and mimics the white colonizers’ ways, for instance, by wearing the fancy clothes especially tailored for her. At the same time, however, she upholds her little idiosyncrasies, such as sleeping on the floor, or keeping unusual pets, and holds on to her ultimate goal, to be reunited eventually with her family. Since Indigo recognizes the extent to which interaction with white people can be beneficial to her, she plays along and adopts parts of their characteristics to achieve her goal. In this her behavior is similar to Tosamah’s adoption (and adaptation) of the dominant group’s language for his purpose—to keep the upper hand in the process of social competition by beating them at their own game. The combination of her interaction with the dominant, oppressor’s, group and her adoption of parts of their culture along with her preservation of distinct aspects of her original social group, allow Indigo to obtain a positive social identity, which seems to be a result of her mediation between the two groups.
However, her identity is not a synthesis of the dialectic between minority and majority groups in the sense that Rudolfo Anaya, for instance, presents in *Alburquerque*. While the modern Chicano/a identity is made stronger by the group members’ very “mestizo/a-ness” and thus prepares them to live in the society of the dominant culture, Indigo is indeed changed by the influence of the majority group (for example, by learning to read), but she only retains some traits of the dominant group and otherwise returns to her former Indian identity and old ways when she moves back to the old gardens at the end of the novel. Moreover, by keeping some of the characteristics and practices she has adopted from the dominant group which she considers appropriate and practical, such as planting in the old gardens even the seemingly useless flower seeds and corms she collected in Europe, some of which turn out to be edible, Indigo in a way reverses, or at least avenges, colonization and thus establishes a positive social identity not only for herself, but for her people.

*Gardens in the Dunes* is as much about the Euro-American people and culture as it is about Native Americans. In fact, Leslie Marmon Silko’s novel demonstrates that it is not just the minority outgroup that is influenced by the dominant majority ingroup and develops its social identity through contact and comparison with the majority group; indeed, the relationship between minority and majority is a dialogic one and the impact of contact with and identification through the “other” works both ways.

Hattie Palmer, an intellectual from New York, who was more interested in pursuing a Master’s degree in early church history than in getting married, was considered by her mother, relatives and other socialites as destined for spinsterhood due to her “inappropriate” taste for knowledge. Though unconcerned by the pity she faced, she suffered a severe blow to her self-esteem and a consequent nervous breakdown when the white male conservative thesis committee rejected her thesis project, “The Female Principle in the Early Church,” and declared it heretical because she had based her argument on unauthenticated manuscripts (102–03). She met her husband, Edward, after the debacle with the thesis, and although by the time she enters the novel, she is somewhat recovered from her breakdown, her encounter with Indigo constitutes a diversion for her and allows her to take her mind off her old problems.

It becomes apparent that through her developing relationship with Indigo, Hattie is able to find the impetus she needs to form her own identity. She very soon becomes truly attached to the bright child, takes a personal interest in teaching her to read and write, and in turn is interested in learning about Indigo’s family. In fact, after their trip to Europe and the breakup of her marriage to Edward, Hattie has become so enamored of the girl that she secretly hopes that Indigo and she won’t be able to find Indigo’s family, so that they can stay together. When in the course of their search the superintendent of the Indian Bureau on the Parker Reservation suggests that she might legally adopt Indigo (397), Hattie realizes how much she actually needs Indigo to provide meaning for her life. This feeling is dramatically reinforced when Indigo and Hattie find Sister Salt, and Hattie is left to her own devices:

Hattie felt her face flush, and the palms of her hands were damp; her heart pounded and she began to feel light-headed. […] She realized she hadn’t prepared herself for parting with Indigo; she hadn’t really believed they’d locate her sister so easily or so soon. She parted with Edward because it
was the right thing; neither of them wanted the marriage to continue. But she loved Indigo with all of her heart; without the girl she didn’t know what she would do. (411)

Hattie is overwhelmed by a terrible feeling of being alone, of being the one without a life of her own. She returns to visit with Indigo and to bring her food and other supplies, but eventually must acknowledge the rift that has come between them:

She was shocked at the awkwardness between them in a matter of only six weeks. What a fool she was! Indigo returned to the life and sister she had before she was taken away to boarding school. Hattie realized, oddly enough, she was the one who no longer had a life to return to. Although they would welcome her, she could not return to her parents’ house. (441)

By stating that she doesn’t have “a life to return to,” Hattie painfully realizes that her social identity has become fragmented. She no longer can see herself as a member of the dominant group, but at the same time cannot associate with any minority group, such as Indigo’s, despite her feelings of attachment to, or sympathy toward, it.

Hence, it is not surprising, yet significant, that instead of going back to her family in the East, she turns to Indigo and her family after being brutally attacked and violated. Hattie is not simply looking for medical attention and help; rather, she seems to reach to them for spiritual guidance. When the sisters are preparing for the sacred Ghost Dance again, which they hope will not only bring back the Messiah, but also their mother along with him, Hattie’s wish to become a witness of, if not participant in, the Ghost Dance, demonstrates the extent to which the relationship between her and Indigo has shifted. Thus, in a way, Silko describes the topsy-turvy nature of Hegel’s master-slave relationship as Hattie, the oppressor, becomes increasingly more dependent on Indigo, the oppressed, so that in the end the roles have been switched. Indigo has become a representative of the favored social group and the desired “other” to whom the member of the dominant majority group is reaching out and must concede.

When her parents come for her and inadvertently cause the breakup of the Ghost Dance ceremony (471–72), Hattie is devastated, and her anger over their interference worries her confused parents. She has clearly dissociated herself from her original social group and identifies now with the minority outgroup, in fact relating her physical and mental recovery directly to her affiliation with the Indians: “The dancers’ prayers had saved her life—each night of the dance she recovered a bit more as the Messiah drew nearer. She wept with fury when she saw her mother and the lawyer whisper to each other—they believed she was ill, out of her head” (473). After having been taken away, Hattie escapes from her “captors” when they are not paying attention, hence paralleling Indigo’s experience from the beginning of the book. Wandering through the alleys in the town and discovering remnants of her belongings that were stolen from her during the attack on her, she fully realizes the abominable squalor and corruption of the town and its people and consequently sets the stable where she found her belongings, and thus the town, on fire. Her action can be interpreted not only as an expression of disdain for the white town, but more importantly as a way of atoning for what her people have done.
Forced by the soldiers to break up the gathering place, the Indian dancers cannot complete the Ghost Dance ceremony, which is intended to “purify the Earth of its destroyers,” to make the used-up land whole again, to bring back the elk and the buffalo, and remove “all the white people and all the Indians who followed the white man’s ways” (25). By burning down the town of Needles, Hattie—though probably unaware—(partially) fulfills the goal of the Ghost Dance in a figurative way, and obliterates the town and the people who have committed so many sins against Indian people—even if she can’t bring the Messiah or purify the Earth completely.

At the end of the book, it becomes clear that Hattie would not have found a sense of identity had she not met Indigo. She has understood that although she cannot be a member of Indigo’s social group, she can no longer be a member of the dominant (oppressor) group either. Hence, she decides to go to England to live with her Aunt Bronwyn, who is considered by her family to be mentally disturbed for being a stone collector and a pagan—hence clearly a member of a minority group on the periphery of society, a place Hattie seems to have chosen for herself after disassociating herself from the majority group.

What Leslie Marmon Silko seems to suggest here is that power relationships, especially those of a colonial/postcolonial nature, are relative and can fluctuate. Moreover, the formation of a social identity is a dialogic process, in which favoritism may shift between groups. In other words, while people may associate themselves with one group at one point, they may feel the need to disidentify themselves with that group and seek membership in one that had previously been considered undesirable. The character of Hattie Palmer is a good example of a person who followed the first step (individual mobility) according to Tajfel and Turner’s theory of social identity, by disassociating herself from the dominant, colonizers’, group. More importantly, once affiliated with the minority group, she entered into social competition with the majority group by defying that group’s efforts to “bring her back” to her original group. Her escape from her family at the end of the novel and her arson can hence be read as an expression of her favorably evaluating her new social group, even from the viewpoint of the majority group in which she was raised.

Clearly, in Silko’s novel the boundaries of social groups are not fixed. There aren’t any insurmountable barriers between the groups; the borders are fluid. Both Indigo and Hattie—though initially representatives of two opposing groups—are able to adapt to changed parameters and develop a positive social identity through contact with an Other. One possible conclusion that can be drawn from this fact is that Silko might want to suggest that people—despite their varying backgrounds—aren’t so different after all. Any kind of separation, classification and labeling on the basis of religion, race, or skin color is uncertain and even dangerous. In an interview with Ellen Arnold, Silko has discussed her eclectic approach to writing, in which she draws upon a variety of ideas and philosophies, using what she deems appropriate or valid. She claims that this inclusive approach is a practice of “the tribal people of the Americas,” which she is afraid might get lost when people “argue for exclusion” and thus become like the destroyers. And exclusion, she maintains, is usually enacted by judging people on the basis of how they are “on the outside,” not on how they “feel,” or “see things” (188).

She expresses a similar idea earlier in the same interview when she states that it was her intent, in Gardens in the Dunes, to demonstrate the artificiality of lines people draw
between themselves and others. Silko asserts that “those who make the boundary lines and try to separate [the people], those are the manipulators” (170); she continues, “what I was trying to do [was] to get rid of this idea of nationality, borderlines. […] Our human nature, our human spirit, wants no boundaries, and we are better beings, and we are less destructive and happier. We can be our best selves as a species, as beings with all the other living beings on this earth, we behave best and get along best, without those divisions” (170–71). In other words, while it is certainly natural to associate with a particular social group, we should not focus on social comparison in the sense of drawing attention to the groups’ differences, but rather their similarities.

However, since the “damage is already done” and the boundaries are drawn, the process needs to be reversed; the differences between groups need to be reconciled. While Silko tries to accomplish that through her portrayal of the characters of Indigo and Hattie, Muskogee poet Joy Harjo attempts to reach this goal through her poetry, more specifically through her poems that use love as a motif, as a solution to interpersonal, intertribal, and interethnic problems, many of which have historical roots. In these poems, which do not always use the term, love, Harjo proposes the concept to counter hatred and give birth to healing and reconciliation.

Harjo, whose poetry is “largely autobiographical, informed by her love of the natural world and preoccupation with survival and the limitations of language” (Scarry 211), is a Muskogee Creek from Oklahoma, who lived many of her adult years in the Southwest. Her poetry reflects concerns with politics, demonstrating the need for personal and collective resistance against injustice and oppression; this political preoccupation was doubtless fostered by her involvement with Acoma Pueblo poet and essayist Simon Ortiz, the father of her daughter Rainy Dawn, with whom she lived in New Mexico in the 1970s, when Ortiz was much engaged in AIM politics and actions. Despite her protest against the oppression of contemporary Native Americans in modern U.S. society, however, Harjo’s poetry expresses “the need for remembrance and transcendence” (Scarry 211). She believes that she has certain responsibilities as a poet, needing to speak not only for herself but also her tribe and fellow Indians. She states, “I feel strongly that I have a responsibility to all the sources that I am: to all past and future ancestors, to my home country, to all places that I touch down on and that are myself, to all voices, all women, all of my tribe, all people, all earth […]” (qtd. in Scarry 211). Hence, Joy Harjo includes non-native people in her writing and as her audience, recognizing the need to transcend ethnic boundaries.

In her introduction to the collected interviews with Joy Harjo, The Spiral of Memory (1996), Laura Coltelli states that many of Joy Harjo’s poems, and particularly “Mad Love,” the second part of the In Mad Love and War (1990) collection, “dra[w] its healing impulse from the intense existence of things ‘larger than memory,’ […] of lands lost and found again with an unbroken communicative endeavor” (Spiral of Memory 6). Hence, what Harjo communicates is that though the horrors of the past can’t and shouldn’t be forgotten, they can yet be overcome by love. In an interview with Bill Moyers, Joy Harjo said that she considers every poem to be a love poem. Obviously, she is not thinking of love in a romantic sense of the word, and explains, “all poems are love poems in another sense which involves the power of language and the real nature of what a poem is. Ultimately, a poem has an electrical field which is love. […] A poem may be about death
or destruction or anything else terrible, but I somehow want it to resolve, and in some manner I want the resolution to be love” (Spiral of Memory 47).

The poem “Remember,” from her 1983 collection She Had Some Horses, provides a good example of Harjo’s implicit deployment of the concept of love in order to demonstrate that differences between people of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds can be overcome if they share a common love of the earth and nature—and each other. Harjo’s effort to write for both native and non-native audiences is not an expression of her “caving in” to the oppressor’s ideology, but rather an attempt to reconcile minority and majority groups to improve the former’s living conditions. In a way, this effort is similar to N. Scott Momaday’s suggestion in House Made of Dawn which he presents through the character of Ben Benally.

The poem “Remember” is almost entirely written in the imperative, asking the addressees to become alert to and not to forget their surroundings, their environment, their family and tribal history, and origin. As in many of Harjo’s poems, repetition, often as anaphora, is the prevalent poetic device, a poetic means that is also employed in prayers and songs during ceremonies, and which, as Laguna Pueblo writer Paula Gunn Allen has noted in her essay “The Sacred Hoop: A Contemporary Indian Perspective on American Indian Literature,” “serves to entrance and unify—both the participants and the ceremony” (228). Here is the poem in its entirety:

Remember the sky that you were born under,
know each of the star’s stories.
Remember the moon, know who she is.
Remember the sun’s birth at dawn, that is the strongest point of time. Remember sundown and the giving away to night.
Remember your birth, how your mother struggled to give you form and breath. You are evidence of her life, and her mother’s, and hers.
Remember your father. He is your life, also.
Remember the earth whose skin you are:
red earth, black earth, yellow earth, white earth brown earth, we are earth.
Remember the plants, trees, animal life who all have their tribes, their families, their histories, too. Talk to them, listen to them. They are alive poems.
Remember the wind. Remember her voice. She knows the origin of this universe.
Remember you are all people and all people are you.
Remember you are this universe and this
universe is you. Remember all is in motion, is growing, is you. Remember language comes from this. Remember the dance language is, that life is. Remember.

_{(She Had Some Horses 40)\textsuperscript{39} }_

Although the word “love” is not actually used, its spirit and energy still permeate the poem in the sense Harjo described in the Moyers interview: as a force field of language. “Remember” demonstrates a kind of love that is intertwined with ecology, as Patrick Murphy has argued in his article “Ecology and Love: The Spiderwebs of Joy Harjo.” In urging the reader to “remember,” Joy Harjo also implies attention to and a love of the land, a love of the earth, the natural and animal world, a love of the tribe, of people; in short, “an intense love for others, human and non-human” (Murphy 83). By drawing together these elemental entities, the poem “Remember” asserts the connectedness of all things and people in the universe, the cyclical and circular nature of the world and the position of all human beings, of all living things even, in it: “Remember you are all people and all people/are you. Remember you are this universe and this/universe is you,” it says. In this respect, Joy Harjo assumes the communal function of truth teller,\textsuperscript{40} of mediator between people, tribal and non-tribal, by disseminating the message of love embodied in poetic language, and thus alluding to the idea that through loving one another, a synthetic identity can be formed.

The line, “Remember all is in motion, is growing, is you,” points to the continuity and fluidity of the world, which implies renewal and regeneration. In an interview with Angels Carabi, Harjo said, “forgiveness is part of renewal” (Spiral of Memory 136), renewal of both people and the world. In order to forgive, she believes, one must be capable of love. In that same interview she relates a dream she had in which a man from Spain came to visit her and explained to her the history of the conquistadors and the Indian people. She said that “Over the images of blood and destruction was an incredible light, which was the huge power of the sun coming through. It was illuminating a terrible reality yet it was setting to rest, and the underlying concept was forgiveness” (136). Clearly, Harjo seems to have the history of her people in mind when she emphasizes forgiveness and renewal. She seems to say that the members of her (minority) social group are not only capable of forgiving their oppressors for the sins they have committed against them, her people are even able to learn from the experiences of the past and thus grow, and “renew” their social identities. Moreover, it is important to note that in her dream Harjo has learned this important lesson through a representative of the colonizers, which again emphasizes her conviction that despite the differences and boundaries between social groups, there is a common ground on which interaction between the groups can lead to positive results and allow positive social identities for both minority and majority groups.

The prose poem “Transformations,” from the 1990 collection _In Mad Love and War_,\textsuperscript{41} is another good illustration of Harjo’s belief in the power of love as well as the power of “the word,” the power of poetry, to bring people together and to obliterate the boundaries
between them. The poem presents a first person speaker addressing an audience directly as if in a letter. It opens, “This poem is a letter to tell you that I have smelled the hatred you have tried to find me with; you would like to destroy me” (59). The ambiguity of the “you” is tantalizing. While Harjo could simply be addressing a former lover in a form of dramatic monologue, it becomes clear later in the poem that she is more likely speaking to the white readers, attempting to explain to them that hatred can be reversed and hence be transformed into love “if you have the right words, the right meanings, buried in that tender place in your heart where the most precious animals live” (59). This line in particular reveals Harjo’s belief in the power of poetic language and her hope that her poems can accomplish this most important transformation. In the interview with Bill Moyers she said, “I know that language is alive and living, so I hope that in some small way my poems can transform hatred into love” (Spiral of Memory 43–44). Just as love has transformative power, to reverse hatred, words have that same power and may open a dialogue, and eventually alter the attitudes and feelings, and the course of life. “Transformations” ends as follows: “That’s what I mean to tell you. On the other side of the place you live stands a dark woman. She has been trying to talk to you for years. You have called the same name in the middle of a nightmare, from the center of miracles. She is beautiful. This is your hatred back. She loves you” (59). This passage especially can be imagined as being predominantly addressed to white people since it stresses the woman’s dark complexion and portrays her as a dream “Other” who has changed the hatred directed toward her into forgiveness and love. Harjo emphasizes that up until now the addressee has borne only feelings of hatred, which—it seems—Harjo would like to dispel or even reverse by mediating between the two social groups with her poetry.

The poem “Transformations” not only deals with present instances of hatred but also alludes to the past and Native Americans’ history of being the victims of oppression, colonization, and racism. Again, individual, but more importantly, collective memory, which may take “many forms,” is the agent of change. In this respect, Harjo’s poems work in a similar fashion to Gonzales’ Joaquín, in which the speaker also appealed to his readers’ memory and evoked a past filled with oppression and violence against his social group. However, Harjo and Gonzales differ greatly in what they want to accomplish with their poetry, although both call for change. While Gonzales calls to his people to start fighting against the oppressive culture and to resist their assimilationist agenda, Harjo addresses her social group in an effort to mediate between her own and the majority group and to create awareness of and understanding for the “other.” In the poem “Transformations,” for instance, it becomes clear through the speaker’s calm analysis of the instances of hatred and racism over the course of “a thousand years” that love, the reversal of hatred, takes the dimension of an “act of resistance” (Womack 259)—resistance against colonization, oppression, and injustice. Instead of fighting or resisting violently, full of hatred, or resigning and becoming bitter, Harjo suggests that we approach conflicts in a spirit of love. Hatred and violence, she seems to say, should not be answered with hatred and violence; resistance is more powerful and successful in the non-violent form. Craig Womack has summarized that love in Joy Harjo’s poetry “not only means avoiding acts of gratuitous violence but can also be proactive, part of the spirit of resistance that has kept Indian people alive these last five hundred years as they have stood against the forces of colonization” (259).
The works and authors discussed in this chapter demonstrate a variety of ways indigenous people live in the Southwest, a predominantly “tricultural” region (Dasenbrock 308), a “triptych of rich Anglo, Hispanic and Indian cultures” (Lensink viii), without being assimilated by the dominant white Anglo group and instead preserving their own social group’s distinctiveness. While some works display a forceful resistance against the oppressor, others take a more inclusive and moderate stance and even attempt to promote understanding and compromise in order to avoid perpetuating a history of racism and violence. As Reed Way Dasenbrock points out, “cultural contact in the Southwest has meant above all cultural conflict” (309), and this conflict is present in the works of southwestern indigenous authors. As the works analyzed above prove, this cultural conflict cannot be simplified as a minority versus majority relationship. N.Scott Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn*, for instance, demonstrates a clash between American Indians and Chicanos in the characters of Abel and Martinez, hence leading to the conclusion that in their attempts to obtain positive social distinctiveness for their groups, minorities may enter into conflicts with each other in addition to competing with the dominant group. While both Native American and Chicano/a authors of the Southwest focus on the oppressive forces as exercised by the dominant culture and blame their struggle for a positive social identity mainly on the dominant, majority, group, many of them have nonetheless realized the potential of their works to avoid or even reverse hatred and rejection by the majority group and develop a positive self-image on the basis of their new social identities.
Chapter Four
Weaving the Voices: Internarrative Identity

Indigenous people’s ways of coping with the dominant Euro-American society are not just reflected thematically in the literary works of native writers of the Southwest but are also mirrored in the narrative structure of these works. It is true that a considerable number of works by Native American and Chicano/a authors tend to employ a conventional, “Western,” linear, unified plot structure. However, the majority of works by the indigenous southwestern authors discussed in this study show the dilemma of constructing identity in a region characterized by various native and non-native influences by employing a mix of conventional, chronological, or appropriated Anglo-American paradigms as well as native, tribal, or local ones.

Laguna Pueblo writer Paula Gunn Allen, for instance, remarks in her book *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (1986) that many Native American writers “adapt ritual narrative structures to the western convention of conflict resolution” in their stories of “loss of identity, loss of cultural self-determination, genocide or deicide, and culture clash,” and thus create “mixed-blood or half-breed protagonists, treating the theme of cultural conflict by incorporating it into the psychological and social being of the characters” (81). Hence, it is fruitful to trace and illuminate the connection between the formal characteristics and the subject matters of works by Native American and Chicano/a authors to understand how the use of “hybrid” narrative forms reflects the creation of a hybrid identity, i.e. how it underscores these authors’ awareness of their “mestizo/a-ness” or bicultural identity.

Ajit K. Maan’s book *Internarrative Identity* (1999) is based on the premise of a connection between narrative structure and identity formation in minority literature—a phenomenon frequently discernible in the works of indigenous authors of the Southwest. Her treatise uses Paul Ricoeur’s theory of narrative identity as a springboard for her own, contrasting concept of “internarrative identity,” hence constituting both a critique and an extension of Ricoeur’s thesis. Maan discusses Ricoeur’s work as a representation of the Euro-American tradition just as she sees postmodern deconstruction as a product of the Western (or colonial) world.

Alluding to an early document of postcolonial theory, the famous 1985 essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” by Gayatri Spivak, Maan maintains that in postmodern theory subjectivity and authorship are deconstructed, which preconditions that before the narrator or author may deny the subject, he/ she must have gained a right to speak; this position, however, is precisely one that Spivak contended subalters do not hold, or at least have not been allowed to hold for a long time. Maan explains that Ricoeur’s theory of narrative identity is limited in its scope because it requires a unified plot structure in which narrated events and experiences must fall within the “plot” of one’s self. According to Ricoeur, Maan maintains, any event or experience one has must be fitted into this unity of one’s narrative of oneself; if it can’t be related or assimilated by the
unified plot, it is silenced, or repressed. In Ricœur’s opinion, “a narrative must not be open-ended. [...] [It] must have a Master-voice and Master-consciousness.” He states that “The co-existence of dominant voices [...] cannot form the structure of a narration” (qtd. in Maan 13). This would mean, however, as Maan points out, that “Dialogical form, for example, violates the criterion of Master-voice” (13).

Contrary to Ricœur, Maan agrees with the Bakhtinean view that all novels are inherently dialogic. Moreover, she objects to the notion that repression of parts of a narrative that do not fit in the Master-plot lead to their consequent omission from the narrative, and instead contends that not all individual events and stories which one experiences have to be related to the larger unity of the self, but that it is more important to connect them with each other by re-association. “To tell one’s story is to assign meaning to events and experiences; and re-telling one’s story is a way to creatively re-assign meaning to experience after critical reflection” (16). Furthermore, Maan maintains that there are a variety of stories which can be told in a variety of ways and by a variety of voices, so that subjectivity is “co-structured as much by fissure and disjuncture as by intentional self consistency” (xviii). She asks, “Cannot one’s experience of fracture and discontinuity be what the story is about, or part of what the story is about?” (20; emphasis in the text). Hence, Maan claims that unity and wholeness in a narrative “are not required to have a coherent personal identity” (xvi).

Moreover, trying to fit any experience into a unified narrative structure, as Ricœur demands, may lead—for the storyteller—to a harmful dichotomization of experience into the categories “meaningful or trivial, anomaly or pattern” (19). Here, the parallel to social identity theory as discussed in the previous chapter becomes apparent: if one followed Ricœur’s theory, any experience that cannot be fitted into a unified plot structure would be considered deviant according to Ricœur’s requirements for an integrated self and would need to be repressed and omitted from the narrative. However, Maan claims that in order to express one’s life story it may be necessary to use “alternative plots” and consequently “alternative formal structures” (16), or even to “manipulate[e] traditional paradigms” (35), in order to accommodate the “tension between multiple worlds, multiple languages, multiple selves” (35). The storyteller achieves a sense of self through the dialogic relationship between these voices and selves, hence creating an internarrative identity. Maan even goes as far as saying that “the postcolonial agency of an Internarrative Subject is exercised in undermining traditional associations, identity practices, and structures of self-representation” (54). Thus she suggests that an “un-unified,” or fragmented, plot structure may even be a deliberate attempt at disassociation from the dominant culture, and a way of disregarding or purposely disappointing reader expectations to draw attention to the author’s need to mediate between conflicting cultural influences.

N.Scott Momaday (Kiowa) in his Pulitzer Prize winning novel House Made of Dawn (1968) has doubtless created one of the most prominent examples of a subject exposed to various opposing voices and texts that need to be accommodated and mediated between in order establish a unified self-image. In this novel, Momaday intersperses an array of text genres, traditions and influences—Pueblo, Navajo, Kiowa, and Euro-American to name a few—hence creating a complex web of stories and texts the ailing protagonist has to sort through in his quest for identity. Upon returning to the Jemez Pueblo reservation after the war, Abel, the protagonist of House Made of Dawn, finds he is unable to live in
his familiar surroundings. Like many contemporary Native American protagonists, Abel is a mixed blood: while Abel’s mother seems to be a native of Jemez Pueblo, his father is from another Indian tribe, possibly “a Navajo, […] or a Sia, or an Isleta, an outsider anyway, which made him and his mother and [his older brother] Vidal somehow foreign and strange” (House Made of Dawn 11). Consequently, Abel’s problems are initially not rooted in his being divided between the dominant Euro-American and a native identity—as many (non-native) readers may assume (cf. Velie 177)—but in his conflicted Indian identity, in being an outsider in his own home tribe; Velie notes that “Abel’s illegitimacy makes him an outsider to his tribe even before his traumatic experiences in the war. […] In fact, Abel’s problems stem from this earliest experiences at Walatowa, which is not the world of his fathers” (177; emphasis in the text). Matthias Schubnell, in his study N.Scott Momaday: The Cultural and Literary Background (1985), concurs, stating that “Abel is struggling to find an identity within his own tribe long before he comes into direct contact with the culture of modern America” (102). However, while Velie sees Abel’s problems more as being rooted in his intertribal heritage, Schubnell argues that the tribal (Pueblo) community’s resistance against change and insistence on “perpetuation of the old ways” posits the conflict Abel—and other young American Indians for that matter—are confronted with; hence it is a generational conflict, a “crisis of […] culture which denies its young tribal members accommodation to changing conditions” (102). Since “Abel cannot simply adopt the traditional customs of his tribe,” Schubnell maintains, “[h]e turns his back on the Indian world and enters modern America” (103).

Undoubtedly, fighting in the war for the United States has aggravated Abel’s problems, as immersion in the white culture has added another dimension to his conflicted identity. “As an Indian among white soldiers he is denied a personal identity by his comrades” (Schubnell 112), who call him “chief” and make fun of him, and who by classifying—and hence stereotyping—him as an Indian, “not only shut him out from their culture but also deny his identity as a Jemez man” (113).

Coming home to Jemez Pueblo after the war, Abel is unable to communicate with his grandfather, unable to express himself and his feelings:

His return to the town had been a failure, for all his looking forward. He had tried in the days that followed to speak to his grandfather, but he could not say the things he wanted; he had tried to pray, to sing, to enter into the old rhythm of the tongue, but he was no longer attuned to it. And yet it was there still, like memory, in the reach of his hearing, as if Francisco or his mother or Vidal had spoken out of the past and the words had taken hold of the moment and made it eternal. Had he been able to say it, anything of his own language—even the commonplace formula of greeting “Where are you going”—which had no being beyond sound, no visible substance, would once again have shown him whole to himself; but he was dumb. Not dumb—silence was the older and better part of custom still but inarticulate. (58; emphasis in the text)
Silko and Paula Gunn Allen—have pointed out on several occasions, language is not just a means of communication, but a creative element in the native world. Silko alludes to the creative power of language, for instance, in the beginning of Ceremony (1977) (which will be discussed later), when she relates the beginning of the Pueblo creation story in which grandmother Spider turns her thoughts into living things: “Ts’its’tsi’nako, Thought-Woman/is sitting in her room/and whatever she thinks about/appears. […] Thought-Woman, the spider/named things and/as she named them/they appeared” (1). Thus, in being unable to speak, Abel is indeed not only cut off from others but also from (re)creating himself through language or from speaking himself into being. He does not really “exist”; he has no identity. Schubnell emphasizes as well that this is the root of Abel’s problems. He states:

Momaday believes that the Indian relation to the world is based on the power of the word. The word links the Indian to his religious and mythological heritage. Indian culture is based on an oral tradition and maintained through the creative power of the word. If the word is lost, culture and identity are forfeited, as wholeness can only be established by the word. (116)

To achieve wholeness, Abel needs to touch base with his cultural and tribal world, and he can only do so by connecting a variety of stories, memories, and voices that surround him and that he is confronted with, including those outside of the Jemez Pueblo realm. As Alan Velie has pointed out, Momaday in House Made of Dawn uses the technique that Bakhtin has termed “heteroglossia” in order to present an array of ideas and attitudes, including his own (178). By incorporating other characters’ stories, such as those of Ben Benally, Milly, Father Olguin, Fray Nicolás, Tosamah, and Angela St. John, Momaday is able to position Abel for the reader and himself, to evaluate Abel’s situation and his quest. Hence, the incorporation and mixture of various texts in the novel parallels Abel’s fragmented identity and reflects Abel’s search for his full Indian identity, which he needs to establish through internarrative, through a connection of the different, often conflicting voices. Paula Gunn Allen points out that the whole novel is “structured to match the Navajo ceremonials known as chantways. The primary purpose of these rituals is healing, based on the Navajo understanding that health depends on an integrated psyche” (88). Susan Scarberry-Garcia, in her seminal study, Landmarks of Healing: A Study of House Made of Dawn (1990), concurs when she states that “It is possible to think of the structural composition of House Made of Dawn as analogous to the process of Abel’s healing, because both are dependent on the slow process of accretion to create meaning and wholeness” (110).

Throughout the novel, the reader finds memoirs, questionnaires, journal entries, letters, songs and prayers, Momaday’s own poetry (Velie 179–80), as well as detailed descriptive passages on the Southwest landscape. From the first chapter on, the narrative is non-linear, non-chronological, jumping back and forth in time between events from Abel’s childhood and adolescence, growing up on the Jemez Pueblo reservation, his war experiences, but also the time before his birth in the history of his family, especially his grandfather Francisco. Dovetailed into the narrative are other texts, such as the history of the Santiago festival as told by Father Olguin, and letters and journal entries written by
Fray Nicolás, Father Olguín’s predecessor at the Catholic Church in Walatowa and likely Abel’s great-grandfather. Moreover, the southwestern landscape as observed by Abel and described through his eyes at the beginning and end of the novel can be read as another “incorporated” text. As Velie states, “It is a matter of Indian culture to invest special importance in a particular piece of land, and to link a people to it” (180). Lawrence Evers, in his essay “Words and Place: A Reading of *House Made of Dawn,*” connects the significance of landscape with that of language and relates it to the process of identity formation. Illustrating what Momaday terms a “sense of place,” Evers maintains that “[b]y imagining who and what they are in relation to particular landscapes, cultures and individual members of cultures form a close relation with those landscapes” (212). Moreover, “It is only through words that a man is able to express his relation to place. Indeed, it is only through shared words or ritual that symbolic landscapes are able to exist” (213).

Hence, just as language defines or even creates a human being, places—or the earth in general—provide existence to humans. While the spiritual significance of the land has been discussed extensively in Chapter 2, the focus here lies on the connection between language and the land, i.e. on “articulating the land.” Native American place names illustrate this connection. In his essay “Sacred Places” in *The Man Made of Words* (1998), Momaday states that “Acts of sacrifice make sacred the earth. Language and the sacred are indivisible. The earth and all its appearances and expressions exist in names and stories and prayers and spells” (114). In the essay, “Navajo Place-Names” in the same collection, Momaday further illustrates the connection between places, language and identity. He states, “Where language touches the earth, there is the holy, there is the sacred. In our deepest intelligence we know this: that names and being are indivisible. That which has no name cannot truly be said to exist, to be. That which bears a name bears being as well. *I have a name; therefore I am*” (124; emphasis in the text). Momaday goes on to tell a story from his personal experience, relating how one day while driving from Gallup to Kayenta he picked up a young Navajo hitchhiker. Trying to talk to the man in his limited knowledge of the Navajo language, Momaday asked him for the names of a great number of places they passed on the way, and was stunned to learn that the young man knew the name of each and every one of them. Thus Momaday realized that “this man was indeed *at home.* He was eminently familiar with the places that defined him” (126; emphasis in the text). Although Abel seems to know subconsciously the significance of the Southwest landscape for his life, for his sense of who he is, he needs to get back in touch with it through an association of this “text,” or “voice,” with the other texts, such as the traditional songs and prayers, in order to (re)establish his identity.

In addition to detailed descriptions of the landscape around Jemez Pueblo, the first chapter contains incorporated historical texts, such as an account by Father Olguín relating the history of the feast of Santiago and a letter and a journal written by the former Catholic priest on the reservation, Fray Nicolás. These historical documents have the main function of providing the reader with essential background information, such as the story of the origin of the feast of Santiago, which is celebrated annually on July 25 on the Jemez Pueblo reservation (Scarberry-García 41); the conflict between the native religion and Catholicism at Jemez Pueblo in the 19th century; and the personal histories of some of the characters in the novel. For the reader, these texts are essential as they
elucidate the depth of Abel’s problems and his quest for a sense of identity. Fray Nicolás’ journal entries reveal the bitter conflict, or clash, that existed between Catholicism and the traditional, native religion in the Pueblo. In a letter written (but never sent) to his brother, which Father Olguín finds in the journal, Nicolás complains about Francisco, Abel’s grandfather and, as we later deduce, Nicolás’ illegitimate son: Francisco is following and practicing the traditional religion despite being Nicolás’ altar boy, which Nicolás considers both a betrayal and a threat. Francisco seems to have reconciled the two religions later in life, but the conflict is still present in Abel, who doubts the efficacy and power of the native religion when Francisco’s prayers and ceremonies fail to heal Abel’s injured back (suffered in a riding accident). It is not until the end of the book that Abel appears to have adopted his grandfather’s eclectic, or syncretic, approach to religion and spirituality, which is demonstrated when he first performs the traditional ritual on his deceased grandfather and then calls Father Olguín to bury him (210).

Moreover, Fray Nicolás’ journal relates the birth of Juan Reyes (50), the Indian albino, whom Abel kills because he considers him the incarnation of evil and a witch (Scarberry-García 32). Since at this point in his life, Abel’s identity is still fragmented, he has not yet understood that he cannot destroy evil, that evil cannot be finally eradicated. Abel only acquires this knowledge through his horrible and violent experiences in Los Angeles through his encounters with the satanic police officer Martínez, whose malice Abel initially tries to fight with counter-violence until his broken body reflects and parallels the disunity of his self.

Another manifestation of Momaday’s belief in the importance of a dialogic relationship of a variety of (pan-tribal) stories for the creation of his protagonist’s internarrative identity is the autobiographical stories Tosamah incorporates into his sermons. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Tosamah is modeled after Momaday, hence a mixed-blood of Kiowa, Cherokee, and Euro-American descent, who bases his sermons on both Christian and native (Kiowa) texts. As a trickster, Tosamah (and by extension Momaday himself) merges between the native and the non-native culture, which makes him belong to both and neither at the same time. Therefore, he can be critical of both, and he indeed criticizes Abel harshly in several passages of the novel, calling him a “longhair” and justifying the government’s conviction of Abel for murder (149).

Nonetheless, Tosamah’s sermons constitute an important link to Abel’s quest for identity. The chapter named after Tosamah, “The Priest of the Sun,” is the most fragmented and confusing of the novel because it switches between scenes and perspectives, dovetailing pieces of Tosamah’s speeches and fragments of Abel’s memories of his childhood and adolescence at Jemez Pueblo, his trial, and his time in Los Angeles. While the fragmentary nature of the chapter clearly parallels Abel’s state of mind, it also offers a solution to his predicament. In his first sermon, which begins with an analysis of the first verses of the Gospel of John, Tosamah points to the diverging uses of language by Indians and whites, an issue that Abel is confronted with during his trial (cf. Chapter 3, page 103), and thus to the juxtaposition of instances of inarticulation and mastery of language. However, the second text Tosamah uses in this sermon, the story of the Kiowas’ acquisition of the sun dance doll Tai-me, demonstrates that the diverging use of language does not consequently mean inarticulation or muteness for the tribe. In contrast, it tells how the tribe recovered from bad times through obtaining Tai-me, how indeed they were renewed or reborn through Tai-me’s promise to provide them with
anything they needed. By emphasizing that it was a voice, and words, that the Kiowa man
to whom Tai-me appeared heard first, before seeing “the thing” before him with “the feet
of a deer” and a body “covered with feathers” (96), the story reiterates the creative power
of language. Indeed, after relating the story in his sermon, Tosamah exclaims, “Do you
see? There, far off in the darkness, something happened. Do you see? Far, far, away in
the nothingness something happened. There was a voice, a sound, a word—and
everything began” (96). While in the story it was the word, the sound of language, that
changed the Kiowas’ lives and effected renewal, a new beginning, it is now the story
about this occurrence which is passed on from generation to generation to be “cherished
and revered” (97) and to serve as a reminder for the Kiowas of who they are. By telling
this story along with an analysis of its significance, Momaday suggests through Tosamah
that this is what Abel needs as well: a story that establishes and demonstrates his place in
the world and that he can make his own.

Tosamah’s second sermon, which, as mentioned in Chapter 2, is a reproduction of
Momaday’s introduction to his The Way to Rainy Mountain (1969), illustrates the
significance of a sense of belonging and home. Momaday relates the Kiowas’ creation
and migration story, thereby noting important historical and geographical markers, most
prominently Devil’s Tower, location of the story of the seven sisters and the boy who
turned into a bear.46 In doing so, Momaday stresses tribal people’s need to define and
orient themselves in the world through their relationship to their homeland. As Susan
Scarberry-García points out, the story of the sisters, who became the star formation of the
Big Dipper, not only helps the Kiowas to orient themselves in the world, but also
contributes to their sense of identity, as by seeing “this night light they could redefine
themselves as [a] people […]. This historic redefinition of tribal identity is transformative
and renewing. Symbolically, the people were ‘healed’ through their new self-created
sense of place” (48).

Moreover, by returning to his home, Tosamah recalls childhood memories of the
tribe’s gathering for feasts and prayers, or his playing with his cousins and friends
outside, in short his being part of a community. By positioning this sermon, which
stresses the importance of home and community and relates Tosamah’s return to Rainy
Mountain, where he could see “the center of the world’s being” (136), at the end of this
highly fragmented chapter, Momaday gives the reader a clue as to what Abel must do to
resolve his conflict of a fragmented identity. Momaday suggests that Abel cannot put the
pieces of his self together unless he returns to his own home at Jemez Pueblo—a return
that is facilitated by his friend Ben Benally later in the novel.

The interspersed narrative segments on Milly, the white social worker who befriends
Abel in Los Angeles, which are told either from her own or Benally’s perspective, are
part of the dialogic internarrative that takes place in the two chapters, “The Priest of the
Sun,” and “The Night Chanter.” While the former provides background on Milly, the
story of her childhood and adolescence on a farm and her life in Los Angeles, the latter
provides more of a commentary on the nature of her relationship with Abel from the
perspective of Benally. Both chapters, however, explain what brought them together, as
both Abel and Milly are lost and lonely in the city; moreover, both seem relocated and
displaced—Abel from the Jemez Pueblo reservation and Milly from the farm where she
grew up. Milly’s story parallels Abel’s also in the losses she has experienced in her life:
she was separated from her father when he could no longer provide for her; her husband
left her, and her beloved daughter died at the age of four. Similarly, Abel’s mother and brother passed away when he was still quite young, and he never knew his father.

While these similarities in their life stories may explain why Abel and Milly were attracted to each other, each looking for a focal point in their lives, another kind of interspersed text that is related to Milly may shed light on the nature of their relationship and provide a potential reason for the way Abel treats her. The fragmented chapter “The Priest of the Sun” contains three segments of a government questionnaire on education, health and leisure time activities and interests that Milly, in her capacity as social worker, presents to Abel. Hence, Milly represents not only the Euro-American society in general, but more specifically an oppressive institution, the government, which has caused Abel’s disorientation through relocation. Given the chance, Abel unconsciously avenges his situation by “saying things about her” and making fun of her (*House Made of Dawn* 163), and by being “brutal with her” during sexual intercourse (109), hence conquering, violating, and abusing her as he feels he has been by the Euro-American society.

Although Milly is “ultimately unable to save the hero from himself” (Velie 179), she is nonetheless integral to the story and to Abel’s quest for identity as she plays an important part in making Abel open up to his friends and share some of his stories, thus revealing the roots of his displacement. As Marilyn Nelson Waniek has pointed out, through talking to him about her life she “enables Abel for the first time to share his memories of his own life. Though she does not understand the power of the word, their relationship thus starts Abel on the way toward realizing that he can talk, and toward regaining the power of the word” (26). However, Abel is not capable of acting upon this realization and of achieving his sense of a unified self until he understands his own life story through association with two more interspersed stories, one told by his former lover Angela St. John, and the other by his friend Ben Benally.

Angela St. John, whose last name evokes Tosamah’s first sermon on the creative power of language, becomes Abel’s lover when she comes from Los Angeles to stay at Jemez Pueblo for its hot healing springs. Pregnant with her husband’s baby, Angela makes love to Abel while imagining him to be a badger or a bear (*House Made of Dawn* 64), which, as Susan Scarberry-García had pointed out, are considered brothers, whose “powers are complementary and constitute a strong force when taken together. Abel, then, is symbolically identified with Bear […]” (53). This becomes relevant later in the novel when Angela, after being called by Benally, visits Abel in the hospital in Los Angeles where the latter is recovering from his injuries inflicted upon him by the policeman Martinez. Angela tells him that she has been thinking about him a lot, especially when she tells her son his (and her) favorite “story about a young Indian brave. He was born of a bear and a maiden, she said, and he was noble and wise. He had many adventures, and he became a great leader and saved his people” (187). Scarberry-García states that by “imagin[ing] herself into the story, thereby symbolically connecting herself to Abel and Peter [her son] and to the native tradition,” Angela “has identified with the ‘maiden’ of her story who ‘marries’ Bear. Her son Peter then is identified with the young hero, bear boy” (52). Moreover, Scarberry-García maintains, by bathing in the medicinal springs at Jemez and by making love to Abel while realizing his “bear powers,” Angela “activates] her transformation toward renewal of self” (54), which is reinforced by returning to her native California. 47 Hence, Angela models a recovering of a sense of
identity which Abel must emulate by understanding his place in this story, and the bear story Benally remembers after hearing Angela’s.

Ben Benally’s bear story is triggered by his amazement that a Euro-American woman would tell a shortened, but otherwise accurate version of a Navajo mythical story; he tells the reader, “Ei yei! A bear and a maiden. And she was a white woman and she thought it up, you know, made it up out of her own mind, and it was like that old grandfather talking to me, telling me about Esdzá shash nadle, or Dzil quigi, yes, just like that” (187). Benally’s story provides more details and a “graphic description of specific landforms that are part of Navajo sacred geography” (Scarberry-García 58), but he ends the story before it is completely finished (Scarberry-García 59) and instead recites the beginning of the Mountainway prayer, “With beauty before me/With beauty behind me/With beauty above me/With beauty below me,/With beauty all around me...” (*House Made of Dawn* 189). Benally’s invoking this Navajo prayer underscores his central role in Abel’s healing ceremony and foreshadows his singing of the Navajo Night Chant for (or over) Abel later in the novel to help him to reconnect with his tribal self and find his way home.

Benally’s interspersed stories of his growing up on the Navajo reservation, of his being raised by his grandfather primarily, and of his working as a sheepherder have the function of demonstrating to Abel (and the reader) that he can empathize with Abel’s experience—a fact that Benally points out himself (*House Made of Dawn* 153). Not only does he know reservation life from his own experience, he is actually familiar with the place Abel calls home, as he once visited Walatowa on the occasion of a “big dance they have in November” (*House Made of Dawn* 153). Benally describes the landscape as being similar to his own home, and even believes that he and Abel may be related, explaining that “the Navajos have a clan they call by the name of that place [Jemez]” (153). Hence, Evers concludes that “This kinship gives Benally special insight into Abel’s problems and strengthens his role as Night Chanter” (224).

Just like Abel’s, Benally’s character is also a composite of stories and experiences, but unlike Abel, Benally has been able to accommodate the various stories and to establish an internarrative identity in addition to being adapted to city life—another reason that he is able to relate to Abel’s problems and offer help. Unlike Milly, who seems unaware of the power of language, Benally is aware of the magic of words; he seems to know that the “inability to speak is the prime symbol of powerlessness” (Allen 138), and he plans on returning to Abel the power of speech. Waniek has pointed out that even more important than Benally’s sharing of his life story with Abel is his belief in the power of language, which he conveys in the form of “prayer, song, and legend to heal and create” (26). Benally introduces Abel to the Navajo Night Chant, a “ritual song of healing” (Allen 88) and prayer that helps Abel to make the turn toward his tribal heritage and culture—despite the fact that this prayer originates in a different tribal culture. S.K. Aithal claims that although *House Made of Dawn* demonstrates how each tribe described in the novel has kept its own unique identity and is “greatly concerned with maintaining the purity and distinction of their group” (169), one “has to go beyond the experiences of any single individual Indian to find a satisfactory explanation for [Abel’s] behavior—one has to go to historical experiences of the whole race in order to understand it” (161). That Benally indeed plays an integral role in helping Abel to create his internarrative identity is shown in the final section of the novel in which—back on the Jemez Pueblo reservation—Abel becomes a “dawn runner” and the novel closes with words from the Night Chant and the
traditional Pueblo ending word to a story: “House made of pollen, house made of dawn. Qtsedaba” (212). Here, it becomes clear that Abel has finally understood the connection between the texts composing his internarrative identity and has now healed, as he is repeating the words of the healing prayer as he should as “the one-sung-over” (Scarberry-García 10). Moreover, the ending underscores the cyclical nature of the tribal world view as it refers back to its beginning.

Another, no less important, indication that Abel will recover his sense of self upon his return to the reservation is that he goes to his grandfather’s house to care for Francisco during the last hours of his life. Going in and out of a coma, Francisco nonetheless recognizes his grandson by his bedside and strains to talk and sing to him, but he makes no sense to Abel (195). After a few days, however, Francisco shares a story with Abel and “the voice of his memory was whole and clear and growing like dawn” (197). The ensuing story relates first Francisco’s taking out his grandsons (Abel and his brother Vidal) to black mesa, “the house of the sun” (197), where he teaches them about the journey of the sun, the seasons for planting, hunting, and celebrating, in short “the larger motion and meaning of the great organic calendar” (198). The reader learns: “These things he told his grandsons carefully, slowly and at length, because they were old and true, and they could be lost forever as easily as one generation is lost to the next, as easily as one old man might lose his voice, having not spoken enough or not at all” (198). In this passage, Francisco not only reiterates the importance of passing on tribal stories to the next generation to ensure the tribe’s survival, he also reminds Abel of his own affliction of being on the verge of being lost because he seems to have forgotten the old stories, which shows in his inability to articulate himself. Francisco therefore underscores the urgency of Abel’s reconnecting with the old stories and his tribe, so that he will not only recover his own voice and identity, but also the tribe’s, by finding his voice and perpetuating the tradition of storytelling.

The second part of the story that Francisco tells Abel on his deathbed goes back in time and revolves around Francisco’s maturing into manhood and becoming a Jemez hunter by killing a black bear (198–204). Susan Scarberry-García notes that through his ritual killing of the bear, Francisco is endowed with the bear’s powers, which—by telling this story to Abel—“are transferred to Abel” so that “Abel receives bear power for healing” (75). Moreover, Francisco learns from the bear “his place in the landscape in relationship to everything else” (Scarberry-García 77), a knowledge that Abel has been lacking so far and needs to recover, a task that is facilitated by his association to his grandfather’s hunting story. Consequently, Francisco’s story functions to remind Abel of the importance of finding his place in the landscape while at the same time understanding that “he can be his own worst enemy, or he can activate his [bear] powers for self-healing” (Scarberry-García 81–82), if he makes a connection between his grandfather’s story and his own.

The final story Francisco tells before he passes on relates his participation in a ceremonial run, during which he felt as if he could not go on because of the pain in his lungs, but was able to overcome the moment, and run on. This story foreshadows Abel’s own participation in the dawn run on the last pages of the novel, and his running demonstrates that he has merged all the stories and voices in his mind and has become whole again by creating his own story and by establishing his internarrative identity. Susan Scarberry-García notes as well that “the presence of multiple voices telling a
collective story contributes to the novel’s healing power” (73), which reinforces the idea that by mediating among the various stories, Abel not only finds his own sense of a unified self, but may also contribute to the unity and survival of his community, an important feat that Tayo, the protagonist of Silko’s acclaimed novel Ceremony (1977) also accomplishes.

Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo), who most probably was influenced by House Made of Dawn, published roughly a decade earlier, remains largely within the Pueblo tradition except for a few excursions into Navajo and Euro-American cultures through Tayo and Betonie. Nonetheless, her novel clearly illustrates the connection between subject and narrative structure in order to be able to accommodate a variety of conflicting voices that contribute to the protagonist’s heightened awareness of and struggle with his sense of identity. Ceremony depicts in a highly sophisticated way the interconnectedness of old, or traditional, stories (which are usually rendered in the text in the form of poems) and their significance in everyday life, and juxtaposes them with the characters’ stories of personal experience.48 For Tayo, the protagonist of the novel, who grapples with the debilitating effects of his participation in World War II, the stories become part of a healing process, steps in a ceremony he has to undergo in order to cope with these experiences and to find his personal peace and sanity. Eventually, he is able to resolve his conflict “by turning to the native American tradition in which resides the power to restore the mind, the only healing power capable of effecting a complete mental recovery” (Secco 60). Moreover, the novel’s non-linear narrative structure parallels Tayo’s quest for a sense of identity, his plight of being exposed to conflicting stories and of having to come to terms with his mixed-blood heritage, which was further shaken through the events of the war and the loss of his cousin and uncle.

The fact that the novel opens with two poems already suggests that its narrative structure will probably be rather unconventional. Once the actual course of events begins, the reader immediately notices the frequent shifts in tense and sequence of events. The plot jumps back and forth between past and present events, childhood experiences and war stories, Tayo’s reality and mythical stories. Thus, it becomes hard for the reader not only to follow the plot, i.e. Tayo’s current psychological and physical problems, but also to make the connection between Tayo’s narrative and the inserted stories. Consequently, the reader enters the book on a comparable basis with Tayo: a ceremony is needed in order to make sense of the facts of Tayo’s life. Silko uses the narrative structure of her novel to contribute to the notion of the stories’ importance, role, and purpose, to emphasize “how they orient one in the world and how they keep people and cultures alive” (Salyer 31). The reader is reminded of the opening poem and the statement that the stories are “all we have” in order to make sense of the fragmented world. By tying the narrative and the inserted tales and poems in with the theme of the novel—a healing ceremony—Silko points out that the stories not only connect with each other, but also work together and actually reinforce each other, thus gaining strength precisely from their connection with other stories (Salyer 31). Moreover, the connection of the stories, along with the communal aspect of storytelling, is essential in the formation of the internarrative identity; as Maan notes, “in an Internarrative the emphasis is less on individuality and more on community; that is to say, there is identification through relationship rather than through individuation. The subject is a collective subject” (59). Thus, the reader must understand that family relationships, ancestral places and ties, and
tribal stories contribute to the establishment of the subject’s—in this case Tayo’s—internarrative identity, an experience that he will share with his tribal elders for the benefit of his community.

While it is relatively easy to see the connection between individual narrative segments in *Ceremony*, the overall integration of all stories only becomes absolutely clear in the resolution of the novel’s “Western” plot. Silko parallels historical stories and myths, sets them back to back, in order to demonstrate how myth and reality are one, how the old stories repeat themselves (hence emphasizing the circular nature of time and contrasting it with the Western notion of time as being linear), how they penetrate and shape people’s lives, so that everybody actually becomes (part of) the stories, but these numerous stories are part of the healing ceremony that results in Tayo’s self-integration.

Just as the reader has to be guided through the reconstruction of the past and present course of events, as well as the significance of the inserted myths, Tayo needs help in seeing the pattern of his life in the different mythical tales. His growing up a mixed blood, his education in Western schools, and the strong influence of his cousin Rocky, whom he admired and who called the “old-time ways” superstition (51), have caused him to doubt the power of traditional healing methods. Moreover, his aunt, who raised him after his mother had abandoned him (65–66), and her adopted Christian belief (77) have contributed to Tayo’s distrust in his roots—in fact, have largely kept him away from a tribal way of life, so that he can’t make the connection between the traditional stories and is generally unable to use them to his advantage, now that he needs them to restore his health. His grandmother, in contrast, has a strong belief in her heritage and initiates the healing ceremony. She calls in the Laguna medicine man Ku’oosh, who begins his “treatment” by telling Tayo the story of a nearby cave, which snakes frequent in order to “restore life to themselves,” and into which people “in the old days” would throw the scalps (35). Tayo not only remembers this cave, and how he used to play there with Rocky, his beloved cousin who died in the war, but also begins to understand how the medicine man evokes the old stories and places in order for Tayo to see the circular nature of all things. Describing the “fragility” of the world we live in, the medicine man refers to the image of the spider web and “the intricacies of a continuing process” of spinning it to help Tayo understand how the tearing of just one delicate strand can injure the fragile world. This tearing is precisely what he suffers from: the war he volunteered to participate in as well as Rocky’s death have torn the filaments of his life, and he needs to restore this web by identifying the pattern described by the stories, and actively participate in their “spinning.” However, since the world is constantly changing and the ceremonies and stories have to change with them, Tayo needs a ceremony that adapts to the change and which integrates Western influence.

Silko’s project of making the connections has Tayo consent to consult Betonie, a mixed-blood Navajo medicine man, renowned for his unusual life style and healing methods. Betonie has realized that the world has changed from the pre-conquest traditional world, a fact that Ku’oosh had also noted, but unlike the Laguna medicine man, Betonie has adapted his methods according to the demands of the modern world, a realization that was most probably facilitated by his mixed-blood heritage. In his ceremonies, therefore, he uses fetishes from both native and white culture. Evidence of his progressive belief is displayed in his hogan, where he keeps his paraphernalia such as dried roots and twigs, “gourd rattles and deer-hoof clackers,” but also bundles of old
newspapers and telephone books, calendars, and Coke bottles (119–20). Like Ku’oosh, Betonie voices the implications of change in the modern times: “‘In the old days it was simple. A medicine man could get by without all these things. But nowadays...’” (121). It is necessary to be flexible and to modify the ceremonies according to the demands and needs of the people. In fact, Betonie maintains, ceremonies have never been fixed or unchanging. He says:

“The people nowadays have an idea about the ceremonies. They think the ceremonies must be performed exactly as they have always been done, maybe because one slip-up or mistake and the whole ceremony must be stopped and the sand painting destroyed. That much is true. They think that if a singer tampers with any part of the ritual, great harm can be done, great power unleashed. [...] That much can be true also. But long ago when the people were given these ceremonies, the changing began, if only in the aging of the yellow gourd rattle or the shrinking of the skin around the eagle’s claw, if only in the different voices from generation to generation, singing the chants. You see, in many ways, the ceremonies have always been changing.” (126)

Oppression by the white people has additionally worsened native people’s living conditions, which again had a profound effect on the nature and power of ceremonies: “At one time, the ceremonies as they had been performed were enough for the way the world was then. But after the white people came, elements in this world began to shift; and it became necessary to create new ceremonies” (126). Hence, the ceremonies undergo a similar process as the stories themselves (which, in turn, are part of the ceremonies), in that they need to be adapted according to the needs and demands of the people; “I have made changes in the rituals,” Betonie says, “The people mistrust this greatly, but only this growth keeps the ceremonies strong” (126). Louis Owens affirms that “Silko [...] demonstrates how the stories evolve to meet new conditions and needs” (184).

Betonie, who carefully listens to Tayo’s past experiences, above all the events on which Tayo blames his mental affliction, reiterates the importance of the stories and Tayo’s involvement in them. He says, “You’ve been doing something all along. All this time, and now you are at an important place in this story” (124). This is the first indication of Tayo’s eventual success in integrating the various stories and voices into the story of his own self. Furthermore, it is a manifestation of his being part of a collective identity: He not only establishes his own sense of identity through internarrative, but in the end becomes part of the community—a resource the village elders consult in order to learn from him (Ceremony 218; 257). Tayo has learned to accommodate the changes and the new and old stories and can share this knowledge for the betterment of his community.

During his encounter with Betonie, Tayo learns, or is reminded of, various mythic tales that have significance for his quest for identity. These interspersed stories, which usually appear in the form of poems, not only play an important role in Tayo’s ceremony in the sense that he will “meet” characters from these tales so that he will “act out” and
thus experience the stories himself, they also parallel the course of events in the “present,” or “reality,” of the novel.

In the climax of this “Western” plot of his identity quest, Tayo meets Ts’eh Montaño on his search for his uncle’s lost spotted Mexican cattle. Because Ts’eh appears at a crucial time in the plot to further the progress of Tayo’s quest, and because she represents the sacred natural world, Mount Taylor, as her name reveals (cf. Chapter 2), the reader comes to understand that she is a supernatural being and an element of the “mythic plot.” She represents the spirit of the earth, like her brother, the mountain lion hunter who saves Tayo from some border-guarding cowboys. Ts’eh can also be read as embodying the figure of Yellow Woman (Salyer 48). In her essay, “Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit” in the collection with the same title, Silko explains that Yellow Woman “represents all women in the old stories. Her deeds span the spectrum of human behavior and are mostly heroic acts. […] She dares to cross traditional boundaries of ordinary behavior during times of crisis in order to save the Pueblo” (70). Through her knowledge and loving acceptance, Ts’eh helps Tayo to fulfill his ceremony and become well again, which in turn helps the Pueblo, because the drought spell which the Laguna people have been suffering from for a long time will be lifted.

The internarrative becomes clear in the parallel between the “real” events in the novel, the reader’s “reality,” and the interspersed mythical story of Corn Woman and Reed Woman. Captured as prisoner of war in the Philippines, Tayo had to go on the notorious Bataan death march in the jungle through never-ceasing rain, and on this trip his cousin Rocky died. Looking at his dying cousin on the stretcher, he damned the rain until the words were a chant, and he sang it while he crawled through the mud to find the corporal and get him before the Japanese saw them. He wanted the words to make a cloudless blue sky, pale with a summer sun pressing across wide and empty horizons. The words gathered in him and gave him strength. He pulled on the corporal’s arm; he lifted him to his knees and all the time he could hear his own voice praying against the rain. (12)

When he came back from the war, however, it hadn’t rained on the reservation for a long time. Thus he blames himself for the drought from which the land and his people are suffering: “So he had prayed the rain away, and for the sixth year it was dry; the grass turned yellow and it did not grow. Wherever he looked, he could see the consequences of his praying” (14).

Parallel to this part of the main plot, Silko tells the reader the mythical story of the two sisters Corn Woman and Reed Woman. While Corn Woman works hard in the field every day, her sister Reed Woman spends all her time “sitting in the river/splashing down/the summer rain.” Tired of her sister’s irresponsible behavior, Corn Woman scolds her, as a consequence of which Reed Woman leaves, going “back/to the original place/down below” (13). However, she takes the rain with her so that “everything dried up.” By cursing the rain, Tayo “has committed the same error as Corn Woman: through partial vision he has failed to see the necessity for every thread in the web of the universe, even the maddening jungle rains” (Owens 176). Additionally, Tayo has insulted one of the “creative deities” (Handbook 466), and he needs help in the ceremony to lift the curse.
Ts’eh will play this important part; she performs important steps in the ceremony with Tayo by teaching him about roots and plants indigenous to the Southwest (224), thus reestablishing his connection with the spirits of the earth and renewing his awareness of the familiar landscape and its characteristics and natural resources.

The connection of historical and mythical stories is further reinforced through the parallel of the drought at Laguna, Tayo’s uncle Josiah’s remark that “droughts happen when people forget, when people misbehave” (46), and the mythical Pueblo story of the twin brothers Maa sees’wi and Ou’yuy’e’wi, who neglected their responsibility of caring for Corn Mother’s altar out of fascination with the Ck’o’yoy medicine man’s magic. Angry about the twins’ neglect, the mother takes the “plants and the grass from them” so that “no baby animals were born,” and “she took the rainclouds with her” (Ceremony 48–49). The story parallels Rocky and Tayo’s indoctrination into Euro-American values in their school and the army: in this mythic story, drought and infertility follow as a result of the people’s improper behavior, so that the people need to seek help from other mythic figures—in this case Fly and Hummingbird, who manage to appease Corn Mother by bringing her tobacco (Ceremony 255–56). As Owens points out, “Like these mythic persons, the Indians of Silko’s novel have failed to maintain the proper respect and understanding in relation to mother earth” (179). Consequently, this story can be viewed in the context of postwar experience of many of the Indian war veterans, including Tayo and his peers, who have strayed from a traditional tribal way of life and have lost respect for tribal traditions, but also as a reflection of the Laguna Pueblo’s struggle to cope with influences of the dominant white culture, which have been brought to the community through Euro-American schooling and their own returning veterans.

Significantly, the traditional Laguna clan story of Fly and Hummingbird permeates the whole novel—it is told in eight installments throughout the course of the novel (53–54; 71–71; 82; 105–06; 113; 151–52; 180; 255–56)—which underlines the idea that the ceremony for the reversal of the drought “isn’t very easy” (256), a fact that is repeated several times in the novel, lastly by Tayo’s aunt: “It isn’t easy. It never has been” (259). Paula Gunn Allen notes:

Silko uses this clan ritual narrative in a ceremonial way as an analogue to her own story about Tayo and the long drought he helps the region recover from, thus illuminating the connection between the ritual tradition, the storytelling tradition, and a contemporary working out in a novel of both tribal forms. By using a non-sequential structure that is accretive, achronological, and interspersed with the traditional clan ritual narrative about how the rain is made to return to the village, Silko shows that clear understanding of a given narrative depends on proper understanding of the stories attached to each significant word. (95–96)

Moreover, the story of Fly and Hummingbird, which relates the difficult task of finding and bringing the proper offering to Corn Mother, parallels the multiple steps Tayo needs to complete to reach his ultimate goal: a sense of identity through re-association and connection of the stories, and, in a communal sense, an end to the drought.

Throughout the novel, Silko not only alternates and parallels mythical stories and narratives of personal experience—as demonstrated above—but also juxtaposes the
personal narratives of different characters. A prominent example is the war stories Tayo’s fellow veterans, above all Emo, tell when they get together for drinks in a bar. Emo likes to boast about his conquests of Caucasian women, made possible by his “transformation” into an American soldier in uniform. Although he is again treated as the foreign “other,” no longer “one of them,” as soon as the war is over and he takes off the uniform, Emo still likes to reminisce about his conquests. Moreover, it is important to note that the “historical” war stories seem to enter the realm of the mythic stories, which is suggested by the fact that Silko once renders one of them in the text in the form of a poem: Emo’s story of his “conquest” of two white women (57–59) takes the same shape, and hence significance, as some of the traditional, mythic stories which function as stories of warning. This story seems to be an expression of the attempt to take advantage of the Indians’ elevated status as American soldiers to revenge and possibly undo their oppressed and colonized identities; through conquering and abusing white women (similar to, but more callous and impersonal than Abel’s treatment of Milly in *House Made of Dawn*), Emo and his peers tried to reverse the process of colonization. Emo says, “They took our land, they took everything! So let’s get our hands on white women!” (55). While this attempt at reversed colonization seemed successful at first—Caucasian women were indeed attracted by their uniforms and dark good looks—the situation has changed back again, as Tayo has painfully pointed out to them (cf. Chapter 1, page 18). Subsequently, Emo and the other Indian war veterans try to relive the glorious moments through telling these “heroic” stories.

Since they are not satisfied with the image of themselves imposed by the dominant culture, since they are unable to accommodate the conflict of how they are seen by the Euro-American society and how they want to see themselves, they need to counter this damaged identity by telling a story that purports to better express their identity. What Emo and his peers are trying is what Hilde Lindemann Nelson, in her book *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* (2001), has explained as creating a “counterstory” in order to resist “an oppressive identity (enforced by a higher, oppressive power upon the individual) and attempt[t] to replace it with one that demands respect” (6); this narrating of a counterstory is, in fact, similar to the process of telling historical counter narratives to subvert the prevalent Eurocentric version of history (discussed in Chapter 1), which native peoples also see as misrepresenting them. A counterstory, Lindemann Nelson explains, “positions itself against a number of master narratives: the stories found lying about in our culture that serve as summaries of socially shared understandings. Master narratives are often archetypal, consisting of stock plots and readily recognizable character types” (6). The colonial master narrative that the Indian war veterans seem to be attempting to counter presents Native Americans as uncivilized, inferior to Euro-Americans, and not worthy of respect or equal rights. Consequently, the counterstory they weave needs to reverse this image and present them as at least equal to white men, hence worthy of their women, if not superior through the brutality and ruthlessness with which they conquer and “colonize” Caucasian women.

However, this attempt at a “narrative repair” of their damaged identities fails in the end (Harley, Leroy, and Pinkie are killed; Emo moves away from Laguna to California), and it is fortunately not the story that Tayo has created for himself. Instead, he understands his place in the revised old stories through his encounter with Ts’e’eh and the various stories he learns from his grandmother, his uncle Josiah, Old Ku’oosh, and
Betonie. Witnessing Emo’s cruel torture and eventual murder of Harley, he understands finally that he can’t destroy evil (just as Abel does in House Made of Dawn) and that “good and evil must coexist in a delicate balance” (Owens 179). He can now finally see “the pattern, the way all the stories fit together—the old stories, the war stories, their stories—to become the story that was still being told” (Ceremony 246). Tayo has found his internarrative identity and because of his ability to enter the realm of myth, as documented through his encounter with Yellow Woman Ts’eh, he can even become a communal storyteller and hence savior of his community. Hence, Silko takes Tayo a step further than Momaday takes Abel, the protagonist of House Made of Dawn, who upon returning to the reservation becomes whole again, but has not yet “become a teacher in his home community” (Scarberry-García 20) by the end of the novel.

In tandem with Tayo’s successful completion of his quest for identity, readers complete their “ceremony of reading” (Wiget 89), their ceremony of relating all the events of the “Western” plot with the mythical stories that are so important to the novel. Just as Tayo sees the pattern, the interconnectedness of the stories, the readers see it too, along with the cyclical structure of the novel as it concludes at sunrise, just as it began. Once the readers see the “reality of the novel in terms of the mythic poem,” they also see “the order of the story”; the readers must understand that “the stories and reality in the novel are one” (Ruppert, “Reader’s Lesson” 79). Moreover, Ruppert contends, Silko creates a dialogism in the novel by assuming two implied readers, a native and a non-native one, who will both straddle the two perspectives in the novel: the “Western,” realistic, World War II stories “that come from mainstream culture,” and the “ancient stories of the Pueblo peoples, which we tend to call ‘myths’” (Ruppert, Mediation 75). Consequently, the fusion of story and reality, as well as the dialogic relationship between the stories, constitute Tayo’s counterstory to repair his fragmented identity; through a weaving, or mediation, of these voices, Tayo creates his own—and, by association, the reader’s—internarrative identity.

In Ceremony, Leslie Marmon Silko employs a heteroglossia of different voices and texts which interact with each other and which convey the protagonist’s inner struggle. Hence, the novel is an example of a narrative in which identity and unity of self are created through a dialogue of voices and stories, similar to the formation of identity as expressed in Silko’s Storyteller (1981). In this collection of poetry, short stories, autobiographical sketches, and photographs of family members and the southwestern landscape, Silko demonstrates the importance and dialogic nature of storytelling as a means of uniting people, and insists that this is an integral part of the Native American tradition as it expresses who people are. In fact, Silko dedicated the book “to the storytellers as far back as memory goes and to the telling which continues and through which they all live and we with them.”

In Storyteller, Silko clearly presents herself as a communal storyteller, as she relates personal but also tribal stories that have been told to her or that she heard while growing up. By keeping those stories alive in retelling/re- writing them she contributes to sustaining the Pueblo culture (Krupat 59). In fact, Silko does not fail to give credit to other storytellers, such as her Aunt Susie and Aunt Alice, or Acoma writer Simon Ortiz, nor to note that naturally her versions of the stories would be altered, since any story changes when retold, and also because they were taken from the oral tradition and must change when put in written form. In one personal anecdote, Silko tells the reader that
once during a visit to a neighbor’s house her neighbor remarked that she and her grandchildren had discovered one of Silko’s poems, “Laguna Coyote,” in a library book. She pointed out to Silko, however, that although “we all enjoyed it so much,” she told her grandchildren, “the way my grandpa used to tell it was longer.” Acknowledging that this is true, Silko replies, “that’s the trouble with writing. […] You can’t go on and on the way we do when we tell stories around here. People who aren’t used to it get tired” (Storyteller 110).

Referring to the stories in Storyteller Silko heard from Simon Ortiz, Arnold Krupat remarks that “Silko’s own versions of stories […] introduce certain phrases and distinctive words that make them identifiably her own. Yet these and all the other stories are never presented as the final or definitive version; although they are intensely associated with their different tellers, they remain available for other tellings” (60–61). This phenomenon is indeed confirmed by Silko as well when she states that “Aunt Susie and Aunt Alice would tell me stories they had told me before but with changes in details or descriptions. The story was the important thing and little changes here and there were really part of the story. There were even stories about the different versions of stories and how they imagined these differing versions came to be” (Storyteller 227).

While taking on the role of communal storyteller in this collection, Silko nevertheless expresses how these different stories she tells and the various voices she includes in the texts define her in a very personal way. In fact, Krupat even goes as far as classifying Storyteller as an autobiography:

_Silko_ is presented as a strongly polyphonic text in which the author defines herself—finds her voice, tells her life, illustrates the capacities of her vocation—in relation to the voices of other native and nonnative storytellers, tale tellers and book writers, and even to the voices of those who serve as the (by no means silent) audience for these stories. (60)

What Krupat is referring to here is the formation of Silko’s internarrative identity through the connection, mediation, and dialogic relationship of multivocal stories and texts. By weaving these stories and associating their meanings, Silko demonstrates that the voice she found for herself is “a product of many voices.” In Elizabeth McHenry’s formulation, her “text implies its communal authorship; it acknowledges the other voices on which her voice is dependent and a part while also leaving the story open to future tellings and other versions” (McHenry 109). Linda Krumholz concurs when she maintains that “The Native American autobiographical subject is created amid a community of voices that relate, interact, and define one another—in dialogized speech” (65). Moreover, like Krupat in the quotation above, she explains that it is not just Silko who defines or creates her identity in the book strictly for herself, but that it is also the reader who needs to follow these steps to create meaning; she states that “the many stories, poems, and photographs are gathered into an apparently random ‘scrapbook’ form, and it is left to the reader to construct connections between them” (64–65). Both the native and the non-native reader will have to connect and make sense of the variety of genres Silko includes, dovetailed and juxtaposed, hence coming to understand the significance of the stories in the Pueblo culture.
Like *House Made of Dawn* and *Ceremony*, Rudolfo Anaya’s novel *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972) presents a protagonist who is searching for his identity, and who in this quest is faced with the conflict between his parents’ different “tribes” and the colonizers’ oppression, reinforced through the conflict between the dominant Catholicism and the indigenous belief in a pagan religion, represented by the “Golden Carp.” The novel’s protagonist Antonio Luna y Márez, six years old at the outset, is—as indicated in Chapter 2—growing up in a household on the Rio Grande south of Albuquerque, the area called the Llano Estacado, dominated by his mother’s Catholicism and the magic and wisdom of an old *curandera*, a wise woman who cures with herbs and magic, and who comes from his father’s home region farther south to live with the family. Antonio is further shaped by his dual heritage, thus—in a way—making him a “mixed blood”: his mother’s family, the Lunas, “associated with the moon and its circle of fertility” (Saldívar 106), are farmers, who are attached to the earth, dependent on its crops, and “domesticating and allied with the civilizing arts” (Saldívar 106), and who are devoutly Catholic; in contrast, his father’s family, the Márez’, “a people associated with the sun and the oceanlike plains” (Saldívar 106), are *vaqueros*, or cattlemen from the community of Las Pasturas, who are nomadic and adventurous. Growing up in this environment, Antonio must face the contradictions these different influences have on him, in the process absorbing the stories and legends about his ancestors and the history of his people, which he hears predominantly from the *curandera* Ultima, along with stories about pagan gods, such as the tale of the Golden Carp, which he learns about from his friends Samuel and Cico. In addition, his frequent dreams, which are interspersed throughout the novel and which function as texts or voices he has to analyze and “process,” as well as his growing attachment to and appreciation of the southwestern landscape have a great impact on the formation of his identity.

Antonio’s quest for identity begins with the conflict of his dual heritage. The first dream Antonio has that is rendered in the text revolves precisely around this dilemma. The dream relates Antonio’s birth and illustrates the conflict of his familial heritage through the two quarreling families who want to find out which part of his ancestry will outweigh the other. Both sides offer symbols of their families’ customs and traditions—the Lunas bring fruits and vegetables of their latest harvest, while the Márez place “a saddle, horse blankets, bottles of whiskey, a new rope, bridles, chapas, and an old guitar” (96) next to the baby’s bed. Moreover, both families demand the afterbirth and the umbilical cord to dispose of them according to their tradition: the Lunas want to bury them in their fields, while the Márez want to burn them and “let the winds of the llano scatter the ashes” (6). However, neither family gets their wish because Ultima steps up, announcing that “I pulled this baby into the light of life, so I will bury the afterbirth and the cord that once linked him to eternity. Only I will know the baby’s destiny” (6).

Ultima’s skill and tendency to solve difficult situations and to demonstrate to Antonio the need to mediate between these adverse elements becomes apparent in another situation in which Ultima explains to him the difference between the Lunas and the Márez (41), and—very importantly as well—the relation of their people to old Native American tribes such as the “Indians of the Rio del Norte,” the Aztecs and the Mayas (42). Moreover, when Antonio’s inner struggle with his heritage reoccurs in a dream, it is again Ultima who helps him to mediate between the polarities. In the dream, both his mother and his father are attempting to lure him to their shore of a great lake; his mother
is representing the “saved” people who were “baptized in the water of the moon which was made holy by our Holy Mother of the Church,” while his father is standing on the shore of the sinners, representing the ancient paganism.

Oh please tell me which is the water that runs through my veins, [Antonio] moaned; oh please tell me which is the water that washes my burning eyes!

It is the sweet water of the moon, my mother crooned softly, it is the water the Church chooses to make holy and place in its font. It is the water of your baptism.

Lies, lies, my father laughed, through your body runs the salt water of the oceans. It is the water which makes you Márez and not Luna. It is the water that binds you to the pagan god of Cico, the golden carp! (120)

In his dream, Antonio can hardly bear the agony of the conflict any more until Ultima appears and solves the problem.

Like Betonie in Ceremony and Francisco in House Made of Dawn, who have adopted a syncretic approach to religion and spirituality in an effort to reconcile seemingly conflicting traditions and who are aware of the need for a new, or modified, religious approach, Ultima knows that the two religions don’t necessarily exclude one another and that they can be accommodated by one person. Ramón Saldívar maintains as well that Ultima “unites the Christian and the pagan, the Virgen of Guadalupe and the Golden Carp, in one symbol of overarching good” (124). In the dream, Ultima explains to Antonio and his parents how everything converges, and how there can be no conflict of the faith or heritage, but that in fact they all work together:

You both know, she spoke to my father and my mother, that the sweet water of the moon which falls as rain is the same water that gathers into rivers and flows to fill the seas. Without the waters of the moon to replenish the oceans there would be no oceans. And the same salt waters of the ocean are drawn by the sun to the heavens, and in turn become again the waters of the moon. Without the sun there would be no waters formed to slake the dark earth’s thirst.

The waters are one, Antonio. (120–21)

After the dream, Antonio understands how the two sides of his heritage as well as the two religions he has learned about are reconcilable, and how his identity is based precisely on the dialectic between them. Ramón Saldivar concurs that Antonio sees the parallel between the two religions when he begins to accept […] that the Carp too is a figure of regeneration—a symbol of salvation. In fact, both myths, the Christian and the pagan, are versions of the same story. […] Compounded with the unmistakably real healing powers of the curandera Ultima, […] Antonio seems willing to risk breaking the commandments, believing in the existence of more than
one God, in order to create a synthetic, transcendental unity of godly powers, to which he above all might have access. (114)

Hence, Antonio’s internarrative identity encompasses and reconciles the multiple and conflicting voices and texts—a process that is paralleled by the novel’s narrative structure. Like Ceremony and House Made of Dawn, Bless me, Ultima is composed to reflect the protagonist’s inner struggle and quest for identity. However, unlike Silko’s and Momaday’s novels, Anaya’s book is focalized through Antonio at all stages of his childhood and adolescence and narrated in a mostly linear and chronological way by Antonio as an adult. Saldívar points out as well that the “narrative voice […] is that of an adult speaker, presumably Antonio himself, as he recollects his childhood and transcribes its effects” (108). Throughout the book, the reader finds evaluative remarks about Antonio’s process of spiritual and social growth, which he as a first person narrator can only make in retrospect.

Although only few of Ultima’s stories are actually rendered in the text, it becomes clear through Antonio’s first person narrative that she is the main provider of stories, that she becomes Antonio’s teacher and spiritual guide. Ultima’s stories are so important and of such high educational value to Antonio that they occasionally appear in his dreams as well, so that his dreams can be considered reflections, and sometimes continuations and foreshadowings, of her stories. Clearly, the stories Antonio hears about his ancestors, their history, and the land where he is growing up are integral to his spiritual growth and at the same time underline the oral tradition of the Chicano culture—another important aspect that links Anaya to Silko and Momaday. In fact, Anaya contends that “those of us who write in the Chicano community are the storytellers; we are the cuentistas. Tradition has not really been broken; we have only stepped from an oral storytelling setting around the kitchen table to writing it down on paper and sharing it with a wider community” (Iftekharuddin 18).

From the moment Ultima moves into the Márez’ home, she and Antonio become very close and develop a very special relationship. She takes him out into the countryside, the hills of the llano, to gather the herbs and roots she uses for her medicines. In this way, she teaches him about the earth and the plants (as Ts’eh teaches Tayo), and the spirit inherent in each of them (39), and the “presence of the river” (41). Antonio conveys his recognition of Ultima’s teaching in the following passage:

We walked together in the llano and along the river banks to gather herbs and roots for her medicines. She taught me the names of plants and flowers, of trees and bushes, of birds and animals; but most important, I learned from her that there was a beauty in the time of day and in the time of night, and that there was peace in the river and in the hills. She taught me to listen to the mystery of the groaning earth and to feel complete in the fulfillment of its time. My soul grew under her careful guidance. (15)

Héctor Calderón summarizes that Ultima “instills in Antonio a respect for the spirit of all living things and a faith in the eventual goodness of nature” (30).

Moreover, through Ultima Antonio undergoes a process of learning the significance of the Southwest landscape for his own and his people’s lives, so that—similar to Ceremony
and *House Made of Dawn*—the landscape becomes a text, or voice, that enters into the heteroglossia of Antonio’s internarrative identity. Upon meeting Ultima, Antonio experiences “his first epiphany with his landscape” (Anaya, “The Writer’s Landscape” 99). He tells the reader how

[Ultima] took my hand, and I felt the power of a whirlwind sweep around me. Her eyes swept the surrounding hills and through them I saw for the first time the wild beauty of our hills and the magic of the green river. My nostrils quivered as I felt the song of the mockingbirds and the drone of the grasshoppers mingle with the pulse of the earth. The four directions of the llano met in me, and the white sun shone on my soul. The granules of sand on my feet and the sun and sky above me seemed to dissolve into one strange, complete being. (*Bless Me, Ultima* 12)

In his essay, “The Writer’s Landscape,” Anaya explains that he prefers the Spanish word *la tierra* over the English word “landscape,” because it “conveys a deeper relationship between man and his place, and it is this kinship to the environment which creates the metaphor and the epiphany in landscape” (98–99). Clearly, Anaya has expressed this understanding of the power of the earth as reflected in landscape in *Bless Me, Ultima*, as Antonio—through the lessons taught by Ultima—develops his “sense of place,” which becomes the center of his life (“Writer’s Landscape” 100). Anaya demonstrates that without attachment to and understanding of their native place, people lack their center and thus their sense of identity. He explains: “[Characters who have become separated from their land and sense of place become frustrated, alienated human beings. They lose their center, and most devastating, they lose their source of redemption” (101).

Ultima teaches Antonio about the spirit of nature and its magical powers and shows him that they succeed in curing people and lifting curses laid by *brujas* (witches) when the Church and its priests remain helpless and powerless. Twice, Antonio becomes a witness to and even an active part of a cure carried out by Ultima. When almost all hope is lost, Ultima lifts a curse laid on Antonio’s uncle Lucas by the Trementina sisters and saves his life literally at the last moment (103). She also succeeds in laying to rest the ghosts of three Indians who were killed and not properly buried according to their custom and thus haunt the Téllez household (227). All these incidents contribute to Antonio’s doubts of the power and existence of a Christian god who fails to intervene when people really have need of a god, and drive him to be even more receptive to stories about pagan myths, such as the legend of the “golden carp.”

Antonio’s friends Samuel and Cico, who tell him about the golden carp, realize that Antonio is “different” from the other children and adults in the village, and so they trust him with the story. There are only very few people, above all adults, who share the same quality as the boys, as Cico explains:

“I know every man from Guadalupe who fishes, and there ain’t a one who has ever mentioned seeing the golden carp. So I guess the grown-ups can’t see him—”

“The Indian, Narciso, Ultima—”

“They’re different, Tony. Like Samuel, and me, and you—”
“I see,” I said. I did not know what that difference was, but I did feel a strange brotherhood with Cico. (115)

Hence, Samuel and Cico decide to tell Antonio the “legend of the people” (Lattin 630), which was passed on to them by the only Indian in the village of Guadalupe. The legend holds that the people who had lived in their valley sinned against their gods by breaking their promise of never eating the carp in the river, and as a punishment were turned into fish themselves. One god who truly loved his people chose to become a carp and swim amongst them so that he could be with them at all times and protect them. That is why it is a sin today to fish for carp as there is the danger of angering the gods again so greatly that the “prophecy of the golden carp” might come true and the whole valley be swallowed by water (117). Antonio learns this story in several “installments,” or “lessons”—which is reminiscent of the story of Fly and Hummingbird in Ceremony, which also constitutes an educational story about people’s misbehavior. Antonio’s friends take him to the lake where he sees the golden carp for himself. He is fascinated by the story, the sight of the carp, and realizes that this legend and this belief have more power for him than the Christian faith ever had or could: “I knew I had witnessed a miraculous thing, the appearance of a pagan god, a thing as miraculous as the curing of my uncle Lucas. And I thought, the power of God failed where Ultima’s worked” (114). Clearly, Antonio sees the connection between Ultima’s power and magic and the legend of the carp: both fall into the realm of an ancient mythic understanding of existence.

The interconnectedness of the stories and voices becomes clear not only in the fact that Antonio hears them from both his peers and Ultima, but also that he experiences them in his dreams, which reflect and combine what Antonio has learned or is confronted with and often foreshadow future events. In the course of the novel, Antonio has ten dreams, which are woven into the framework of the narrative and are marked by italicized font. Ramón Saldívar points out that the “dreams form a coherent narrative sequence in their own right” (110); hence, they constitute a heteroglossia of narratives Antonio has to mediate and connect in the process of establishing his internarrative identity. The dreams reveal Antonio’s development and underscore his struggle and quest for understanding and enlightenment. Hence, his dreams are a way for Antonio to process the various voices and influences upon him and are thus an important means in the development of his internarrative identity.

Four of Antonio’s dreams revolve around his three older brothers, Eugene, León, and Andrew, who represent the influence of the Euro-American culture through their participation in World War II. Coming back from the war, his brothers show some of the same traits as the veterans in House Made of Dawn and Ceremony, seeming to have lost their appreciation and love for their home, calling it a “hick town” in which they “can’t breathe” (66), as well as their pride in their ethnicity or cultural heritage. They appear to have become “Americanized,” which shows, for instance, when they explain that they cannot respect their parent’s wishes for their future. Antonio’s brother Eugene states, “we can’t build our lives on their dreams. […] We can’t be tied down to old dreams—” (68). Héctor Calderón notes as well that Antonio’s brothers “are self-interested, alienated men, corrupted by the outside world, and [they] succumb to the pleasures and vices that money can buy” (28–29).
At the same time, however, the narrative strand relating Antonio’s brothers’ orientation toward the Euro-American culture and their rejection of their cultural heritage evokes the image of the mythic figure of La Llorona. Antonio has two dreams preceding and foreshadowing his brothers’ return from the war, both of which take place by the river where Lupito, whom the people called crazy after he came back from the war (16), was killed after shooting the sheriff (16–17). Lupito died on the riverbank, and his blood mixed with the sand and the water. In both dreams, Antonio remarks how Lupito’s blood washed into the river, and simultaneously, he hears a long wailing cry coming from the river. In the first of the two dreams, his brothers think that “It is la llorona […] , the old witch who cries along the river banks and seeks the blood of boys and men to drink” (26); in the second dream, the voice turns out to be his brothers, who are calling out to him, telling him that they “are coming home to [Antonio]” (61). Moreover, upon returning home, Antonio’s brothers are restless and feel oppressed by the limitations of the town and their parents’ expectations. They frequently visit Rosie’s brothel in town, which Héctor Calderón understands as another allusion to the “folk motif of ‘la llorona’” (24). Interpreting the “wailing woman” as an evil spirit who in the novel “is related to the theme of misdirected responses to a calling or vocation,” Calderón maintains that “the prostitutes who live in Rosie’s house that overlooks the River of the Carp and the mermaid or siren of the Hidden Lakes” are “negative feminine archetypes” like the mythical figure of La Llorona (24). Because Antonio is directly affected by his brothers’ “misdirected responses to the calling” of the prostitutes in two other dreams, and on the night of Narciso’s murder, the myth of La Llorona becomes part of the heteroglossia of texts that Antonio has to process.

Troubled by how “the war had changed [his brothers]” (67), leading to their unwillingness to comply with their parents’ wishes for their future, Antonio must helplessly stand by when they go to “say good-bye to the girls at Rosie’s” (68) before leaving the village again to seek better lives in “Las Vegas, Santa Fe, maybe even Albuquerque” (67). Antonio’s distress is reflected in his ensuing dream, in which his brothers as “three dark figures silently beckoned [him] to follow them,” leading him to the “house of the sinful women” (69). Although he pleads with them not to enter so that they will not “lose [their] souls to hell” (69), his brothers dismiss his pleas and enter the house one after another. His favorite brother Andrew offers to make a deal with him, however, saying, “I will wait and not enter until you lose your innocence,” which disturbs Antonio even more, as he believes that “innocence is forever” (71). At this point, his mother, the priest of the local church, and Ultima enter his dream. While his mother tells him that he was innocent once, but now “already know[s] too much about the flesh and blood of the Márez men” (71), thus pointing out Antonio’s father’s side of the family, which she associates with paganism and consequently a proneness to sin, the priest claims that Antonio is innocent until he will gain the knowledge of God through his first communion. As in Antonio’s first dream in the novel, Ultima again steps up and relieves the situation. Pointing to “Las Pasturas, the land of [Antonio’s] birth,” she says, “There in the land of the dancing plains and rolling hills, there in the land which is the eagle’s by day and the owl’s by night is innocence. There where the lonely wind of the llano sang to the lovers’ feat of your birth, there in those hills is your innocence” (71). Hence, Ultima, who—as discussed in Chapter 2—is associated with the land and the natural world through her capacity as curandera and with the owl as her spirit, reminds Antonio of his
attachment to his homeland, which serves the function of mediating between the conflicting sides of his familial heritage and thus contributes to the formation of his identity.

The next time Antonio is confronted with the lure of La Llorona that his brother Andrew (who decided to stay home and not move north with the other two brothers) cannot withstand, is the night that Ultima is in danger of being murdered by Tenorio, who considers her a witch for her magic powers. Narciso, a friend of the family who hears Tenorio utter his threat, tries to warn Ultima, but is too old and weak to walk to the Marez home through the blazing snowstorm, and instead looks for Andrew at Rosie’s house. Antonio, let out from school, follows Narciso to the brothel and becomes a witness to his brother’s refusal to take Narciso seriously, and to leave his girl and the warmth at Rosie’s. Fearing for Ultima’s safety, Narciso decides to go to Antonio’s home himself, but is shot by Tenorio on the way. Dying underneath the juniper tree, under which Antonio will later bury Ultima’s owl (cf. Chapter 2), Narciso asks Antonio to take his confession and to bless him, which Antonio finally agrees to do.

The dream Antonio has in the aftermath of this horrible experience, further fueled by the high fever he runs due to the pneumonia he caught in the snowstorm, reflects and confirms Antonio’s fear from the beginning of the novel that his brother is “lost again” (69), and foreshadows Antonio’s later realization of the need for a new, syncretic religion, as discussed in Chapter 2. In his dream, Antonio promises to be God’s priest if He forgives his brother, which God refuses to do, pointing out that He is “not a God of forgiveness,” and that He “can have no priest who has golden idols before him” (173). Thus God punishes Antonio for his interest in and reverence for the pagan god, the golden carp, and establishes his power by roaring, “Vengeance is Mine! […] [N]ot even your golden carp would give up that power as a god!” (173).

After this exclamation, havoc breaks out in Antonio’s dream. The evil witches, the Trementina sisters, place a curse on Antonio, from which nobody, not even Ultima, can cure him, and he dies (174–75); his parents perish when their house burns down (175); the townspeople murder Ultima, burn her beheaded body, and cook the river carp over the fire; the earth opens and “the whole town disappears] into the chasm” (175); the surviving people are infected with a deadly disease and die in great agony (176). “In the end no one was left, and the she-goats and the he-goats returned from the hills whence they had fled, and they looked in innocence at the death camp of the people” (176). However, the dream ends with an optimistic outlook, as the golden carp appears and restores the people and the earth:

*Evening settled over the land and the waters. The stars came out and glittered in the dark sky. In the lake the golden carp appeared. His beautiful body glittered in the moonlight. He had been witness to everything that happened, and he decided that everyone should survive, but in new form. He opened his huge mouth and swallowed everything, everything there was, good and evil. Then he swam into the blue velvet of the night, glittering as he rose towards the stars. The moon smiled on him and guided him, and his golden body burned with such beautiful brilliance that he became a new sun in the heavens. A new sun to shine its good light upon a new earth. (176)*
The conclusion of the dream underscores once more Antonio’s realization of the need to create something new, which resolves the dichotomies between the Christian god and the golden carp, between his dual family heritage (being both a Luna and a Márez), and between good and evil. The dream’s resolution—the carp’s swallowing “everything there was, good and evil”—suggests that in the creation of people in “new form,” the creation of a “new sun,” which shines “upon a new earth,” the two opposing elements are merged, which results in an enhanced new “product”: a syncretic religion and a protagonist whose identity reflects the successful formation of his syncretic identity.

The array of the diverging influences in the novel prove that Antonio’s narrative of his coming of age and quest for identity depends on his ability to mediate among the different voices and texts that dominate and determine his internarrative identity. Thus, his story can also be viewed as a “story of a cultural experience” (Saldivar 106) in which “Antonio Márez y Luna’s odyssey is a search for his own identity, a spiritual journey which in the course of the narrative is developed into an allegory for the whole Chicano experience” (Johnson qtd. in Saldivar 106).

Like Bless Me, Ultima, Denise Chávez’s The Last of the Menu Girls (1986) tells a coming-of-age story, a Bildungsroman, revolving around the young Chicana protagonist’s quest for a non-fragmented sense of identity, which is aggravated by her lacking sense of place or home, and the conflicting expectations she is presented with based on female “role models.” The protagonist Rocio Esquibel’s search for a sense of who she is and wants to become is reflected in the narrative’s loose structure of interrelated stories. The book’s structure, in fact, has led to divergence as to how it is to be defined with view to genre: while Rudolfo Anaya calls it a novel in his introduction to the book, most other critics, such as Alvina E. Quintana in her book Home Girls: Chicana Literary Voices (1996), or Deborah L. Madsen in her Feminist Theory and Literary Practice (2000), consider it a collection, collage, or series of interrelated stories. All critics agree, however, that The Last of the Menu Girls establishes a unity through its focus: the protagonist Rocio’s rite of passage into Chicana womanhood.

The Last of the Menu Girls contains seven stories, told mostly from Rocio Esquibel’s point of view, which relate different stages in non-linear, non-chronological, order in the protagonist’s quest for her unique identity through the stages of her childhood, adolescence, and womanhood. Rocio is the second of three daughters; her parents are separated, and she lives with her mother Nieves, a teacher, and her younger sister Mercy in a small town in southern New Mexico until she moves into her own apartment as a college student. Rocio lives in a household of women—in addition to her mother and younger sister, her older, married sister Ronelia is “present” through photographs and the clothes she left behind (most notably her prom dress), as is Rocio’s great aunt Eutilia, who lived in the house for seven months until she died, and whose presence is still felt through the smell of “the mercilessly sick” (14) that, Rocio feels, continues to linger in the room where she passed.

Despite the dominance of women in the house, however, the influence of three male figures on Rocio is always noticeable: there is Juan Luz Contreras, her mother’s first husband and her older sister Ronelia’s father, “the town’s best catch, a descendant of the Contreras family of west Texas” (79), who died, but is always present through his photographic image; Rocio states, “For many years I wondered who the man in the wedding photograph was. He wasn’t my father. My father still lived with us at that time,
but he wasn’t home much. Who was the man in the photograph if he wasn’t my father?” (80). Her father, whose name is never mentioned, is present through the books he left behind in his study, incidentally the room in which Rocío’s great aunt stays and dies. The third male influence is Regino, her mother’s handyman, whose repairs are always less than perfect but who is Nieves’ compadre (father of her godchild) and therefore a part of the family. Nieves explains to Rocío that while marriages can break up, “compadrazgo” is “a union truer than family, higher than marriage, nearest of all relationships to the balanced, supportive, benevolent universal godhead” (169). It becomes clear through the various allusions to the absence/presence of these three men that their stories are “texts” or voices that Rocío needs to process in her quest to find out who she is, where she belongs, and who/what she should become.

As Denise Chávez’s autobiographical essay, “Heat and Rain (Testimonio),” demonstrates, Rocío Esquibel bears many similarities to Chávez’s own persona. Chávez reveals in her “testimonio” the elements that shaped her own sense of identity:

Perhaps because I was born in the middle of August in Southern New Mexico, I have always felt the burningly beautiful intensity of my dry, impenetrable land. […] My other friend was my imagination that invented an extended family of loving, congenial spirits who wandered with me nighttimes in my dreams—into other worlds I inhabited as vividly and completely as I did my own waking existence as middle daughter in a family of three girls, one mother, Delfina Rede Faver Chávez, a teacher divorced by my father, E.E. “Chano” Chávez, one lawyer, long gone. (27) Because of her parent’s divorce, she “grew up knowing separation as a quality of life—and this sorrow went hand in hand with extensions—for despite the fact that my parents were apart, both families were an everpresent in my life. So I grew up solitary in the midst of noise, a quality I didn’t know then was essential to my work as a writer” (28). This “noise” she was surrounded by was caused by a variety of voices, some imagined (cf. above quotation), and some real, emanating from books and family members and being pronounced in both English and Spanish, reflecting her bicultural heritage. Chávez explains that as a writer, she has always tried to capture “those voices [she] hears clearly” (30–31):

Voices like my mother, who always spoke in Spanish, or my father, who mostly spoke in English. […] My father, as a child, was punished for speaking Spanish in the schoolyard. He decided to beat the Anglos at their game. He went and got a law degree from Georgetown during the Depression. And he became, in his mind, more Anglo than those Anglos who had punished him. I remember my mother saying, “I never think of your father as Mexican.” My mother was, though, in her heart and soul. She studied in Mexico for thirteen summers, was a student of Diego Rivera. (31)

Rocío Esquibel’s search for identity in The Last of the Menu Girls clearly parallels the author’s experience in her need to mediate the various voices in order to achieve a unified
sense of self. Douglas Anderson in his essay, “Displaced Abjection and States of Grace: Denise Chávez’s The Last of the Menu Girls,” maintains that Chávez’s “testimonio” suggests that “neither the work nor the writer can be reduced to a single essence or identity,” an idea that The Last of the Menu Girls also expresses (235). He describes Rocío’s self as “multiple yet cohesive,” presented in the narrative in “moments of the protagonist’s life, moments of loss, moments of longing, and moments of when the multiple self is balanced” (236). However, Rocío’s self is not “balanced” or unified until the very last story in the narrative, in which she has found her way home and into the midst of her family and reveals her decision to become a writer, the product of which is The Last of the Menu Girls. In this story, entitled “Compadre,” Nieves, Rocío’s mother, encourages her daughter to write about the people and places she knows (190), so that Rocío finds her identity—and her voice—by connecting the various, multivocal stories she experiences.

On several occasions before this conclusion, however, Rocío expresses her wish to “become someone” (158), or, more importantly, to “become someone else” (34), thereby alluding to the expectations she faces growing up female in a male-dominated culture and to the female “role models” that are presented to her, such as her mother, her grandmother, her great aunt, and Florence Nightingale (the British nurse who is considered the founder of modern nursing), but in whose footsteps she doesn’t want to follow. The title story, incidentally the first story in the collection, describes Rocío’s application process for a work study position during the summer at the local hospital and her subsequent job as a “menu girl,” taking menu orders from patients. Although she “never wanted to be a nurse, ever” (13), Rocío moves from being a mere menu girl to helping the nurses on the wards, and involuntarily grows more and more involved emotionally in the patients’ stories and histories. Rocío constantly compares herself with the women in her family, and rejecting the paths they have trodden, states, “I want to be someone else, somewhere else, someone important and responsible and sexy” (34). Rudolfo Anaya notes that “Rocío cries out against the traditional serving roles which society has prescribed for women” (“Introduction”), and in the course of her development, which the reader recreates by putting together the bits and pieces of her narrative, Rocío eventually chooses the career of an artist, more specifically a writer and dramatist.

The title story most clearly reflects Rocío’s fragmented identity and her necessity to combine and mediate the conflicting stories that surround her. It presents an array of different texts and genres, as the reader finds items or questions from the application form Rocío has to complete, interspersed with Rocío’s memories of her great aunt Eutilia—evoked by the question “Previous experience with the sick and dying” (14), the first-person narrative of her duties in the hospital, her interior monologue about who or what she would and would not like to be(come), juxtaposed with vignettes of hospital patients she gets to know, and who, significantly, are all women with one exception: “Juan Maria/The Nose” (31) is an illegal immigrant from Mexico who doesn’t speak English, and who is looked down upon by the predominantly Chicana staff because of that. (Here it becomes clear that the women suffer from a classist and sexist culture and see an opportunity to establish their position and boost their self-image by discriminating against someone who, due to his linguistic deficiencies and illegal status, is inferior to them.) That Rocío’s sense of self is determined by the conflict between the societal
pressure she feels to comply with the traditional female roles and her wish to break free from those expectations is paralleled in the fragmented structure of the story. Deborah Madsen contends:

The imposition of an external form upon the representation of her life and experience represents the fragmented and discontinuous quality of life experienced by Chicanas, who are subject to a range of social and cultural gender prescriptions which prevent the exercise of a personal sovereignty and agency. Thus, the structure of the narrative represents the fragmentation of identity under the twin pressures of racism and sexism. (229)

Moreover, Rocío needs to mediate between her own image of herself and the image others have of her—which in turn is determined by outside expectations. When she finally leaves her job at the end of summer break to return to school, the nurses are angry with her, since they had come to consider her one of them. Esperanza, the head nurse, exclaims, “Why’d I train you for, so you could leave us? To go to school? What for? So you can get those damned food stamps? It’s a disgrace all those wetbacks and healthy college students getting our hard earned tax money. Makes me sick! Christ!” (36). Rocío’s predecessor as menu girl, Arlene Rutschman, also has an image of Rocío that doesn’t correspond with how she sees or experiences herself: “You never get angry, do you?” she said admiringly. ‘Rarely,’ I said. But inside, I was always angry” (34). Moreover, Arlene compares Rocío to Florence Nightingale on several occasions, telling her how much Rocío looks like a painting of the famous nurse, which hangs in one of the hallways in the hospital, and Rocío again feels forced into an image or role with which she can’t identify. One dialogue between Arlene and Rocío illustrates Rocío’s discomfort with the comparison:

“You’re sweet,” she said. “Everyone likes you. It’s in your nature. You’re the Florence Nightingale of Altavista Memorial, that’s it!”

“Oh God, Arlene, I don’t want to be a nurse, ever! I can’t take the smells. No one in my family can stand smells.”

“You look like that painting. I always did think it looked like you…”

“You did?”

“Yeah.”

“Come on, you’re making me sick, Arlene.”

“Everyone likes you.”

“Well…” (34)

Hence, Rocío’s conflict is somewhat comparable to Antonio’s in Bless Me, Ultima, when he has to mediate between his parent’s diverging expectations of what he should become in his future, a vaquero or a farmer—or better yet, a priest, and apparently becomes a writer like Rocío, as the novel suggests.

Throughout the series of stories, “images of women appear in the narrative in succession; old and young, white and Hispanic, from the past and present” (Madsen 231). These images of women, who all represent varieties of women’s destinies, are forced
upon Rocío as measuring sticks and hence underline the struggle she undergoes in order to find her true self. As Deborah Madsen perceptively notes, “There are two female figures that dominate [the] opening story—the mythical figure of La Llorona and the historical figure of Florence Nightingale” (231). While the La Llorona figure is represented by most of the women who appear in this story as examples of oppressed, helpless, and dispossessed Chicanas who, additionally, put the blame for their fate on themselves (Madsen 231), Florence Nightingale stands for a female figure who is held in high esteem, yet represents the fate of women in service roles who shoulder not only their own, but also other people’s burdens. Looking at the painting of Florence Nightingale, Rocío remarks, “Her look encompassed all the great unspeakable sufferings of every war” (37).

Repeatedly, Rocío rejects the notion of being in any way a modern Florence Nightingale—just as she rejects the oppressive image of La Llorona. In the narrative of The Last of the Menu Girls, the evoked stories of La Llorona and Florence Nightingale enter the heteroglossia of texts and voices that Rocío needs to connect and mediate along with the personal stories of women she is in contact with and who, in a way, are associated with images of these women. It is in this mediation that she will find her own internarrative identity. In order to find her own sense of self, Rocío needs to come to terms with and ultimately cast aside these two images of historical and mythical female figures with whom she is compared, as well as all other stereotypical feminine images for that matter. In her rejection of these figures, it becomes clear that Rocío creates for herself a counterstory, as Hilde Lindemann Nelson defines it, by rebelling against the “master narrative” and the image and course of life of a woman in the Chicano society. She refuses to perpetuate the tradition of service, the tradition of machismo, and instead invents a story for herself in which she is “sexy and important,” or just plainly different from the women in her family.

The story “The Closet,” the fifth one in the collection, reflects in a similar way Rocío’s desperate attempt at finding out who she is, and inevitably, this search always confronts her with stories of her mother, or other women in her life, but also the men: her father, her mother’s first husband Juan Luz, and compadre Regino. The story jumps back and forth between passages relating the “action” of the story, namely Rocío and her sister’s searching through the items in their mother’s closet, dialogue between her sister Mercy and herself, memories of her mother, pieces of her mother’s life story determined by two marriages, and descriptions of the content of the closet, which in turn evoke more memories or more segments of her mother’s life. This mix of different elements of narrative along with the literal search of her mother’s closet suggests that Rocío may be searching for her identity in the closet, looking for items and memories that could “explain” who she is.

Besides clothes and shoes, Rocío finds a box of assorted items in her mother’s closet, which her mother received from her students. The “gift box,” as Rocío calls it, contains “vinyl wallets and heart-shaped handkerchiefs and a plastic container of car-and-animal shaped soap” (82), items that appeared in the previous story “Evening in Paris” (the name of a perfume), which tells how her mother, her sister Mercy, and Rocío draw from this box each year for Christmas presents, returning the presents to the box after Christmas if they don’t see any use for them, and repeating the same procedure the following year, thus circulating the items amongst themselves (75). In her mother’s closet, Rocío also
finds the wedding picture of her mother’s first marriage to her older sister Ronelia’s father, Juan Luz. Looking at the wedding picture triggers memories of her own father’s leaving, and she states that after his departure she would go into her mother’s closet to look at the picture: “When my father finally left our home, it was Juan Luz’s face in the crowded closet who comforted me.” Eternalized in the photograph and not being able to disappoint and hurt her as her father did, he seems “[f]rom all accounts” to be “a perfect man” (80).

Rummaging through her mother’s closets also leads Rocío to describe all the other closets in the house, where they are located and what they contain (e.g. her sister’s prom dress and her mother’s wedding dress; a jacket a boy, possibly Rocío’s ex-boyfriend, forgot and which she occasionally smells), which evoke more memories of her childhood and her family members. The content of the closets thus represents texts and voices in the form of memories and people they represent, and function as a way for Rocío to orient herself and locate herself in relation to them, so that they can be considered steps in her quest for her sense of identity.

The following story, “Space is a Solid,” portrays Rocío at a later age, a “graduate student at the Drama Factory” (113), who teaches drama appreciation classes, lives poorly on her own in an apartment she can’t afford, feeling unloved by her boyfriend, Loudon, who doesn’t want her to live with him. Through twelve vignettes that are told from five different alternating, shifting viewpoints—Rocío’s and those of some of the other characters, titled according to whose character’s perspective they reflect, the reader learns about Rocío’s struggle at school, work, and at home, and her quest to find out who she is and where she belongs. Again, the structure of the story mirrors Rocío’s state of mind and her fragmented sense of identity. Even though the segments told from a perspective other than Rocío’s relate background information, thoughts, and emotions of the respective characters, they all center on Rocío and reveal her disturbed physical and mental state.

Moreover, within the individual narratives of the story, the reader finds a variety of other texts; for instance, one vignette entitled “Kari Lee” (a student in Rocío’s drama appreciation class), contains the heading and beginning of Kari Lee’s essay, “History of a Friendship,” which she has to write for Rocío’s class, and which describes her perspective on her relationship with Rocío (136). In Rocío’s sections, the reader finds unfinished letters to “Jettie,” who is in charge of the apprentices in the costume shop at the Drama Factory, in which Rocío complains about “the feudal conditions in the Costume Shop” and begs Jettie to give her a different work-study job in the theater (105; 107–8). Other passages read as if they were taken out of Rocío’s diary, headed with a date and relating the day’s events (118); some passages recollect pieces of dialogues with various people (e.g. 120). Another vignette contains a poem Rocío writes in her journal (122), and which reflects her somber state of mind: she describes herself as blind, silent, crying, caught in a “[s]orrowed death trance of fear,” and finally “impaled” (122).

Several times throughout her sections of the story, Rocío states that she feels abandoned and homeless:

I have no home. I am homeless. Where can I move? Why won’t Loudon let me stay with him? After all, we are friends. We’re friends, aren’t we? He’s too busy, all his time taken up. Why do people get degrees? How
many hearts broken, lovers abandoned? Loudon! Where’s Ron? I’ll just wait here. Sit down. On this loveseat. Alone. Wait for Ron. My hands are blue. Why? I don’t know, it’s all too much. I don’t have a place to live, Loudon doesn’t want me, he’s told me so. (107; emphasis in the text)

Moreover, this passage of interior monologue contains another important voice through a reference to Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s 1899 story, “The Yellow Wall-Paper.” Sitting in the hallway outside of the main bathroom in the house in which the opening party for Arthur Miller’s play, The Crucible, takes place, Rocio describes herself staring “at the beige wallpaper with its shadowed coronets” (107). The fragmented rambling of interior monologue that follows this description is an indication of Rocio’s hypersensitive and almost hysteric condition, as are her frequent remarks about her hands’ turning slowly blue. Like the female character in Gilman’s story, who is slowly driven to madness through her confinement to a room in which the faded yellow wallpaper “is torn off in spots” (425), thus forming patterns and “dim shapes” which, in her mind, reveal a “woman stooping down and creeping behind that pattern,” seeming “to shake the pattern, just as if she wanted out” (425), Rocio shows signs of mental illness. Her nervous condition causes an inability to eat, sit, sleep, or rest; Rocio misses classes, and work, and her mother eventually surmises that she must have suffered a nervous breakdown (134).

Following the story, “Space is a Solid,” is the last story in the narrative, entitled “Compadre.” Paralleling the structure of the entire collection, it is non-linear and non-chronological, jumping back and forth between different stages in Rocio’s life, the only connecting thread being her mother Nieves’ compadre Regino, and his relationship to the Esquibel family. The end of the story, however, seems to jump to a much later point in Rocio’s life and development, and offers the solution, or remedy, to Rocio’s affliction of her fragmented sense of identity. The story conveys a sense of place and a feeling of being at home and part of a community that is so important for all indigenous writers of the Southwest. As Paula Gunn Allen states in her book The Sacred Hoop, “Although one of the major themes in contemporary American Indian literature is alienation,” many texts by Native Americans convey an “overwhelming message of belonging, of enwollement. […] Belonging is a basic assumption for traditional Indians, and an estrangement is seen as so abnormal that narratives and rituals that restore the estranged to his or her place within the cultural matrix abound” (127). Even though Allen limits her remarks to American Indian literature, they can be applied to other native writers of the American Southwest, and prove to be true for Denise Chávez’s work as well.

The story “Compadre” emphasizes the importance of a sense of belonging, by pointing out that the home includes both the place (here southern New Mexico) and the community of extended family and friends. “Compadre” relates the numerous jobs that Regino, a friend of the family and Rocio’s mother’s compadre, has completed in the house and the yard over an unspecified, but apparently long period of time. In one section of the story, which takes place in the heat of the summer, her mother asks Rocio to bring a glass of water to Regino, who is pulling weeds in the backyard, which she only reluctantly does, and which triggers a heated debate about the value and the quality of Regino’s work. Interspersed in the story is background information about Regino’s large family whom he has to support with his work; this information serves as the basis for Rocio’s mother’s definition of “compadrazgo,” and her decision to become compadres
with Regino, a decision that has not only bound her family to his through her role as
godmother to one of his daughters, but also requires loyalty to him and his work, even if
she knows that “the jobs could take six months, a year, be slipshod, and never [be] to my
satisfaction” (168). Although she resents her mother’s lecture and still disagrees on the
justification of hiring Regino, Rocío admits Regino’s dependability, stating “When
Regino was needed, he appeared. He was the only one who ever emerged from the
darkness to fill my father’s place. […] [H]e would calmly arrive to help us, his other
family” (149). By the end of the story—and the whole narrative—it becomes apparent
that Rocío has understood the meaning and significance of community and home,
through which she is able to mend her fragmented identity and develop a unified sense of
self.

The last section of the story relates a later period in Rocío’s life, which is indicated
through various segments of dialogue during a family gathering, revealing that her
younger sister Mercy has children now and lives “up North,” as does Rocío as well (190).
In the course of the conversation, her cousin Tommy asks her about her occupation:
“‘And so what do you do? […] I hear you write.’ ‘She’s a famous writer,’ tío Roque said
[…] . ‘Or will be. Aren’t you a writer, Rocío?’ ‘Yes,’ I said, ‘I write. I’m a writer’” (188).
That Rocío has not only found her voice and the confidence to state that she is a writer,
but also her identity through her return to the home of her childhood, becomes apparent
in a later segment of the story. Her mother expresses that she “misses [her] girls,” who all
have left the house, but hopes that “Someday my girls will come home” (190). When
asked, “So what do you do, Rocío? […] I mean, can you make a living? What do you
write?” Rocío answers, “Oh, about people. New Mexico. You know, everything” (190),
thereby revealing that although she may live “up North” now, she knows where her home
is and always will be, and where she belongs. She has realized that the place where she
grew up has shaped her and has had a great influence on her identity; she sees the
connection between the place and the people and wants to incorporate that in her writing,
thereby evolving into a communal storyteller, a resource for her community, like Tayo in
Silko’s Ceremony.

In his introduction to the book, Rudolfo Anaya states that The Last of the Menu Girls
“reflects [Chávez’s] particular sense of place, revealing the depth of the world of women
and the flavor of southern New Mexico. The central metaphor of the novel is the home”; the
figure includes the “family, [and] the known neighborhood” (n. pag.). As
demonstrated above, the narrative structure of The Last of the Menu Girls conveys to the
reader that Rocío needs to establish her place within the boundaries of the land—her
native New Mexico—, and more specifically within the nucleus of her family and
neighborhood in order to find her sense of place and to see the connections among the
stories and voices that surround her, so that she, like Abel, Tayo, and Antonio, is
eventually able to create her unique internarrative identity.

The fictional works discussed in this chapter demonstrate that indigenous authors of
the Southwest draw upon sophisticated modernist and postmodernist narrative
techniques, such as fragmentation, genre mixing, non-chronological and non-linear plot
lines, and multivocal, heteroglossic narration, some of which come from their indigenous
oral narrative traditions. By adopting Anglo-American literary forms as well as
appropriating the colonizers’ language to their autobiographical and traditional materials,
indigenous authors draw attention to their quest for their individual bicultural identities.
Moreover, as the close readings above have shown, indigenous authors incorporate into their works solutions to their protagonist’s problems or remedies for their lack of wholeness and unified identity, many times in the form of stories and/or an orientation towards their homeland. These texts and stories evoke and often resemble traditional native healing ceremonies to establish or restore the characters’ sense of self. Consequently, both Chicano/a and Native American authors of the Southwest employ (often cyclical) “ritual narrative structures” as Paula Gunn Allen has termed them (*Sacred Hoop* 81) that express their people’s need to orient themselves in their environment, their quest to mediate and integrate the conflicting cultural influences, as well as elements of healing, which are the catalyst for the establishment of their unique syncretic selves.
Conclusion

In tracing the parallels between Native American and Chicano/a authors of the Southwest in terms of their history, their shared experience as colonized people, their spiritual ties to their homeland, and their consequent quest to establish a non-fragmented sense of bicultural identity, it becomes evident that they indeed can and—as this study set out to demonstrate—must be read as one cultural and social group of indigenous people. Their efforts to define themselves as distinct and unique and to withstand assimilation into the dominant Euro-American society, thereby drawing upon their ancestral birthright to the region, constitute the trait that sets these authors apart from other ethnic writers in the United States.

While all ethnic groups in the United States must face the task of mediating between their native culture and the influences of Euro-America in order to establish their identities, most non-native ethnic groups show a tendency to embrace the dominant culture in this process. Most immigrants to the United States left and still leave their homelands largely voluntarily, wishing to find a better and more secure life in the United States. Oftentimes fleeing religious and political persecution, and making a conscious decision to move to a foreign country, immigrants naturally are more likely to accept their new environment and culture and to try to integrate themselves into U.S. society. (An example demonstrating this ongoing phenomenon is the many, mainly Asian, immigrants who, upon arrival in the United States, take on English names.) In this process, customs and other markers of their culture (e.g. language, dress) are often lost or neglected.

Indigenous authors, in contrast, enter the battleground of accommodating conflicting cultural influences on a different level. They must acknowledge that they cannot avoid their colonizers’ influence on their lives, yet need and want to resist this culture’s impact on the basis of their status as original inhabitants, or first nations of the North American continent. As Luis Valdez’s statement, quoted in the introduction (pages 4–5), makes clear, indigenous peoples of the Southwest did not choose to be immersed into U.S. society; rather, the dominant culture’s society was imposed on them, and this fact, as well as the resentment rooted in it, is often recognizable in native writers’ works.

This study of southwestern indigenous people’s shared culture, history, and religion, and the reflection of these ties in their literature, has illuminated native peoples’ challenge of having to affirm their indigenous ancestry and identity while being confronted with the imposition of a colonial power and its dominant culture. While native writers are gradually receiving more attention, their voices are still not widely heard and only select works have made it into the canon of American literature today. However, as Simon Ortiz, in his book *Woven Stone* (1992), has pointed out, it is imperative for the dominant culture in America to understand that without listening to indigenous writers and intellectuals, the United States may not survive (32). Paying attention to native people, Ortiz maintains, would not only recognize present social realities in America, but will also ensure the country’s continuance (32).
In this context, it is also important to acknowledge indigenous authors’ contribution to the formation of the United States as it exists today. As Jack Weatherford describes it in his book, *Indian Givers* (1988), native peoples of North America have put a mark on America in many areas of civilization, most importantly in this context in politics, “teaching” European colonizers about the concepts of community and democratic government. These are important facts that are too often overlooked by Euro-Americans. Knowledge of these historical facts facilitates and illuminates a reading of such complex works as Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead* and brings to light aspects of the history of colonization that the prevalent Eurocentric version of the history of North America wrongfully omits. Attempting to counteract such unjust neglect, indigenous authors recreate and reimagine their past and thus their status in U.S. society through their literature, hence arriving at a more positive self-image, which is the basis of their unique hybrid selves.

The reverence for and need of a sense of their homeland plays an important role in the formation of southwestern indigenous authors’ bicultural identity as well as in the healing process, or ceremony, they undergo to achieve this identity. Analyzing, for example, Anaya’s *Bless Me, Ultima* in combination with N.Scott Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn*, or Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* in tandem with Rudolfo Anaya’s *Tortuga*, sheds light on the significance of the land for native people’s everyday life as well as their spirituality. Exploring and tracing indigenous creation, emergence, and migration stories in these works reveals native peoples’ attachment to and rootedness in their homelands, which explains their natural and spiritual environmentalism and elucidates their efforts to (re)claim their lands. Moreover, through reading southwestern indigenous authors’ works Euro-Americans can learn to value, appreciate, and preserve natural resources and to protect the environment.

Neglect of this concern for the earth and Euro-American exploitation of land and natural resources have resulted in native people’s bitterness over colonialism and imperialism, which is reflected in many authors’ more or less explicitly political pieces. Applying Henri Tajfel’s social identity theory to southwestern indigenous authors’ works allows a very differentiated view of the degrees of resistance and rejection, as well as accommodation and reconciliation, which can be found in all their works. Tajfel’s theory explains indigenous authors’ stances toward the dominant U.S. society and illuminates the different ways of dealing with the U.S. society’s assimilationist agenda. Studying, for instance, Rudolfo Anaya’s *Alburquerque* along with Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Gardens in the Dunes* demonstrates the various possibilities of dialogic interaction between minority and majority groups and illuminates the strategies indigenous people may employ to achieve a positive self-image and develop a unified social identity.

Similarly, a combined reading of Chicano/a and Native American works of the Southwest, such as Silko’s *Ceremony* and Denise Chávez’s *The Last of the Menu Girls*, through the lens of Ajit Maan’s internarrative identity theory reveals the significance of the parallels between literary forms and subject matter: clearly, southwestern indigenous authors’ struggle to establish a unified bicultural identity in the face of conflicting cultural influences is reflected in the literary forms and narrative techniques they employ. Many authors of the Southwest depict mixed blood characters and protagonists who often not only grapple with the conflict of merging Euro-American and native elements in their personas, but often with different tribal influences as well (e.g. Abel and Antonio). This
dilemma may be demonstrated in non-linear plot structures and/or fragmented narratives, thus paralleling the characters’ search for a coherent life story and image of themselves.

In addition, both Native American and Chicano/a authors of the Southwest continually draw upon their traditional oral narrative forms, merging and combining them with modernist and postmodernist elements. Therefore, knowledge of the native folk and mythic tales, especially indigenous creation stories, as well as rituals and healing ceremonies, are essential to understand indigenous writers’ inclusion of traditional native stories in their narratives as a path to the protagonists’ healing, or their (re)establishing of their unified bicultural identities. As readings of both Chicano/a and Native American works of the Southwest have shown, indigenous authors include a resolution to their characters’ quests for a coherent identity, often in the form of a (re)orientation towards their homelands and/or specific educational stories that provide the people with the means to weave their own internarrative life stories.

To be clear, this study does not claim that Native American and Chicano/a literatures are exactly the same. It would be false and misleading to say that there is no difference between works by, say, Rudolfo Anaya and N. Scott Momaday, Ana Castillo and Leslie Marmon Silko. As the readings of several works have demonstrated, there are noticeable differences in style and tone even among authors of each subgroup, Chicano (cf. e.g. Rodolfo Gonzales’ *Yo Soy Joaquin* and Rudolfo Anaya’s *Alburquerque*) and Native American (cf. e.g. Joy Harjo’s poetry and Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead*), resulting in more or less radical or conciliatory attitudes towards the dominant Euro-American society, and in more or less extensive inclusions of Anglo-American literary elements in their writing.

However, as this study has shown, southwestern Chicano/a and Native American authors’ incorporation of Euro-American elements in their writing reflects the dialectic of a long process of conquest and colonization, effecting the establishment of their syncretic culture and identity as a people. As demonstrated throughout this study, Native American and Chicano/a literatures of the Southwest have very distinct features as indigenous literature, and can best be understood when studied as such.
Notes

NOTES FOR INTRODUCTION
1. Rudolfo Anaya explains the spelling of this title on the dedication page of his novel: “In April of 1880 the railroad reached la Villa de Alburquerque in New Mexico. Legend says the Anglo stationmaster couldn’t pronounce the first ‘r’ in ‘Albur,’ so he dropped it as he painted the station sign for the city. This novel restores the original spelling, Alburquerque.”
2. Chicano/a and Native American authors’ attachment to their homeland, which is naturally reflected in their writing in that the Southwest is the preferred setting for much of their prose and poetry, may suggest a reading of their works in the tradition of regionalism in American literature. Although Reed Way Dasenbrock, in his 1988 essay, “Forms of Biculturalism in Southwestern Literature: The Work of Rudolfo Anaya and Leslie Marmon Silko,” contests that there is such a genre as southwestern literature, he does claim that “There is a characteristically Southwestern generic (or perhaps cross-generic) space” (308). Other critics, such as Kathryn VanSpanckeren, however, describe a renewed interest in regionalism in American literature studies, calling it “new regionalism” and praising “its expanse and its diversity” (VanSpanckeren chap. VIII), and include the Southwest as one distinct region with its own unique literature. Likewise, the authors in the collection *Old Southwest/New Southwest* regard the Southwest as a particular locale, as the subtitle of the book, *Essays on a Region and Its Literature*, demonstrates.
3. Werner Sollors, in his book *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (1986), draws attention to the problematic nature of the term “ethnicity.” While he contends that it “is still superior to and more inclusive than any other existing term,” as “‘minority’ needlessly calls our attention to numbers” and “‘immigration’ focuses on the process of traversing space and leads to rather awkwardly forced discussions of people who came as slaves or who were on the American continent before ‘America’” (39), Sollors prefers the terms “consent” and “descent” to talk about conflicts between cultural groups. He defines descent relations as “relations of ‘substance’ (by blood or nature),” whereas consent relations “are those of ‘law’ and marriage” (6). Because it is a commonly employed designation, “ethnic” will be used in this study as an umbrella expression for non-Anglo-American people, while “native” or “indigenous” will be used as an opposite term to “immigrant.”
4. While one may argue that indigenous authors’ (and their characters’) identities are often composites of more than two cultures, as many are descendants of more than one native tribe and Europeans, the term “bicultural” will be used here to express the binary nature of their identities, i.e. the dichotomy between indigenous and European cultures.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER ONE
5. The impact of the coexistence of the two religions on the people at Jemez Pueblo in *House Made of Dawn* will be explored in Chapter 2.
6. Another example of this (ab)use of native people by the U.S. government is the military’s employment of American Indian language code talkers during World Wars I and II. While only little is known about the use of Choctaw to encode messages during World War I,
somewhat more has been written about the Navajo code talkers during World War II. While
the U.S. government had for decades tried to eliminate native languages by sending Indian
children to boarding schools where they were only allowed to speak English, now the
government realized the usefulness of tribal people and their language for war purposes.
However, it wasn’t until 1992 that the Navajo code talkers finally received the honor they
deserved by the U.S. government (Department of the Navy). Recently, they have been able
to enjoy more publicity after MGM decided to base a movie on the Navajo “Windtalkers”
(with Nicolas Cage in a leading role; release date June 14, 2002) (USA Today, Oct. 02,
2001).
7. Abel’s struggle to deal with this situation and consequently to find a sense of identity will be
discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.
8. Some sources state that the land on which the university is located (a former army base) was
deeded “as a concession to Indian people after they left Alcatraz Island” (“History of
American Indians in California”). However, as the university’s name already indicates—
named after the “founder of the Iroquois federation” (Acuna, par. 7) and the Aztec god—the
university is considered a tribal college designed for native people to “explore their Indian
roots in and out of the classroom” (Acuna, par. 14) and is thus shared by Chicanos/as and
Native Americans.
9. For a detailed analysis of the poem see Chapter 3.
10. These representations of this historical period can also be read as a way to glorify the
building of the United States, which naturally ignores or conceals what would tarnish this
image.
11. In The American Heritage College Dictionary, “poiesis” is defined as “production, creation,
or formation.”
12. The second chronological list focuses entirely on Black Indians.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER TWO
13. This issue constitutes the unofficial proceedings of a session of the ninety-ninth annual
conference of the American Anthropological Association in November 2000, entitled
“Native Places, Public Spaces.” Each author in this issue discusses native peoples’
dependence on and connection to the land with a special focus on his or her tribal land.
14. These two terms have been coined by anthropologists Ralph Linton and Anthony
F.C. Wallace respectively. Linton defines a nativistic movement as “[a]ny conscious,
organized attempt on the part of a society’s members to revive or perpetuate selected aspects
of its culture” (499). Wallace defines a revitalization movement as “a deliberate, organized,
conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture” (265).
15. The “first Ghost Dance” took place in 1870 (La Barre 227), but it is the “Great Ghost Dance
of 1890” (La Barre 229) that has received the most attention, as it culminated in the brutal
massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890.
16. Leana Hicks remarks that the folkloric “apparition story of the Virgin is based on two
documents: one written in Spanish in 1646 by an Oratorian priest named Miguel Sánchez,
and the other written a year later in Nahuatl […] by the vicar of Guadalupe, Luis Laso de la
Vega. Vega’s version is much more articulate and detailed, revealing more Nahuatl
contributions to the story” (34).
17. Juan Diego has become the Catholic Church’s first Indian saint after Pope John Paul II
canonized him during his visit to Mexico in July 2002 (CNN.com, July 31, 2002).
18. The implications of Antonio’s heritage for the formation of his identity will be discussed in
Chapter 4.
19. Vine Deloria, Jr. also refers to a more “precise” or specific nature of tribal religion as a reason for contemporary Indians’ turn—or return—to their native religions (253).
20. Since Ben Benally does not so much represent a syncretic religion in terms of a merging of native and Christian beliefs, but demonstrates the notion of the land as a spiritual guiding force, his influence on Abel will be discussed further on (p. 70).
21. See Chapters 3 and 4 for a discussion of Abel’s identity formation.
22. Several critics have noted that Tosamah seems to be modeled after Momaday himself, since part of one of his sermons contains a verbatim passage from Momaday’s *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (cf. e.g. Velie, “Identity and Genre in *House Made of Dawn*” 177).
23. It is important to point out, however, that while Chicanos/as could join the Native American Church and attend their services, due to Chicanos/as’ ethnic status in the U.S. as “Caucasian,” they are not permitted to claim any tribal rights, which eliminates the legal practice of peyote religious rituals (i.e. the consumption of peyote)—an ironic fact when one considers the religion’s origin.
24. The late Joseph Epes Brown was one of the first scholars of native religions and a renowned author in the field of Native American studies. He is best known for his close work with Black Elk, an Oglala Sioux holy man, who related to him sacred Oglala traditions, published in the book *The Sacred Pipe* (1997).
25. In *Almanac of the Dead* (1991), a small creek has an important role at the end of the novel, which is similar to that of the springs in *Ceremony* and *Gardens in the Dunes*. The function of these water sources in Silko’s novels will be discussed further below (p. 62–68).
26. In *The Mythology of Native North America* (1998), David Leeming and Jake Page point out that the element of the flood is common to an array of creation stories from various traditions. Leeming and Page state, “It often happens in creation myths that the creator becomes disappointed or even disgusted with his work. Usually it is the behavior of his human subjects that disturbs him (or her), and he can think of nothing better than to wash them away and begin again” (104).
27. Gloria Anzaldúá, emphasizing her attachment to her origins and her homeland, describes herself as a “turtle,” carrying her home on her back, so that she can take it with her wherever she goes, especially when her travels take her away from her native Texas (*Borderlands* 43).
28. “The mountain had been named for the swirling veils of clouds, the membranes of foggy mist clinging to the peaks, then leaving them covered with snow” (*Ceremony* 185).
29. The cattle can be interpreted as representative of Tayo’s search because like him, they are native to the land, a mixed breed with the strength and stamina to survive the adverse conditions of the desert.
30. Joy Harjo went to boarding school in Santa Fe, got her B.A. from the University of New Mexico, has been an instructor at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, the University of Arizona in Tucson, and the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. She also lived in Albuquerque with Acoma Pueblo poet and essayist Simon Ortiz, with whom she has a daughter.
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32. In a recent article in *The Atlantic Monthly*, Toby Lester analyzes the development of new religious movements, which gain more and more popularity, and thus have become a serious subject of academic and intellectual study. Many of them are true syncretic religions as they emerged out of “old” religions and mutated into something new, thereby often combining two or more established denominations (37–38).

NOTES FOR CHAPTER THREE
33. Turner and Brown give the “Black is Beautiful” movement as an example of this action (204).

34. In the introduction to the poem, Gonzales states that Joaquin is “a social statement, a conclusion of our mestisaje, a welding of the oppressor (Spaniard) and the oppressed (Indian)” (1), an idea he conveys by publishing the poem in both English and Spanish while at the same time ensuring that the other “oppressor,” the Anglo-American, also understands the poem as a call for resistance, a “literary and anthropological quest for our roots, the renewal of a fierce pride and tribal unity” (Gonzales 1). (For convenience’s sake, only the English version will be quoted here.)

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36. It is interesting to note here, as does Pérrez-Torres in his study, that “Baca does not call himself a Chicano but a detribalized Apache, foregrounding the holocaust of indigenous people by Euroamericans in their territorialization of Aztlán” (285).

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38. “Walatowa” is the ancient Indian name for the Jemez Pueblo. The two names will be used interchangeably here.

39. Appears by permission of the publisher, Thunder’s Mouth Press.

40. In her 1994 poetry collection The Woman Who Fell from the Sky, Harjo maintains that “the word ‘poet’ is synonymous with truth teller” (19).

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NOTES FOR CHAPTER FOUR

42. These narrative techniques are by no means unique to postcolonial or indigenous authors. Modernist authors, such as William Faulkner or Virginia Wolf, or postmodernist authors, such as Donald Barthelme, have used fragmentation and non-linearity of plot structures in their works as a means of defamiliarization. However, as this chapter will demonstrate, southwestern indigenous authors differ from modernist or postmodernist authors in their use of traditional ritual narrative structures and their incorporation of a solution to their characters’ predicament in their works.

43. Paula Gunn Allen remarks in her collection of essays, The Sacred Hoop, that Spider Woman’s name “can be better understood if translated as Creating-through-Thinking Woman” (98).

44. In her Sacred Hoop, Paula Gunn Allen defines chantways as healing ceremonies which “emphasize restoration of wholeness, for disease is a condition of division and separation from the harmony of the whole. Beauty is wholeness. Health is wholeness. Goodness is wholeness” (60–61). A chant, such as the Navajo Mountain Chant or Night chant, are “sung over” the person suffering from a disruption of this wholeness to restore his/her integration into his/her community and environment.

45. Since this non-linear plot makes it difficult for the reader to follow the novel’s complicated time scheme, Momaday took to heart the advice of one of his editors to date the chapters of the novel in order to facilitate the reader’s reading and understanding of the book (Schubnell 96).

46. Susan Scarberry-García notes that Momaday disclosed in a letter to Matthias Schubnell that “he believes that the bear is still guarding Tsoai (Devil’s Tower) and even guarding Momaday himself.” The bear, as Momaday’s “‘guardian spirit’ has protected Momaday’s gift of language,” thus “perpetuating the life of a storyteller” (49).

47. Susan Scarberry-García explains that “returning home galvanizes power. [Angela] changes from a person in need of rebalancing her own life into a protective healer for Abel” (62).
48. A number of critics have analyzed the function and interconnectedness of the stories in *Ceremony*, for example Louis Owens in his book *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel* (1992), James Ruppert in his study *Mediation in Contemporary Fiction* (1995), or Catherine Rainwater in *Dreams of Fiery Stars: The Transformation of Native American Fiction* (1999). Many of these critical studies discuss Silko’s retelling of traditional tribal stories to express the need for stories and ceremonies to adapt to modern times; others focus on the curative powers of the stories and Silko’s role as storyteller/healer to effect Tayo’s restoration of health.
Bibliography


Bibliography


Index

A
Acoma, see Pueblo
AIM (American Indian Movement), 19–21, 22, 24, 115
Alcatraz, 20, 170n. 8
Allen, Paula Gunn, 11, 60, 116, 121, 124, 125, 140, 161, 163, 173nn. 43, 44
   Sacred Hoop, The, 121, 161, 163, 173nn. 43, 44
American Indian Movement, see AIM
Anasazi, 2
Anaya, Rudolfo, 1, 2, 3, 4, 12, 15–16, 34–35, 36, 45, 46, 56–60, 105–108, 111, 144–153, 154, 156, 158, 163, 166, 167, 168, 169nn. 1, 2
   Alburquerque, 1, 105–108, 111, 167, 168, 169n. 1
   Bless Me, Ultima, 1, 4, 15–16, 46, 105, 144–153, 158, 166
   Heart of Aztlán, 1, 34–35, 56, 57, 60
   Legend of La Llorona, The, 12
   My Land Sings, 57–60
   Tortuga, 59–60, 166
Aztlán, 2, 3, 4, 13, 17, 23, 35, 56, 57, 60, 89, 90, 91, 173n. 36

B
Baca, Jimmy Santiago, 90–92, 93, 95, 173n. 36
Badger, 58, 61;
   see also stories
Bakhtin, Mikhail, 82, 104, 122, 125
Barrio, 34, 35, 105, 106, 107
Beauty way, 100
Bear, 129, 131, 133, 173n. 46;
   see also stories;
   Kiowa
Beaver, 57;
   see also stories
Bell, Betty Louise, 93–95
   Faces in the Moon, 93–95
Bhabha, Homi, 79
BIA (Bureau of Indian Affairs), 19, 20
Biculturalism
   bicultural education, 22
   bicultural heritage, 155;
see also heritage
  bicultural identity/subject, 1, 6, 38, 107, 120, 153, 163, 165, 168, 170n. 4
Big Dipper, 53, 129;
  see also Devil’s Tower;
  Kiowa
Black Christ, 43–45;
  see also Nuestro Señor de Esquipúlas
Black Elk, 172n. 24
Brown, Joseph Epes, 54, 55, 75, 172n. 24
Bruce-Novoa, Juan, 82, 85, 86, 88, 89
Bureau of Indian Affairs, see BIA

C
Cactus, 40, 42, 50;
  see also peyote
Candelaria, Cordelia, 83, 88, 89
Castillo, Ana, 4, 18, 40, 45, 60–62, 168
  So Far From God, 4, 18–19, 45, 60–62
Catholicism, 43, 47, 49, 50, 76, 127, 144
  Catholic Church/priests, 15, 43–45, 48, 126, 127, 145, 17n. 17
  Catholic customs/rituals, 47, 48, 49
  Catholic faith, 14, 146
Ceremonies, 11, 39, 48, 51, 52, 54, 55, 71, 75, 100, 106, 127, 135, 136, 137, 138, 140, 142, 163,
  167, 174n. 48
Chantways, 125
Chávez, César, 22, 35
Chávez, Denise, 153–163, 167
  Last of the Menu Girls, The, 153–163, 167
Chávez, John R., 13, 21, 22
Cherokee, 54, 93, 94, 128
Chicano homeland, see Aztlán
Chicano Movement, see Movimiento
Chicomoztoc, see Tenochtitlán
Chimayó (Tsimayó), 43–45
Chippewa, 57
Choctaw, 52, 54, 170n 6
Circular time, see time
Cisneros, Sandra, 43
Civil Rights Movement, 19, 23, 25
Clinton, President Bill, 51
Coatlicue, 41, 107
Columbus, Christopher, 2
Comanche, 59
Compadrazgo, 154, 162
  compadre, 154, 156, 159, 161, 162
Conversion, see religious conversion
Corn Woman, 138–139;
  see also stories
Coronado, Francisco Vásquez de, 11, 13, 14
Cortés, Hernando, 2, 11, 12, 13, 14, 29, 41, 90
Counter-narrative/counterstories, 5, 10, 28, 29, 33, 141, 142, 158
countermemory, 28
counterversion of history, 34
Coyote, 57–58, 143;
   see also stories;
   Anaya
Creation, 4, 10, 37;
   see also stories
Crusade for Justice, 23, 83;
   see also spiritual crusade
Cuentistas, see storytellers
Curandera, 19, 45, 59, 61, 105, 144, 145, 146, 152;
   see also healing
Cyclical time, see time
Cyclical nature of life, see time

D
Dasenbrock, Reed Way, 119, 120, 169n. 2
Deloria, Jr., Vine, 10, 19, 20, 21, 55, 74–76, 171n. 19
Devil's Tower, 53, 129, 173n. 46;
   see also BigDipper;
   Kiowa
Diné, 1;
   see also Navajo
Doña Marina, see Malinche, la
Dreams, 145, 147, 150–153
Duck, 57;
   see also stories

E
Earth, 37, 44, 48, 58, 60, 61, 67, 71, 73, 113, 115, 126, 147, 148, 153, 167
   earth as mother/grandmother, 35, 48, 52, 65, 66, 74, 139
   earth-divers, 57;
   see also stories
Emergence, see stories;
   place
Environment, ecology, 63, 74, 108, 116, 117, 148, 167
   spiritual environmentalism, see spirituality
Esquipúlas, see Nuestro Señor de Esquipúlas
Ethnicity, 18, 106, 150
   ethnic, 4, 169n. 3
Ethnocentrism, 55
Eurocentrism, 5, 26, 31, 32, 33, 141, 166
Exploitation, see land

F
Fanon, Frantz, 91
Feathered Serpent, see Quetzalcoatl
Fifth World, 58
First Man and First Woman, 57–58;
   see also stories;
   Anaya
Flowers, see plants
Fly, 139–140, 149;
see also stories
Fourth World, 58, 62
Fragmentation
fragmented identity, 96, 112, 125, 128, 129, 142, 153, 156, 157, 160, 161, 162, 165
fragmented narratives, 6, 98, 123, 128, 129, 130, 157, 161, 163, 167, 173n. 42
Franciscans, 15, 41, 48, 51
Frontier, 27

G
Gandhi, Leela, 79
Geronimo, 30–31
Ghost Dance, 21, 39, 52, 65, 67, 109, 112, 113, 171n. 15
Wovoka, 39, 65
Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, 161
Golden Carp, 47, 144, 145, 146, 149, 150, 152–153
Gospel, 39, 50, 102, 128

H
Harjo, Joy, 9, 11, 68–69, 72–73, 115–119, 168, 172n. 30, 173n. 40
Healing, 40, 44, 45, 59, 61, 62, 63, 70, 73, 75, 100, 115, 125, 131–136, 146, 163, 166, 167
healer, 19, 174n. 48;
see also curandera
Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich von, 79, 82, 113
Heritage, 3, 4, 23, 34, 38, 56, 76, 83, 86–89, 93, 95, 105, 107, 124, 125, 132, 136, 145, 146, 150,
152
dual heritage, 6, 21, 23, 46, 96, 124, 134, 136, 144–146, 155
Heteroglossia, 142, 148, 150, 151, 158;
see also Bakhtin
historiography, 5, 24–28, 32
History, see narrative
Holy places, see places
Homeland, see land;
see also Aztlán
Hoover Dam, 54, 67
Hopi, 54, 58, 75
Huichol, 50, 51
Hummingbird, 58, 139–140, 149;
see also stories
Hybridity, 104
hybrid identity/sense of self, 5, 6, 57, 104, 105, 121
hybridization of Christian and native/pagan religion, 39, 44, 50, 52

I
Immigrants, 3, 4, 16, 17, 21, 22, 25, 26, 157, 165, 169n. 3
immigration, 25
Internarrative identity, 6, 121–123, 128, 132, 133, 134, 135, 137, 142, 144, 147, 153, 167;
see also Maan, Ajit K.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iroquois, 33, 57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**J**

Jemez, *see* Pueblo

**K**

Katsina (Kachina), 14, 46, 49

Kiowa, 2, 45, 50, 53, 95, 123, 128, 129

Krupat, Arnold, 143–144

Kukulcan, *see* Quetzalcoatl

**L**

La Barre, Weston, 51, 171n. 15

Laguna, *see* Pueblo

Lakota, 57

Land;

*see also* llano

exploitation of the land, 38, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 73, 74, 91, 167

land as home, 5, 13, 27, 37, 77, 161, 165

religious and spiritual attachment to/relationship with the land, 1, 2, 5, 19, 36–38, 52–55, 60, 62, 66, 71, 74, 129, 148, 152, 165, 167, 169n. 2, 172n. 27

sacred land, 36, 48, 53, 126

Language, use/power of, 99, 102–103, 118, 125

Leeming, David Adams, 58, 59, 61, 172n. 26

Lindemann Nelson, Hilde, 141, 159

Linear time, *see* time

Llano, 47, 48, 144, 145, 147, 148, 152

Llorona, La, 4, 12, 43, 151–152, 158;

*see also* Malinche, la

Locust, 61;

*see also* stories

**M**

Maan, Ajit K., 6, 121–123, 135, 167

Madsen, Deborah L., 154, 157, 158

Malinche, La, 12, 43

Malintzin, *see* La Malinche

Manifest Destiny, 4, 16, 25, 91

Majority-minority relationship, 6, 80–120;

*see also* Other

Marx, Karl, 32–33

Maya, 11, 12, 29, 73, 90, 145

Meier, Matt S., 17, 21, 22, 23, 24

Messiah, Indian, *see* Ghost Dance;

Wovoka

Mestizaje, 4, 23, 87, 88, 91, 121, 172n. 34

Mestizo, 3, 4, 13, 23, 40, 42, 43, 88, 106, 108, 111

Mexican-American War, 16

Mexico City, *see* Tenochtitlán

Migration, *see* stories
Minority, see majority-minority relationship;
    see also Other
Missionaries, see religious conversion
Mohawk, 57
Mole, 58–59;
    see also stories
Molho, Anthony, 24, 25, 26
    Man Made of Words, The, 74
    Names, The, 72
    Way to Rainy Mountain, The, 53, 129, 171n. 22
Montezuma, 11, 16
Mooney, James, 51
Mora, Pat, 43
Moraga, Cherrie, 40
Moscovici, Serge, 81–82
Mount Taylor, see Tse-pi’na
Mountain Chant, 173n. 44
Mountainway prayer, 131;
    see also Navajo;
    healing
Movimiento, 3, 4, 21–24, 34, 35, 56, 82, 83, 90
Muscogee, 9, 68, 72, 115
Muskrat, 57;
    see also stories Myth, see stories
    myth-making, 27

N
Nahuatl, 40–41, 42
Names, see place
Narrative;
    see also stories;
    counternarrative
    history as story/narrative;
    history-making process, 10, 28, 30, 32, 95
    master narrative, 122, 141, 159;
    see also Ricœur, Paul
    narrative identity, 6, 122;
    see also Ricœur, Paul
    narrative structure, 121, 135
Native
    creation/origin stories, see stories
    myths, see stories
    worldview, 10, 11, 14, 16, 38, 39, 47, 64, 71, 74, 77, 85
Native American Church, 40, 50–52, 171n. 23;
    see also peyote
Nativistic movement, 39–40, 171n. 14;
    see also Ghost Dance;
Peyote way;
Native American Church;
revitalization movement
Navajo, 1, 49, 50, 54, 55, 58, 70, 72, 95, 97, 98, 100, 123, 125, 126, 127, 131, 132, 134, 136, 170n.
6, 173n. 44
Nelson, Robert M., 56, 62–63, 64, 69, 70, 72
New Age, see shamanism
Niezen, Ronald, 54, 55
Night Chant, 70, 100, 132, 133, 173n. 44
Nightingale, Florence, 156, 157–158
Nuestro Señor de Esquipulas, 43–45;
see also Black Christ

O
Oñate, Don Juan de, 11, 14–15
Origin, see stories
Ortiz, Simon J., 37, 38, 76, 115, 143, 166, 172n. 30
Other, the, 28, 79, 80, 82, 83, 87, 89, 91, 104, 111, 113, 114, 119
Owens, Louis, 96, 98, 100, 101, 103, 104, 105, 137, 139, 174n. 48
Owl, 48, 152

P
Pagan religion/belief, 42, 44, 45, 47, 48, 113, 144, 145, 146, 149, 152
Paiute, see Ghost Dance
Pan-tribal
    religion, 52
    stories, 128
People, the, 1, 34, 56;
    see also Raza, la;
        Diné
Pérez-Torres, Rafael, 83, 85–86, 90, 91, 92, 173n. 36
Peyote, 40, 50–52, 101, 104, 105, 171n. 23;
    see also Native American Church
Pinanne, 46
Place
    as sacred, 5, 38, 44, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 62, 65, 66, 68, 70, 126
    names, 126–127
    of origin/emergence, 37, 54, 55–56, 57, 60, 62, 64, 66, 67, 72;
    see also sipapu;
    stories
Plants, 61, 63, 66, 67, 68, 111
Price, David W., 28, 33
Pueblo, 1, 2, 11, 13, 14, 15, 18, 19, 28, 37, 44–45, 46, 48, 50, 53, 56, 57, 58, 60, 61, 62, 64, 69, 70,
138, 139, 142, 143, 144, 170n. 5, 172n. 30, 173n. 38
Acoma, 37, 61, 115, 143, 172n. 30
Jemez, 2, 15, 19, 48, 49, 50, 69, 70, 71, 91, 95, 96, 98, 105, 123, 124, 125–127, 129–130, 131,
132, 170n. 5, 173n. 38
Laguna, 11, 28, 45, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 108, 116, 121, 134, 136, 138, 139, 140, 141, 143
Tewa, 44–45, 58, 59
Zuni, 11, 13, 46
Q
Quetzalcoatl, 11, 16, 22
Quintana, Alvina E., 154

R
Rainy Mountain, 53, 129;
   see also Momaday
Raven, 57–58;
   see also stories;
   Anaya
Raza, la, 1, 87, 88
Reed Woman, 138–139;
   see also stories
Regionalism, 2, 169n. 2
Religious conversion, 5, 15, 24, 38, 42, 44, 49
Religious syncretism, 38, 39, 40, 41, 43, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 52, 104, 127, 146, 152, 153, 172n. 32
Relocation, 19, 98, 99, 130
Renaissance
   cultural, 24
   literary, 3, 24
Revitalization movement, 39, 52, 171n. 14;
   see also nativistic movement;
   Ghost Dance;
   Peyote Way;
   Native American Church
Ribera, Feliciano, see Meier, Matt S.
Ricœur, Paul, 6, 28, 122–123;
   see also narrative
Rio Grande, 13, 58, 59, 144
Rodriguez, Richard, 40
Rose, Wendy, 75
Ruppert, James, 96, 97, 98, 101, 142, 174n. 48

S
Sacred, see place;
   land
Saldivar, Ramón, 4, 9, 146, 147, 150, 153
Sanctuary, 44, 67, 68, 73
Sandia Mountain, 59;
   see also turtle;
   stories
Santuario, see sanctuary
Scarberry-García, Susan, 40, 125, 127, 128, 129, 131, 133, 134, 173n. 46, 174n. 47
Schubnell, Matthias, 124, 125, 173n. 46
Serpent, see snake
Shamanism, 75
Almanac of the Dead, 1, 28, 29, 30–34, 35, 64–66, 73, 108, 166, 168, 172n. 25
Ceremony, 17–18, 19, 56, 61, 62–64, 69, 73, 125, 134–142, 144, 146, 147, 150, 163, 166, 172n. 25, 174n. 48
Gardens in the Dunes, 56, 66–68, 73, 108–114, 167, 172n. 25
Storyteller, 30, 45–46, 48, 142–144
Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit, 29
Sioux, 21, 55, 172n. 24
Sipapu, 54, 56, 57, 63, 66, 67, 68, 73, 172n. 25
Sixth World, 58
Sky Woman, 57;
see also stories
Snake, 49, 66, 67, 68
Snake, Reuben, 51, 52
Social Identity Theory, 80–82, 167
application of, 82–120
Social group, 80–120, 165
Sollors, Werner, 169n. 2
Spider, 125
Spider Woman, 58, 61, 173n. 43;
see also Thought Woman
Spirituality, 86, 104, 127, 146, 166
“spiritual crusade”, 20
spiritual environmentalism, 39, 52, 53, 76, 167
spiritual guidance, 68, 70, 71, 73, 102, 112, 147, 171n. 20
spiritual identity, 6, 37, 38, 56, 77
spiritual relationship with the land, 5, 35–38, 40, 64, 69, 126, 144, 165, 166
Spivak, Gayatri, 122
Springs, see sipapu
Stories;
see also narrative
creation/origin stories, 39, 52, 53, 55–62, 66, 125, 167, 172n. 26;
see also emergence stories
emergence stories, 39, 52, 56–58, 60, 61, 166
historical/war stories, 135, 140, 142
history as a form of story/narrative, 10, 28, 30, 32
migration stories, 56, 167
traditional/mythical stories, 10, 14, 29–30, 40, 56, 61, 107, 131, 133, 135, 136, 138, 139, 140, 142, 146, 149, 151, 167
Storytelling, 10, 29, 30, 133, 135, 140, 142, 147
storytellers, 30, 103, 123, 143, 144, 147, 163, 173n. 46, 174n. 48
Sun Dance, see Tai-me;
see also Kiowa
Syncretic
identity, see biculturalism
religion, see religious syncretism

T
Tai-me, 50, 128;
see also Kiowa
Tajfel, Henri, 6, 80–81, 114, 167
Tales, see stories
Tapahonso, Luci, 68
Tedlock, Dennis, 46
Tenochtitlán (Mexico City), 11, 13, 32, 41, 42, 107
Tepeyac, 40–42;
   see also Virgin of Guadalupe
Tewa, see Pueblo
Thought Woman, 61, 62, 125;
   see also Spider Woman
Tijerina, Reies López, 22–23
Time
   native understanding of time/life (circular/cyclical), 9–11, 14, 16, 31
   non-native understanding of time (linear), 10
Todorov, Tzvetan, 11
Toltec, 11
Tonantzin/Tonantsí, 40–41, 42
Tortoise, see turtle;
   see also stories
Trail of Broken Treaties, 20
Trail of Tears, 20
Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, 17, 22
Tribal belief system, 38, 40, 49, 66;
   see also native
Trickster, 40, 58, 101, 128
Ts‘eh Montaño, 62–63, 138, 139, 141, 142, 147;
   see also Tse’pina;
   Yellow Woman
Tse-pi’na, 62, 65, 138
Tsichtinako (Ts‘its’tsi’nako), 61, 62, 125
Tsimayó, see Chimayó
Tsoai, see Devil’s Tower
Turner, Frederick Jackson, 27
Turner, John, 80–81, 92, 107, 114, 172n. 33
Turtle, 57–60, 68, 172n. 27;
   see also stories;
   Anaya

V
Valdez, Luis, 3, 4, 165
Velie, Alan R., 49, 50, 123, 124, 125, 126, 130, 171n. 22
Vigil, James Diego, 11, 12, 17
Virgin de Guadalupe, 14, 40–42, 43, 44, 48, 146, 171n. 16;
   see also Tepeyac
   as syncretic figure, 48

W
Walotowa, 96, 97, 98, 124, 126, 132, 173n. 38;
   see also Pueblo
Weatherford, Jack, 33, 166
Wilson, James, 10, 11, 13–17, 20, 21, 45, 46
Womack, Craig S., 119
Woman Veiled in Clouds, see Tse-pi’na
Wood, Gordon S., 24–28
World view, see native
Wounded Knee, 21, 171n. 15
Wovoka, see Ghost Dance

Y
Yaqui, 30, 31
Yellow Wall-Paper, The, see Gilman, Charlotte Perkins
Yellow Woman, 138, 142

Z
Zuñi, see Pueblo