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Juliana Almeida Salles

Empowering natives through autobiographical writing: Lee Maracle's *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel* and Leslie Marmon Silko's *The Turquoise Ledge: a Memoir*

Rio de Janeiro
2014

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Dissertação apresentada, como requisito parcial para obtenção do título de Mestre, ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Área de concentração: Literaturas de Língua Inglesa.

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Aprovada em 02 de abril de 2014.

Banca Examinadora:

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Profª. Dra. Leila Assumpção Harris (Orientadora)

Instituto de Letras - UERJ

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Profª. Dra. Peônia Viana Guedes

Instituto de Letras - UERJ

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Prof. Dr. Luiz Manoel da Silva Oliveira

Universidade Federal de São João del-Rei - UFSJ

Rio de Janeiro

2014

DEDICATION

To my mother, Shirlei Belino de Almeida Salles.

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Thanking is not an easy thing to do because many people tend to be left out. Before this happens, I apologize in advance.

I would very much like to thank my advisor, Professor Leila Assumpção Harris, for the support and mainly patience throughout all these years. Leila has always been a role model to me when it comes to professional and academic issues, and that has deeply influenced me as a professional. Besides, when my duties made life overwhelming, she was there to show her support. Thank you, Leila! We've made it!

I would also like to thank professor Peônia Guedes for her patience, her help and her willingness to provide material and advise me. And most importantly: always with a smile on her face. Peônia has also played a major role in these two years: she has helped me both academically and professionally, and showed me how to perfect my practices and improve. Thank you, Peônia! It all meant a lot to me!

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Without the love and support of my family this dissertation would not have been possible.

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My sister, Beatriz Salles, showed her respect for my work and was able to sleep while the lights were still on throughout the night.

My mother, Shirlei Salles, the one who has always supported me, always cheered for me and believed I would succeed is the one I owe all this to. Ever since my schooldays, when life got hard, she fought hard and gave all she had so I could have the best education possible. There we went throughout the undergraduate course: she always believed I would make it through (even when I thought I would not). When I entered the master's course, she was there to support and cheer for me no matter what, and on the hardest days, she was there to tell me that she knew I could do it. One of the greatest "thank yous" are to her. Mom, without you none of this would have been possible. *Every* little thing mattered. Since day one. Thank you.

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I Lost My Talk

I lost my talk
The talk you took away.
When I was a little girl
At Shubenacadie school.
You snatched it away:
I speak like you
I think like you
I create like you
The scrambled ballad, about my word.
Two ways I talk
Both ways I say,
Your way is more powerful.
So gently I offer my hand and ask,
Let me find my talk
So I can teach you about me.

Rita Joe

RESUMO

SALLES, Juliana Almeida. *Empowering natives through autobiographical writing*: Lee Maracle's Bobbi Lee indian rebel and Leslie Marmon Silko's The turquoise ledge: a memoir. 2014. 113 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa) – Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2014.

Esta dissertação trata de duas obras autobiográficas escritas por autoras nativas que ganharam reconhecimento na década de 70: *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel* (1975), da nativo-canadense Lee Maracle, e *The Turquoise Ledge: a Memoir* (2010), da nativo-americana Leslie Marmon Silko. A importância destas autoras para a Renascença Nativo-Americana/Canadense é inegável, e cada uma delas contribuiu fazendo uso de estratégias diferentes: enquanto Maracle começou sua carreira com *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel*, de cunho autobiográfico, Silko esperou mais de trinta anos para publicar *The Turquoise Ledge*. A problematização de se ver estas obras pelo olhar estritamente ocidental, ou estritamente nativo, é discutida, assim como o aparentemente inevitável tom político dessas narrativas. Ainda que mais de três décadas separem a publicação das obras selecionadas, perguntas como: "Estas obras podem ser consideradas literatura?", "Elas têm como principal propósito engrandecer feitos pessoais das autoras?", ou "Como essas narrativas contribuem para o empoderamento do povo Nativo?" podem nunca chegar a serem respondidas, mas, de fato, incitaram a escrita desta dissertação e nortearam nossa análise.

Palavras-chave: Literatura nativo-canadense. Literatura nativo-americana. Empoderamento. Lee Maracle. Leslie Marmon Silko.

ABSTRACT

SALLES, Juliana Almeida. *Empowering natives through autobiographical writing*: Lee Maracle's Bobbi Lee indian rebel and Leslie Marmon Silko's The turquoise ledge: a memoir. 2014. 113f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa) – Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2014.

This dissertation brings to the fore two autobiographical works by Native women authors who first gained recognition in the 1970s: *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel* (1975), by Native-Canadian Lee Maracle and *The Turquoise Ledge: a Memoir* (2010), by Native-American Leslie Marmon Silko. These women's undeniable importance to the Native American/Canadian Renaissance is clear, and each of these authors decided to contribute to Native literature using different strategies: while Maracle started her career with *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel*, an autobiographical work, Silko waited over thirty years to publish her *The Turquoise Ledge*. The problematization of seeing either works strictly through Western or strictly through Native perspectives is also addressed here, along with the apparently inevitable political tone present in both narratives. Despite the fact that the two selected works have been written over three decades apart, questions such as: "Can these works be considered literature?", "Do they have as main purpose to highlight the authors' personal accomplishments?" or "How do they work to empower the Native people?" may never be answered, but they did incite the writing of this dissertation and guided our analysis.

Keywords: Native-Canadian literature. Native-American literature. Empowerment. Lee Maracle. Leslie Marmon Silko.

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

As stated by Canadian poet and song writer, Rita Joe, on the epigraph to this dissertation, Native peoples have lost their talk in both literal and metaphorical ways. In the literal way, I refer to the loss of a language of their own and the consequent imposition of the colonizer's language. With that, Natives have indeed lost their voice, lost many words to convey meanings and feelings only expressed in their mother tongue, becoming individuals trapped between two languages without really mastering either. As a consequence of the colonization process and the subsequent internalization of the colonizer's prejudice against them, added to the disregard shown by people of other races, the Natives have lost their pride, their strength as a people, and ended up being silenced, metaphorically, losing their talk.

Rita Joe makes an allusion to education, a powerful ally of the colonizers in the process of acculturation: her own story at Schubenacadie School is one of the many stories of oppression and cultural suppression. At those institutions, children were often prohibited to speak their mother tongues and could only communicate in English. About the loss of *her* talk, Joe states "You snatched away", referring to the colonizer and his allies. This poem, however, very much shows how the Natives were able to learn a new way to talk, how they have recently coped with their capacity to straddle between two cultures and languages, and how they have now decided to teach the West about themselves.

Ironically enough, to be able to teach the West about them, the Natives used the colonizer's language. According to Professor Peônia Viana Guedes, in her article "Empoderamento do Sujeito Feminino Indígena em *Storyteller* e *The Turquoise Ledge: a Memoir*, de Leslie Marmon Silko" (2013), writing is one of the many ways to empower individuals and marginalized or excluded groups. Despite the fact that the written word is often connected to the oppressor, it is through the colonizer's language and the use of the written word that these communities can become known and show the existence of new identities and new kinds of representation (p. 130). The written works by Native people are examples of this way to empowerment, as they usually subvert traditional Western identity and literary genres.

In this dissertation I intend to work with Lee Maracle's *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel* (1990) and Leslie Marmon Silko's *The Turquoise Ledge: a Memoir* (2010), both of them

autobiographical works, encompassing the lives of Native women writers. Besides, the fact that these autobiographical narratives contribute to the empowerment of Native communities in general, not just Native of women, is of utmost importance. According to Anne Holden Rønning, on her article "Literature as an Empowerment of Identity" (1998):

> Some texts are empowering because they provide us with ideas as to how to master situations, as well as informing us of the nature of cultural reactions in different parts of our globalized world. It is at this level that reading empowers us, when we recognize that the characters and situations in a text are not unlike those we have experienced, and are able to use this knowledge to strengthen our own sense of identity, cultural or personal (p. 9).

When the experience of the writer has to do with the experience of a reader, there is identification, and the way the character/narrator is able to overcome certain problems and still succeed usually opens up possibilities for the reader.

It was because I had not heard their "talk" before that now I have decided to write about them.

As an undergraduate student, in my literature lessons, I do not recall having studied any Native writers. In fact, the Native presence was very much limited to Powhatan and his daughter, Pocahontas, and how she helped Captain John Smith at the time of the settlements in what would become the U.S.A. At no point did we read or discuss Natives that had no connection to whites. At that time, I started as a volunteer in a study group with Professor Leila Harris in her research on diasporic women and how their identity was problematized and affected by a myriad of factors. The readings opened my eyes to different kinds of works, and, of course, to contemporary novels. That was when I started to work with Caribbean-Canadian writer and poet, Dionne Brand. Her novel *What We All Long For* (2006), which addressed many features of Canadian identity, including the definition of "Canadianness" for the children of diaspora, instigated me to proceed with my studies.

When I decided to apply for the master's course, in 2011, I had no doubt that Brand's novel would be in my research project, so I focused on the concept of home for the second generation of immigrants in Canadian lands. However, during my first semester, I took a course on Canadian literature with Professor Peônia Viana Guedes and the first literary work I read in this class was Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* (1973). At first, not knowing what this work was about, I found it very shocking because of its strong political and denouncing tone on the situation of the *Métis* (women) in Canada, as well as because of the way Campbell wrote about herself: in a simple and straightforward style. Then, we read Margaret Laurence's

The Diviners (1974), which also brought about the issue of the *Métis* in Canada. The fact that it had been a recurrent topic, and I had never heard about it made me even more interested. Nevertheless, the final decision to change the direction of my research came when I read Lee Maracle's short story "Bertha" (1990), a third-person narrative of the life of a lonely, depressed and drunk Native woman living in terrible conditions, reminiscing about her life as a child. This story was another sign that there was a lot I could learn about the Native Canadians, so I started my research by reading Maracle's first work: an autobiographical account entitled *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel* (1990). At the time, I was struck by the strong political tone of the work and wondered if politics would always be an important part of Native women's autobiographical works.

As the research on Maracle led me to autobiographies, I decided that I would find another autobiographical literary narrative to work with. Aware of my search, Professor Leila Harris introduced me to Leslie Marmon Silko's "Lullaby" (1981), and I soon found *The Turquoise Ledge: a Memoir* (2010) and realized that I would work with both Native-American and Native-Canadian autobiographical works, and would eventually deal with the different strategy used by Maracle and Silko to reach their audiences with their autobiographical narratives, to contribute to the identification of other Natives, and these individuals' eventual empowerment.

My dissertation is composed of three chapters. Chapter one, "Colonizing the 'New World': the Europeans and the Others", is an attempt at framing the conditions of Native people in Canada and the United States ever since the beginning of colonization. As at that time there weren't nation-states involved, in this chapter, in the first moment, the colonization process of both Canada and the United States is seen as one, while in a later moment, the differences between both countries are highlighted. Firstly, the chapter focuses on the relationship between colonizers and Natives from North America as well as on the way they were perceived, especially how certain preconceptions towards the colonized first appeared. For that, I was based on theories by Cynthia Sugars and Laura Moss, George Tindall and David Shi, Bill Ashcroft et al, Stuart Hall and Nina Baym et al. I also discuss Native literature and its main themes in connection with Native culture and, refer to Native women authors by using Paula Gunn Allen, Kathleen Donovan, Stephanie Sellers, Devon Mihesuah, Penny Van Toorn, Edouard Glissant, James Clifford, Susan Friedman, Elleke Bohemer and Hertha Wong as theoretical basis. Then, as the focus becomes either Canada or the United States, issues

such as identity, the Native peoples that inhabit each country as well as the literary panorama of the country concerning Native literature are also brought up. When the focus is on Canada, the theories of Alan Anderson, Smaro Kambourelli, Linda Hutcheon and Marion Richmond, Northrop Frye, Chief Dan George, Jeannette Armstrong, Kathleen Donovan, Agnes Grant, Françoise Lionnet and Eigenbrod et al are used to frame my arguments. About the United States, St. John de Crèvecoeur, Frederick Jackson Turner, Paula Gunn Allen, Arnold Krupat, Mary Eagleton, Linda Hutcheon and Françoise Lionnet are the theorists used to weave this part of my work.

The second chapter is entitled "Lee Maracle's *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel:* Political Writing Opening Doors to Native Canadian Literature". *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel* (1990) is an autobiographical account of Maracle's life, but it does not have Lee Maracle as main character: Bobbi Lee is the character whose life history is being told. Taking the fact that Lee is a representation of Maracle, my analysis is problematized by the comparison between the 1975 and the 1990 editions of the book, along with the questioning of how literary this work really is. To do so, theorists such as Agnes Grant, Marta Dvorak, Eliane Campello, Terry Eagleton, Liane Schneider and Mary Eagleton are used to help me on my attempt to answer the questions: Is *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel* Native literature? Can it be considered Western literature? What is there of literary in this text? Is it fair to reduce *Bobbi Lee* to a political work, with no contribution to literature? Is the fact that it is a collaborative work between whites and native taken into account?

When it comes to the genre, Maracle's work is discussed under the light of Georges Gusdorf, Stuart Hall, Susan Friedman, Philippe Lejeune, Sidonie Smith, Julia Watson and Jana Evans Braziel's theories about autobiography. In fact, Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* (1973) is also a parameter to discuss Maracle's work in this chapter. Other than the genre, the presence of political issues is so strong that it is discussed taking into account both editions of *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel*.

"Leslie Marmon Silko's *The Turquoise Ledge: a Memoir*: a Hybrid Work", is the title of the third chapter that focuses on Silko's memoir. For this analysis, the discussion of identity issues was crucial to understand the organization of this work, so theories from Stuart Hall and Bill Ashcroft et al were used. When it comes to the reference to Native culture and literature, Silko's work is discussed under the conceptions of Paula Gunn Allen and Stephanie A. Sellers, which very much clarify passages that might be misread by lay readers.

Since *The Turquoise Ledge* is a relatively recent work, the use of interviews and reviews were crucial for the weaving of this chapter. Many comments from reviewers were brought up and discussed in a way that the primary work was always focused on. In order to address the political tone of certain passages, I resorted primarily to theorist Linda Hutcheon along with Hertha Wong and Paula Gunn Allen. In the discussion on *The Turquoise Ledge* and the autobiographical genres, the theories by Philippe Lejeune, Smith and Watson as well as Wong are my starting points.

When I finished my reading of *The Turquoise Ledge:* a Memoir, I realized how politics as well as prejudice and injustices towards the Natives in a general way constitute linking points between Silko's and Maracle's work. The fact that they were published over thirty years apart from each other also called my attention: both writers have decided to deal with their life histories in a very different way. Maracle's strategy was to start her career by publishing the story of her life, while Silko seems to have waited her whole career to do so. The difference in their backgrounds and formal education may help explain, at least in part, why their writing careers followed distinctive trajectories. However, it seems that both writers have been trying to serve the same purpose: to fill in the "void" created by the lack of works produced by Native writers and by the lack of characters with whom Native people could identify, as mentions theorist Agnes Grant (1990).

This dissertation then, deals with two autobiographical works, one by a Native Canadian author and the other by a Native American author. Both women have used writing to speak their minds, to voice their needs to talk about Natives, and their universe. However simple it may sound, these women were not raised solely in the Western culture, and many Natives have suffered a lot because of their mixed cultural influences. Being displaced from society and from literature are two issues that seem to walk hand-in-hand in these women's writings. My focus is on the effects of these works to Native people and how empowering they are, besides teaching members of other ethnicities about their culture and people. For sure, there is a lot more to be explored in the works analyzed here, but because I needed a focal point, a lot has been left out.

Finally, as stated by Paula Gunn Allen (1992):

> American Indians are not doomed victims of western imperialism or progress; they are also the carriers of the dream that most activist movements in the Americas claim to be seeking. The major difference between most activist movements and tribal societies is that for

> millennia American Indians have based their social systems, however diverse, on ritual, spirit-centered, woman-focused world views (p. 2).

So, it is because they carry this dream that Native authors keep on writing and therefore empowering other Natives. Besides, as Allen also states, tribal cultures have existed for several hundreds of years and it is not a few hundred years of colonization that will bring them to an end.

It is with this hopeful comment that I open my dissertation, so that the power of the two autobiographical narratives dealt with here can be truly perceived.

1 **COLONIZING THE "NEW WORLD": THE EUROPEANS AND THE OTHERS**

> Discovery in our usage means that the discoverer brought the so-called unknown territory into the written record of European civilization. – *Victor Hopwood*

Even though most traditional History books do not comprise the time before the arrival of the Europeans to the northern part of the American continent, it is important to state that this area was not as "new" as the explorers claimed. In fact:

> The designation 'New World' is itself telling, for of course the world of North America was anything but 'new'. Aboriginal peoples had inhabited the area for centuries before the first Europeans appeared off the coast of Newfoundland in search of rich fishing grounds (SUGARS; MOSS, 2009a, p. 16).

At the time when the Spanish intended to build their Empire in the "New World", what is now the territory of Central America served as harbor to Columbus and his soldiers. This first documented contact, back in the fifteenth century, triggered magnificent exchanges of culture and of biological systems. Historians George B. Tindall and David E. Shi, in *America* (1989) affirmed it was "[…] an exchange of such magnitude and rapidity as humanity had never known before" (p. 6), new animals and plants, devices and food, medicine and language became part of the Europeans' lives. However in this great exchange, illnesses were also brought to the "new land": whole communities were devastated by minor diseases such as measles, and also major infections (which spread quickly) as smallpox and typhus contributed to the loss in some tribes of "90-95 percent of their population within the first century of European colonization" (p. 8). It was after the news of Columbus' arrival in the "new land" that other professional explorers decided to take a chance at finding a way to get to the Orient. The first to lay eyes upon North America was John Cabot in 1497; this Venetian explorer was sponsored by the English king, but the British were much too worried about internal conflicts, so Cabot's findings did not become a priority just then.

After the Spanish had built their Empire in the "New World", the whole land was Spanish (except for Brazil, under Portuguese rule) and this nation started to exploit the area and its natives. As time went by, England and France started to become serious threats to

Spain since both countries were in want of riches and strongly affected by the Protestant Reformation. France posed the first threat by making their initial attempt at colonization: near the current territory of Québec, the explorer Jacques Cartier established a colony in 1542 which did not last long. Only after approximately half a century, new settlements were established in Nova Scotia and Québec and effective colonization in what would become the U.S.A. and Canada actually started. In those colonies, the French engaged in trade with the Natives, while Jesuit missionaries worked on their pagan souls. Soon, as the missions continued, the French took their colonies southwards; in the early eighteenth century a settlement called New Orleans was established, and by that time, France controlled great part of the inland waterway in North America, but "it was a deceptive control because the French monarchy never emphasized permanent settlement. Instead, it viewed the region almost solely as a source for trade" (TINDALL; SHI, 1989, p. 14).

From mid-sixteenth century onwards the strength of the Dutch and English started to threaten the Spanish as well, and in 1588, when their Armada was defeated by the English, the latter realized their enemy's navy was no longer considered invincible. The English colonization began in 1584, when an expedition was sent to explore and find out a way to found a settlement colony in America. In 1587, settlers arrived in the land around North Carolina named Roanoke and set up a colony. This settlement, however, did not last long: by 1590 there was absolutely no trace of those people, and according to Tindall and Shi, "There was not a single Englishman in North America when Queen Elizabeth died in 1603" (p. 15). Not until 1607 was there an English settlement colony in the American territory.

Despite the clear economic interest in the colonies, the English, as well as the French, started settler colonies, which according to Bill Ashcroft et al (2001) is a term

> […] often used to distinguish between two types of European colonies: settler (or settler-invader) colonies and colonies of occupation. Nigeria and India are examples of colonies of occupation, where the indigenous people remained in the majority but were administered by a foreign power. Examples of settler colonies where, over time, the invading Europeans (or their descendants) annihilated, displaced and/or marginalized the indigenes to become a majority non-indigenous population, include Argentina, Australia, Canada and the United States (p. 211).

This definition is extremely relevant when it comes to the analysis of the Native Canadian and Native American peoples, since it would be confusing to call both countries "colonies" as this process of colonization differs from the ones that took place in the Caribbean and Africa in

the end of the nineteenth and in the twentieth century. Furthermore, when it comes to the settlers in the areas of both Canada and the USA, it can be said that they have an ambiguous position because as they have been dislocated from their original land and had to adapt to this new place, they tend to appropriate some of the "nativeness" to their own selves, which represents a kind of "re-birth" in the new land (see ASHCROFT et al, 2001, p. 211). The settlers are both discriminated by the colonizers *and* the colonized since they do not properly fit either positions, and, at the same time, can also be considered both colonizer and colonized – the former, because they share the too many characteristics with the colonizers, and the latter because they have come to settle and assimilated part of the Native culture (ASHCROFT et al, 2001, p. 211 – 212). In fact, there was great exchange of cultures at this encounter, as it was detailed by Cynthia Sugars and Laura Moss, in their *Canadian Literature in English:* Texts and Contexts (2009a):

> For the Europeans, this included exposure to new traditions, new foods, new wildlife, and new landscapes, all of which in a very short time ceased to be 'new' and became regarded as familiar and natural. (…) Likewise, Aboriginal communities were altered by their interactions with Europeans, not only by acquiring new technologies or being converted to Christianity, but also by using the fur trade as a way of involving Europeans in their own trading alliances and rivalries with other Aboriginal groups (p. 27).

Trade was one of the activities that involved exchange between Natives and Europeans. Both France and England had been rivals for a long period of time, and the fur trade became an aggravating factor in this rivalry. Not until the seventeenth century, though, did it reach the North American lands – putting to an end the years that area had been neglected by them (SUGARS; MOSS, 2009a, p. 18). Nevertheless, it is important to state that not only did the Natives help Europeans in the exploration of the land, but also in fur trade – without the Aboriginal groups there wouldn't have been any settlement either (p. 16).

In the encounter of explorers/settlers and Aborigines in North America, as much as there was cultural exchange, there was also the Europeans' cultural imposition on Natives. Even though, at the moment of contact, natives found themselves in great disadvantage – for the Europeans had such great weaponry and were so well-equipped – those that did not succumb to diseases still resisted for centuries. According to Tindall and Shi:

> They displayed an amazing capacity for adapting to changing circumstances, incorporating European technology and weaponry, forging new alliances, changing

> their own community structures, and in a surprising number of instances converting whites to their simpler way of life (TINDALL; SHI, 1989, p. 3).

Still, the Aborigines were seen as different and exotic even though they were Native in America – and being *different* meant being *inferior*, in need of help so they could evolve.

This inferiority associated with the Natives in North America (and Natives in many other colonized lands as well) seems to have its origins in narratives of exploration in the "Newfoundland", as explorers had been sent by the king or by companies, there was the need of documents to describe these places. According to Sugars and Moss:

> Exploration and travel narratives were extremely popular in Europe from the sixteenth century onward. While many of these written accounts began as journals or reports composed for the directors of a fur-trading company or for the royal sponsor in England or France, in many cases the writers revised their accounts for commercial publication. The popularity of these narratives drew on a passion for exotic depiction of what was for Europeans a "new" and unfamiliar world. Many of these travel narratives included elaborate maps and illustrations, as well as detailed descriptions of North American Aboriginal peoples, who appeared as exotic to Europeans as did the peoples of China and India (p. 19).

By publishing the colonizer's point of view exclusively, it was clear that those who were indeed the "others" in the Newfoundland were the ones who had the power to document the world to a number of people and determine "[…] the ways readers would imagine and assess the places and peoples they described" (p. 22). Natives then, were depicted as the "others", and according to Ashcroft et al (2001):

> In general terms, the 'other' is anyone who is separate from one's self. The existence of others is crucial in defining what is 'normal' and in locating one's own place in the world. The colonized subject is characterized as 'other' through discourses such as **primitivism** and **cannibalism**, as a means of establishing the **binary** separation of the colonizer and colonized and asserting the naturalness and primacy of the colonizing culture and world view (p. 169).

It can be said then, that history and literature were the main means that framed natives as primitive, and therefore savage and uncivilized.

After the arrival of Columbus to America, several works of art depicted this encounter. Stuart Hall, in his article "Thinking the Diaspora: Home-Thoughts from Abroad" (1999), mentions the famous engraving of Europe encountering America, in which "Amerigo Vespucci is the commanding male figure, surrounded by the insignia of power, science, knowledge and religion: and 'America' is, as often, allegorized as a woman, naked, in a

hammock, surrounded by the emblems of an – as yet unviolated – exotic landscape" (HALL, 1999, p. 5). Considering this comparison in a broader sphere, the American continent and therefore the natives were gendered as female, which brought several consequences:

> Further, by gendering the continent as female, these maps highlight the notion that the land is a 'virginal' space, ready to be tamed, controlled, and overtaken. The feminization of the new space makes it easier to justify conquest in a patriarchal system such as the European one of the time. The female body of America becomes the object of male desire in commercial gaze, and thus becomes an obvious metaphor for desired colonial domination (SUGARS; MOSS, 2009a, p. 29-30).

Such notions led the Europeans to believe that this land and its inhabitants needed to evolve, since their way of living was uncivilized and basically wrong. For that to happen there had to be the imposition of the colonizers' culture, which included patriarchalism and which would dismantle the pillars of Native societies.

Despite being mentioned in European records and contributing to the exploration of their own lands, natives had no chance to give their own version of what actually happened, not even of what had already happened by the time these records were written down. As claimed by Sugars and Moss (2009a), for centuries, the Aboriginal peoples, so affected by European imperialism did not have a chance to be heard, and that is why, in the last decades of the twentieth century, many Aboriginal authors have provided the world with alternative perspectives on the colonizers' accounts (p. 30-31) and, ironically enough, using literature to deconstruct the stereotypical images of them created by Europeans[1].

1.1 **Natives from North America**

According to Tindall and Shi, in *America* (1989), the North American tribes prior to the European settlement, were smaller, less settled and scattered when compared to other American tribes – such as the Incas, Mayas and Aztecs; migration was common in order to find food and better places to live in, and on the permanent settlements built by them, land

[1] In *The Norton Anthology of North-American Literature* (2012), there is reference to some authors that have gone largely unnoticed, such as Zitkala Sa (Gertrude Bonnim), in the 19th century.

was owned communally, but individuals were allowed to own what they produced (p. 2). Even though nowadays there are over hundreds of tribes across North America, back in the time of colonization the ancestors of "the Pueblos, Creeks and Iroquois [n]ever approached the level of social organization or cultural sophistication achieved by the Mayas or Aztecs" (p. 2). They had, however, their own organizational systems.

With the arrival of Europeans to the "Newfoundland", several colonizing practices were being applied and they represented a "[…] virtuous and necessary 'civilizing' task involving education and paternalistic nurture" (ASHCROFT et al, 2001, p. 47). Initially, the colonizers had to make sure the Natives were depicted as inferior not only when it came to trade or lifestyle, but also in a natural state, and this practice is a construct that has endured for centuries also among natives.

Many traditional Aboriginal peoples lived in gynocratic societies, and according to Paula Gunn Allen (1992):

> Some distinguishing features of a woman-centered social system include free and easy sexuality and wide latitude in personal style. This latitude means that a diversity of people, including gay males and lesbians, are not denied and are in fact likely to be accorded honor. Also likely to be prominent in such systems are nurturing, pacifist, and passive males (as defined by western minds) and self-defining, assertive, decisive women. In many tribes, the nurturing male constitutes the ideal adult model for boys while the decisive, self-directing female is the ideal model to which girls aspire (p. 2).

Stephanie Sellers (2008) states that "[…] the governing, ceremonial, and social structures of most gynocratic Native nations are based on gendered halves: women's duties and men's duties. The purpose of that is to maintain harmonious balance with[in] the nation […]" (p. 7). However, even though balance was highly valued

> […] this does not necessarily mean women and men had equal autonomy over their lives and similar opportunities for power. Even in some Native nations that were structured by a gender complementary system, women suffered from the effects of unequal power and experienced types of hardship present in patriarchal systems. However, in most gynocratic nations and certainly in the Eastern Woodlands [U.S.A.], women lived free of the constraints typically found in patriarchal systems (p. 7).

Kathleen Donovan gives some examples of activities destined to men and to women: men would be involved in "[…] more solitary pursuits of fishing, hunting, and trapping while women's activities included communal fishing and trapping of small game near camp, and the

harvesting of berries, nuts and wild rice. Men were in charge of hunting large animals […]" (DONOVAN, 1990, p. 22). Women were also responsible for controlling food and, at the same time, for maintaining the sense of community and interdependence among other members (p. 22). In fact, one of the bases of these nations' traditions were women as key elements in their creation stories: their bodily functions, their psycho-spiritual experiences, women as healers, as political leaders and as the source of all manner in life were ever-present traits in these stories (SELLERS, 2008, p. 3-4). Sellers also declares there were animals, males and transgenders along with women (p. 6). It is crucial to state though, that each nation had its own story which framed that people's philosophy.

It is crucial for the understanding of Native culture that these nations' pre-colonial traditions considered all beings sacred, because of their relationship with the earth. This connection with the land is one of the main features that differentiate the Natives' from the Western culture. The way

> […] the earth is named, conceptualized, and the multitude of different ceremonies conducted to communicate with or revere her[2] vary widely among Native nations; nevertheless, all Native nations do indeed revere her and see her, literally and metaphorically, as the source of all life (p. 11).

The beginning of the colonization process brought about the undermining of Natives' societal structure. And since colonization involves subjugation, the Whites forced their values over the colonized because the former thoroughly believed the Natives' culture of worshiping the land, and mainly having women play important roles in society was terribly wrong. Not only did Natives have their values questioned, but those were soon taken over by the patriarchal system: the women, who were formerly essential to society and households, were now basically "second-class citizens". Concerning the Whites' patriarchalism, Sellers claims it

> […] is not simply the centralization of men but the simultaneous subjugation of women in order for the men to maintain that privilege for themselves and all subsequent male generations. Patriarchy features an exclusive class system where only a small percentage of males at the top of the system have wealth; however, all males benefit from the patriarchal system because of the inherent privilege of men, even if they are poor (p. 84).

[2] The earth is referred to as "she" in Native traditional cultures.

Gynocracies, then, were one of the settlers' greatest fears, since European men could not conceive the fact that their women would be as powerful as the native ones, and neither could they let the indigenous culture survive and therefore undermine the whole colonization process (p. 91). Historian and writer Devon Abbot Mihesuah posits in the introduction to her book *Indigenous American Women:* Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism (2003) that:

> Native women did have various degrees of power, equality, and prestige within traditional tribal structures; the philosophies and policies of colonialism changed that status for many women; and Indigenous women still feel the effects of colonialism. The past does impact the present (MIHESUAH, 2003, p. xv).

Actually, in the beginning of colonization, Christian missionaries started the conversions among the Natives by focusing on men, believing that by converting men, women would simply follow their fathers, brothers and husbands, since, to them, those were the head of households (DONOVAN, 1990, p. 22). Then, realizing how differently Native communities worked, missionaries started to force them into assimilating the European values which consequently led to the internalization of racism, since they started to "reject their own culture that centralized women because they were told it was wrong, even 'savage' and 'ungodly' to believe in it anymore" (SELLERS, 2008, p. 8). Christian missionaries did not suspect that eventually those women would gain strength and become the authors of their own lives, and contribute to filling in the gap left in official history. About that, mixed-race literary critic, poet, activist and novelist Paula Gunn Allen claimed in the preface to *The Sacred Hoop*:

> It seems that gynocracy is a well-advanced social system among all the tribes, and while it falls ever more into disrepute and ignominy as progressive modernism makes its ugly inroads into native life, it simultaneously takes on new life, appearing in new guise and revealing its uncommon tenacity. […] The appearance of this decade's wealth of literature, art, and scholarship by Native American women is another welcome sign of our coming spring (ALLEN, 1992, p. xiii).

1.1.1 Native literature

As stated by Paula Gunn Allen, there *is* such thing as American[3] Indian Literature and it can be divided into two categories: traditional literature and genre literature of the present. Allen goes one stating that:

> Traditional literature can be further divided into ceremonial and popular varieties – that is, into canonical works and those that derive from the canon but are widely told and appeal to audiences gathered on social occasions. Contemporary works, or genre literature, can be divided into the classic western categories of poetry, short fiction, the novel, and drama, with addition of autobiography, as-told-to narrative, and mixed genre works. Structural and thematic elements from the oral tradition, usually from the writer's own tribe, always show up in contemporary works by American Indians, and elements from contemporary, non-Indian works sometimes show up in contemporaneous tribal social literature (ALLEN, 1992, p. 4).

Before the arrival of European colonizers, the natives had not yet had contact with the process of writing or with written words as we know them – as those were created and developed in the West – so, orality was used to pass on knowledge among Natives. As they did not keep written records, the main sources of knowledge were (and still are) the elders, whose main role was to tell stories and teach other members of the community; as traditional nations were matrilineal, grandmothers were usually the beholders of such powerful position. For being wiser, many Native authors make reference to grandmothers as the most respectable person in the family/community, the one who teaches lessons for life, usually by means of stories – Maria Campbell's autobiography, *Halfbreed* (1973), brings Cheechum, Leslie Marmon Silko's *The Turquoise Ledge: a Memoir* (2010) brings Grandma A'mooh and Grandma Whip, the epilogue to *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel* (1990) brings Lee Maracle's reference to Ta'ah (great-grandmother), Paula Gunn Allen's *The Sacred Hoop* (1992) also brings the figure of a great-grandmother.

As stated by Ashcroft et al (2001), it was in the hands of missionaries that the written forms and the acquisition of literacy became great symbols of civilization and, therefore, salvation. Until recently, anthropologists, media theorists, mission societies, and government policy makers still believed "[…] that oral and literate cultures are successive, mutually exclusive stages in a single, unavoidable path of cultural evolution" (TOORN, 2004, p. 24). This, Toorn goes on, justified forced-assimilation processes as the oral cultures would be evolving with the acquisition of literacy. According to Martinican writer, poet, essayist and critic Edouard Glissant, in his *Caribbean Discourse:* Selected Essays (1989), Literacy is

[3] Even though Allen refers to American Indian Literature, the passage also applies to Native Canadian literature.

intricately connected to an "all-powerfulness", helping to justify domination and rule citizens from oral civilizations (GLISSANT, 1989, p. 76). From the last decades of the twentieth century onwards, despite the fact that "Aboriginal cultures are now passed down through a variety of additional means such as books, magazines, dramatic and musical performances, films, television, radio and the Internet" (TOORN, 2004, p. 24), Native writers have realized the importance of the oral culture and made of it a source for their writing.

Actually, Toorn states the term used to refer to the oral discourse of Native peoples – which includes songs, stories, and ritual utterances in general – is "Orature", as it is a contradiction to use the term "oral literature" (p. 24). In *The Norton Anthology of North-American Literature* (2012), there is reference to the controversial aspect of this term. As the term literature comes from Latin, *litteratura*, it brings in "*littera*", the written word, the letter implied, making the combination of "oral" and "literature" a controversy. The choice to refer to Native expressions of oral tradition as "orature" is also suggested in the anthology. So, since the 1970s, Natives started being noticed as authors of serious literary works, and by means of written words have been showing the relevance of orature, as well as of the stories they tell natives and non-natives (p. 7).

Concerning the problems the Aboriginal peoples have been facing throughout history, Native-American writer and theorist Paula Gunn Allen has written about the Native American Renaissance, a concept which can be applied to the whole North-American continent. This renaissance, besides solving severe political and economic issues concerning Natives, also

> […] encompasses the widespread return of Indian people from every tribe to traditional practices and celebrations, the continuing and increasing publication of literary works by American Indian Arts – both contemporary and traditional – in Indian-owned and –operated museums and galleries as well as in wealthier venues recognized by peoples around the world, These occurrences, along with a growing number of films, plays, dance performances, and scholarship devoted to themes of American Indian life and thought, constitute a mighty cultural flowering, a truly Native American Renaissance (p. x).

Allen's concept is intricately connected to the process of colonization both Canada and the U.S.A. went through, and according to Glissant (1989), these areas, like the French Caribbean, had many ruptures in its history and could not have a historical consciousness gradually formed[4]. The Natives from North America went through this process and lack a

[4] Glissant is writing specifically about the French Caribbean, but what he says applies to other colonized areas as well.

history of their own because of the "[…] dislocation of the continuum, and the inability of the collective consciousness to absorb it all […]" (GLISSANT, 1989, p. 62) – the consequence of which Glissant calls nonhistory.

In order to regain this historical space, the French Caribbean needed to break free from the colonial ideology imposed on them, since the erasure of their traditional values brought with colonization kept them from resisting (p. 63). Likewise, the Natives have been though a process of erasure of their traditional values, which seriously affected their strength to resist openly and continuously.

As mentioned previously, the Natives, just as the French Caribbean, did not have the chance to tell their side of History, and were depicted as the Europeans wished. To Glissant:

> "History [with a capital H] ends where the histories of those peoples once reputed to be without history come together." History is a highly functional fantasy of the West, originating at precisely the time when it alone "made" the history of the World. If Hegel relegated African peoples to the ahistorical, Amerindian people to the prehistorical, in order to reserve History for European peoples exclusively, it appears that it is not because these African and American peoples "have entered history" that we can conclude today that such a hierarchical conception of the 'march of History' is no longer relevant (p. 64).

This hierarchy still exists, but with the publishing of several literary works by Natives from North-America, it was possible to show some of the other side of History. But how to write Native's version of History when they are marked by a nonhistory?

Glissant declares that as throughout the colonization process the collective memory was also erased, so the Native authors must "dig deep" into their memories, getting the signs from what she/he had got from everyday life (p. 64). That way, the author would connect culture and nature – what a person remembers from natural events – and be able to "fill in the gaps" left by official History with memories and stories. This process, then, has a strong fictional characteristic once memory is a personal asset often affected by several factors and is, thus, rarely the same for two individuals.

This "digging" might have been difficult once many elders have passed away and carried along with them precious elements of Native culture; the publishing of these authors' writings was difficult indeed. The publishing of Native authors back in the 1970s started being done by small publishers – sometimes even publishers specialized on natives' works, or women's – and usually under the approval of white editors who sometimes shaped the narratives so it could fit the market, which showed how much further natives still needed to

go to actually be heard. Such difficulty faced by Native authors has a lot to do with what Glissant stated on the similarities between History and Literature: "[…] in History as in Literature [,] Western thought (since it is the one that prevails here) [,] has practiced this form of domination and […] it has not managed (in spite of persistent advantages) to resist the liberating force of diversity" (GLISSANT, 1989, p. 71). It is then in attempts to fight this double hegemony over History and Literature that minorities have been struggling to be heard, while dealing with poverty and oppression (p. 76). Glissant argues that it is on Natives' claim for their voice that we realize the fragmented aspect of literature and how "[i]n it lie histories and the voice of peoples. We must reflect on a new relationship between history and literature. We need to live it differently" (p. 77).

Theorist James Clifford claims that this struggle to be heard involves self-affirmation about "sovereignty and 'first nationhood'[,] […] continuity of habitation, aboriginality and often a 'natural' connection to the land" (CLIFFORD, 1997, p. 308). Besides, Clifford states that the predicaments of tribes are, concerning certain historical circumstances, diasporic. On the other hand, even though diaspora necessarily invokes dislocation (not necessarily involving the idea of return), the North-American tribes have been through great loss and displacement: at the moment the settlers arrived, the Natives had their lands invaded and would eventually be enclosed in the so-called reservations. Clifford further explains that:

> […] inasmuch as diasporas are dispersed networks of people who share common historical experiences of dispossession, displacement, adaptation, and so forth, the kinds of transnational alliances currently being forged by Fourth World[5] peoples contain diasporic elements. United by similar claims to "firstness" on the land and by common histories of decimation and marginality, these alliances often deploy diasporist visions of return to an original place – a land commonly articulated in visions of nature, divinity, mother earth, and the ancestors (p. 309).

These ideas of "return" are still strong – the will to reconnect with traditions and communal bonds is a feature that is very much part of many Natives' lives.

[5] The term "Fourth World" was first used in a reference by Mbuto Milando, first secretary of the Tanzanian High Commission in a conversation with George Manuel, Chief of the National Indian Brotherhood of Canada, referring to the natives who would be immersed on their own traditional culture – these would then, be part of the Fourth World. In 1974, with the publication of *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality*, the term gained the idea of marginalized and poor nations/peoples. Moreover, it is destined to define the group of people which does not have a nation-state. (From: < http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fourth_World> Last accessed on January 21st 2014.)

1.1.2 Native women writers

Commenting on the loss of power suffered by Native women over the centuries, Paula Gunn Allen pointed out that:

> The status of tribal women has seriously declined over the centuries of white dominance, as they have been all but voiceless in tribal decision-making bodies since reconstitution of the tribes through colonial fiat […]. But over the last thirty years women's sense of ourselves as a group with a stake in the distribution of power on the reservations, in jobs, and within the intertribal urban Indian communities has grown (ALLEN, 1992, p. 30).

Power is a central issue when it comes to Native women nowadays. And in order to regain the power those women once had, modern tribal women have been trying to redefine themselves, as much as non-native women have been doing from the 1960s on (p. 43). Concerning this struggle, Allen reiterates how multifaceted Native women's identity really is:

> […] though she is at times beset by her knowledge of the enormous gap between the life she lives and the life she was raised to live, and while she adapts her mind and being to the circumstances of her present life, she does so in tribal ways, mending the tears in the web of being from which she takes her existence as she goes (p. 45-46).

However significant being a woman can be, saying gender is *the* defining factor in a woman's life would be an absolute oversimplification, especially when it comes to Native women. Even further essentializing would be to state that being a White woman is the same as a being a Métis or a Laguna Pueblo woman, or claiming that a poor Native woman is the same as a wealthy Native woman. Paula Gunn Allen claims a native woman's "sense of herself as a woman is first and foremost prescribed by her tribe" (p. 43).

In the chapter "Making History: Reflections on Feminism, Narrative and Desire" (1998), Susan Stanford Friedman affirms that many factors affect the gender system and that "[d]iscourses of multiple oppression, intersection, positionality, standpoint, and contradictory subject positions have to a large extent supplanted the monolithic category of 'woman' in academic feminism in the United States" (FRIEDMAN, 1998, p. 208). These multiple discourses may be associated with what Elleke Bohemer refers to as diversity or "layeredness" of women's experience, that is, in each woman there are several layers and

features that influence her. Likewise, there are varied "forms of self expression and community other than those prevalent in the West" (BOHEMER, 2005, p. 218). Some of those influences may then be foregrounded depending on the situation: if a woman in a professional environment, for instance, needs to be defined among a group of men, despite the myriad of influences that make her who she is, gender will, in that case, speak louder. In another situation, depending on the group she is inserted in, or the purpose of such gathering or of such distinction, this woman might have to have other features underscored; this is the theory of relationality.

Since their subjectivity is framed by several influences, women, as well as their autobiographical writings, are framed by relationality and often opposed to men's, mostly connected to individuality. According to Hertha D. Sweet Wong (1998) – a Berkeley University Professor who does research on autobiography, Native American literatures and visual studies –, this dialogic opposition can be paralleled to the oppositional Native American (other, different) and European (individual, universal) subjectivities, for male subjects are claimed to be connected to individuality, universal subjectivity, while women would be framed on relations, and therefore different. Wong overtly states that this analogy is merely reductive oppositionality, but it is important to highlight its relevance to her unfolding of ideas; her major point though, seems to be grounded on the cultural aspect: what would be the differences then between Native American men and women? If women's subjectivity is directly proportional to the Native one, and therefore to difference, where do Native American[6] women stand? Where do Native American men stand? However intricate this issue may be, the point lies on the fact that relationality thoroughly affects Native individuals nowadays for their multiple cultural influences in the globalized world as well as other aspects that might be highlighted or not, such as skin color, sexual orientation, and nationality[7]. Furthermore, indigenous subjectivities specifically offer a range of choices, referred by Wong as "nonoppositional relationality" (WONG, 1998, p. 170). This means that the Natives do not have to choose between being Native or being a woman, for instance. For them, there are alternative choices, and one facet of their subjectivities does not exclude others.

[6] Even though Wong refers to American Indian Literature, the passage also applies to Native Canadian literature.
[7] By nationality it is meant the nation from which one is derived from, such as the Cherokee, or the Inuit.

As the selected primary works are further discussed, more details of Native women writing will be discussed.

1.2 **Canada**

> The land we now call Canada was already multicultural, and multilingual, before the arrival of the first Europeans. – *Smaro Kambourelli*

According to the epigraph, before the settlers arrived, there was a variety of Aboriginal nations ("full-blooded" Indians as the Cree, Ojibwa, Algonquian) inhabiting the land that would become Canada. The First Nations, as they are known, were responsible for receiving the newcomers into the land and even providing help during fur trading. Considering that the encounter between the Aboriginals and colonizers was considered peaceful if compared to what happened to its neighbor the U.S.A., for instance, there was still a decline of one-half to two thirds of the native population due to repeated outbreaks of diseases (see LACERDA, 2007, p. 24). The ones that survived soon became useless and the "[…] 'reserves' they were supposed to live in were shrinking at the arrival of each new commander of a British settlement, who decided the Natives did not need more land to survive than the few acres they still had" (LACERDA, 2007, p. 25). So, besides having their land invaded and taken by these settlers, the Natives were placed in reservations, which clearly did not meet the standards for their lives before white settlement, mainly for the lack of freedom in those areas (p. 25). Similar to James Clifford, Alan Anderson establishes a comparison between this removal of the Aboriginal people by using the term "virtual diaspora", as the migration happens from their original territories to forced or voluntary removal into reserves (ANDERSON, 1998, p. 16-17). Besides, the "Aboriginal people", according to Anderson, are the original inhabitants of lands that became filled with immigrants and their descendants ("alien people"), who took the land and decided to disenfranchise the former by means of exclusion, forced removal, racial stratification (p. 17).

In the introduction to *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions* (1990), editors Linda Hutcheon and Marion Richmond, state that in Canada "[…] 100 per cent of non-native, Canadians are immigrants or from immigrant backgrounds […]" (p. 12), and this massive immigration, along with the existence of Native population, adds to the complex issue of national identity in the country. It is very complicated for one to define what it means to be Canadian. Even before the arrival of French and British settlers, there were several different nations in the land; soon, immigrants were attracted to the country with the promise of a better life, as Hutcheon and Richmond mention:

> The Loyalist migration following American independence in the last quarter of the eighteenth century had injected a rich racial and ethnic mix into early Canadian society: Highland Scots, French Huguenots, Swiss Germans, Dutch, Joseph Brant's natives, black loyalists. African blacks had, of course, arrived in Canada as early as the beginning of the seventeenth century – as slaves at Louisburg and Halifax auctions – and in the mid-1800s, the Underground Railroad brought still others. Earlier in that century, the Irish famine, the unemployment following the Napoleonic wars and the Scottish enclosure laws had already provided more immigrants and perhaps entrenched the image of Canada as a refuge […]. Europeans left homeless by this century's wars have found in Canada a safe haven, as have other victims of political strife: Hungarians, Czechs, Ugandan, Asians, Haitians, Lebanese, Tamils, Chileans, Vietnamese. For still others, Canada – though often a second choice to the United States – has seemed to offer economic opportunities for a better life: Italians, Portuguese, Greeks, Koreans, Chinese, South Asians, West Indians" (p. 11).

The country whose identity is framed on the metaphor of the "mosaic" (see HUTCHEON; RICHMOND, 1990, Preface), bases itself on the presence of groups with ethnic and/or linguistic particularisms sharing the same land, being represented then, by different pieces that together, form a whole: Canada[8]. However, in the 1867 Canadian Constitution the official bilingualism (French and English languages) was implemented in clear detriment to several other cultures that are also part of the country.

Even though the Natives are and were plural, added to the variety of immigrants in Canada, the notion of "multiculturalism" – "[…] that […] reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society and acknowledges the freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage" (HUTCHEON; RICHMOND, 1990, p. 371) – does not seem to have been put into practice. In 1988 "The Multiculturalism Act", one can find, for instance, statements assuring that while the multicultural heritage of the people is enhanced and preserved, there is work to be done to reach equality of all

[8] From http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_mosaic Last accessed on January 18th 2014.

Canadians in the political, social, cultural and economic spheres (p. 370) – all of which have not yet been achieved.

Still according to Hutcheon and Richmond (1990), race is the most important factor in response to Canadian multiculturalism nowadays (p. 7). Both authors go on claiming that the presence of many immigrants in the country lead to a kind of tension, that is, to racism "[…] masked behind the rhetoric of tolerance that is an intrinsic part of multiculturalism" (p. 8). Despite the focus on the immigrants here, racism in Canada has, ever since the arrival of the settlers and explorers, also been extended to Natives.

So, concerning Canada's identity, Canadian literary critic and theorist Northrop Frye attributed to Canadian people the "garrison mentality". Mainly for being "haunted" by its neighbor the United States, and incessantly compared to its inhabitants, and also for repeatedly having to "conquer" nature – marked by its harshness and perils –, Frye's choice of the adjective "garrison" (see FRYE apud SUGARS; MOSS, 2009b, p. 253-255) to describe Canadians suggests that they were part of a permanently established military post, that is, always in a defensive position.

1.2.1 Native Canadian peoples

A Lament for Confederation

> How long have I known you, Oh Canada? A hundred years? Yes, and many many *seelanum* more. And today, when you celebrate your hundred years, Oh Canada, I am sad for all the Indian people throughout the land.
>
> For I have known you when your forests were mine; when they gave me my meat and my clothing. I have known you in your streams and rivers where your fish flashed and danced in the sun, where the waters said come, come and eat my abundance. I have known you in the freedom of your winds. And my spirit, like the winds, once roamed your good lands.

But the long hundred years since the white man came, I have seen my freedom disappear like salmon going mysteriously out to sea. The white man's strange customs which I could not understand, pressed down upon me until I could no longer breathe.

When I fought to protect my land and my home, I was called a savage. When I neither understood nor welcomed this way of life, I was called lazy. When I tried to rule my people, I was stripped of my authority.

My nation was ignored in your history textbooks – they were little more important in the history of Canada than the buffalo that ranged the plains. I was ridiculed in your plays and motion pictures, and when I drank your firewater I got drunk – very, very drunk. And I forgot.

Oh, Canada, how can I celebrate with you this centenary, this hundred years? Shall I thank you for the reserves that are left me of my beautiful forests? For the canned fish of my rivers? For the loss of my pride and authority, even among my own people? For the lack of my will to fight back? No! I must forget what's past and gone.

Oh God in Heaven! Give me back the courage of the olden Chiefs. Let me wrestle with my surroundings. Let me again, as in the days of old, dominate my environment. Let me humbly accept this new culture and through it rise up and go on.

Oh God! Like the Thunderbird of old I shall rise again out of the sea; I shall grab the instruments of the white man's success – his education, his skills, and with these new tools I shall build my race into the proudest segment of your society. Before I follow the great chiefs who have gone before us, Oh Canada, I shall see these things come to pass.

I shall see our young braves and our chiefs sitting in the houses of law and government, ruling and being ruled by the knowledge and freedoms of *our* great land. So shall we shatter the barriers of our isolation. So shall the *next* hundred years be the greatest in the proud history of our tribes and nations. – *Chief Dan George*

"A Lament for Confederation" was Chief Dan George's speech in the celebration of the Canadian Centennial, in 1967, the country's 100th anniversary of the Confederation. Chief Dan George is a Native Canadian author, poet and Oscar-nominated actor, who was chosen to speak about his people, and did so by giving this speech above, that denounced all the changes made to the land, to the rights of the Indigenous people, as well as to their self-esteem and pride as a community. The hopeful ending, though, is a way George found to soothe his community and make them long for better days.

The renowned First-Nations writer, Jeannette Armstrong, in her article entitled "The Disempowerment of First North American Native Peoples and Empowerment through Their Writing", stated she would refer to *what* happened to her people, instead of recounting historical versions of *how* it happened (ARMSTRONG, 1990, p. 599). She claims her community has been under a "total subjective control" and there have been "[…] various coercive measures and the direct removal of political, social, and religious freedoms" (p. 599), so the colonization process could indeed begin. And just like any other area around the globe that has been colonized, the tribes in Canada have been through very similar processes.

Throughout the vast Canadian territory, there are many different ethnic groups which add to the official English and French about 50 different extra-official languages also spoken (see TOORN, 2004, p. 24). Having inhabited the land for millennia, the aboriginal people in Canada are divided in three main groups: the First Nations, the Inuit, and the *Métis*. The First Nations and the Inuit are full-blooded aboriginal people (which are divided among themselves into other ethnic groups) that occupied the territory at the time of the settlements and conquering of the land. Fortunately, unlike the United States, the first contact between the First Nations and the Europeans was not as aggressive or as bloody, and so the indigenous people were preserved and could leave their imprint in the construction of this nation. The *Métis* people, on the other hand, bear their mixed origins on the trading and contact among Indians and mainly French fur traders, but also Scottish or English traders. Just as the First Nations and the Inuit had complex social, political and economic structures along with much-valued cultural traditions, this new aboriginal people also shared similar complexities[9]. Mainly what happens in the country is that on one side of the Native-Canadian panorama there are the First-Nations, who are seen as "pure blood", and the Inuit – formerly referred to with the pejorative term "Eskimos" – are also "pure". On the other hand, the *Métis*, also

[9] From < http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_identity> Last accessed on March 15th 2012.

depreciatively known as halfbreed, end up being doubly oppressed within society: they are not "truly" Indians, nor "truly" white. So, for being of mixed-ancestry, the *Métis*, unlike other Natives, may lack what Kathleen Donovan called "[…] sense of ethnic and tribal identity that is a major source of strength in facing the difficult realities of their lives" (DONOVAN, 1990, p. 18). Being unable to identify themselves with solid and central tribal cultures makes it harder for them to find their way to healing their wounds.

Among the Native-Canadian population, it can be said that the constraints of the colonizers are still present. In "Métis Women Writers: The Politics of Language and Identity" (1990), Kathleen Donovan places the Native Canadian as "the colonized of the colonized" (p. 18), and blames much of the *Métis*'s identity issue on the historical system of identification of Native people, which only augmented the differences among them. In fact, in the 1876 Indian Act – which stated the laws concerning Indians in the country –, the *Métis* were excluded from the definition of Indian:

> (e) Provided also that no half-breed in Manitoba who has shared in the distribution of half-breed lands be accounted an Indian; and that no half-breed of a family (except the widow of an Indian, or a half-breed who has already been admitted into a treaty), shall, unless under very special circumstances to be determined by the Superintendent-General or his agent, be accounted an Indian, or entitled to be admitted into any Indian treaty (SUGARS; MOSS, 2009a, p. 323).

As this system defined the "Indian" differently through time, this strategy is said to have been part of the well-known imperialistic strategy of "Divide and Conquer"; by generating competition, the strength of the once single Native group is undermined therefore making it easier for the government to dominate them. The *Métis*, or halfbreed, have been discriminated against by the government, by the non-Indians, as well as by the "full-blood Natives", since the mixture of Indigenous and white races meant being neither fully Native nor fully white.

Besides the problems created "between the varying classifications of Natives, particularly between the full-blooded Indians and the Metis" (DONOVAN, 1990, p. 20), now focusing on a less broad sphere, the government was also able to create tensions between Native men and women. Donovan mentions the 1985 Indian Act which is said to have put an end to the discrimination against Native women, but actually simply shifted the burden of fighting sexist discrimination from the national to the local level, since each band is now solely responsible for determining enrollment criteria." (p. 20). Before 1985, all Native women

> […] marrying any other than an Indian or a non-treaty Indian shall cease to be an Indian in any respect within the meaning of this Act, except that she shall be entitled to share equally with the members of the band to which she formerly belonged, in their annual or semi-annual distribution of their annuities, interest moneys and rents; but this income may be commuted to her at any time at ten years' purchase with the consent of the band (SUGARS; MOSS, 2009a, p. 322).

Besides, the Act also stated that the woman who married an Indian of any other band, or a non-Indian, would automatically lose membership to the band she once belonged to and become a member of her husband's band (p. 323). It was only after 1985 that women were able to hold on to their origins after marriage.

1.2.2 Native Canadian women authors in native Canadian literature

When it comes to Canadian literature, Natives encounter little or no reference to their people, contributing to what Agnes Grant calls a "void" (GRANT, 1990, p. 124) – very common among minorities. Grant explains the reason why this "void" occurs:

> Partly, because few Native Canadians have been published, but also because our theories of criticism take a very narrow view of literature. We have an idea of what 'good style' is, this idea having fixed and unchanging attributes. We use written European tradition and apply it to literature from all cultures. This effectively precludes members of other culture groups from holding influential literary positions and also ensures a continuation of existing criteria (p. 124).

Few Native-Canadian authors have been published, and Native people's representations are usually included in Western literature as a token, as a metaphor, or as a contribution to a non-native character's development (see GRANT, 1990, p. 125). Therefore, this ethnic group suits perfectly Linda Hutcheon's definition of ex-centric in her *Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988), as people with "[…] strong centralized cultures that are now being upset by their own history, […] [and whose] voices demand to be heard. In their postmodern forms these voices are particularly contradictory and contesting" (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 72). The theorist goes on claiming that an ex-centric is outside and yet inside, being able to see things from a different perspective and by the same token, women also dwell both in and out,

what assigned them to a position of irrationality, thus attaching a forcible silence to them (see HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 60-63).

In the last decades of the 20th century, however, the social problems Native people face have become the focus of some literary works and gained the attention of readers and critics. Often bringing to surface the issues of being a male Indian in an urban environment, these recent works' characters suffer considerably before deciding to return to their people and reconcile with their roots, to achieve healing among them (see DONOVAN, 1998). These so-called "homing in" novels, lack the intricacy found in novels in which indigenous women characters that inhabit cities face varied obstacles through their paths towards their healing process. Despite going through almost the same problems male characters do – unemployment, alcoholism, suicide, drug addiction – women also face others, related to their gender, such as:

> […] a loss of power and esteem in formerly matrilineal cultures; the trauma of psychological, physical and sexual abuse from Native and non-Native men; prostitution; a frequent inability to care for their children, with the subsequent loss of their families to a paternalistic social-welfare system; a high rate of teen-age pregnancy and infant mortality; and, sometimes, an unmistakable, yet usually unexpressed anger at the perceived passivity of Native men (DONOVAN, 1998, p. 18).

Similarly to other colonized peoples, the Native women internalize so much of the burden imposed on their people that they end up promoting a "mimetic idealization" of the oppressor and incorporating many of the Western instruments, such as the written words, the language from the colonizers, canonical genres, chronologically ordered narratives (LIONNET, 1995, p. 14-15). Not only the Native women authors, but also the postcolonial women authors likewise interweave tradition and languages therefore possessing "double-consciousness", which means these subjects dwell and write across traditional and cultural boundaries (LIONNET, 1995, p. 15). In an attempt to rescue their people´s self-esteem, Native women have recurred to writing as a means of obtaining strength and reassurance of their people's values and beliefs; by doing so, they gain agency both by writing and by being able to detach themselves from their legacy of everlasting silence. The Native women must then, weave their story by means of the colonizer's tool so they can "[…] reveal the depth and status of the culture, express Native wisdom and points of view familiar to other Natives,

reveal the beauty of the Native world, beauty rarely recognized by non-Native writers" (GRANT, 1990, p. 125).

It was then, by means of Western knowledge that the Natives were able to read and learn both about the culture of their ancestors and their oppressors, and therefore, engage themselves politically so they could fight against the injustices they have suffered. Thus, in the 1970s Native women have published what would become path-opening literary works for (Native) Canadian literature. In 1973, for instance, Native author Maria Campbell published *Halfbreed*, the autobiographical account of her life as a Métis in Canada. Even though there were works of Native women published before this one, such as poems and stories by Emily Pauline Johnson, Campbell's *Halfbreed* is often said to be the first text of Aboriginal writing in the country (EIGENBROD, et al, 2003, p. 4). After Campbell, there came writer and activist Lee Maracle, who published *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel* (1975), also an autobiographical account of her life, from birth to youth, in which readers can see the character Bobbi Lee, as a representation of the author's life.

1.3 **The United States of America**

> I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. – *Pledge of Allegiance*

On the American Pledge of Allegiance, the United States is depicted as a strong nation, framed on religious precepts, and as a land of freedom and justice. These features, however, have not been a constant in the country.

The U.S., just like Canada, was settled by Europeans of several origins, as Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur stated in his *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782). The Americans are a mixture of English, Scottish, Irish, French, Dutch, Germans and Swedes, and about them Crèvecoeur comments:

> I know it is fashionable to reflect on them, but respect them for what they have done; for the accuracy and wisdom with which they have settled their territory; for the decency of their manners; for their early love of letters; their ancient college, the first in this hemisphere; for their industry, which to me who am but a farmer is the criterion of everything. There was never a people, situated as they are, who with so ungrateful a soil have done more in so short a time (CRÈVECOEUR apud BAYM et al, 2012, p. 606).

The immigrants are seen as strong people, able to overcome obstacles, establish settlements and start building a nation. In Crèvecoeur's letters here is no reference to the Indigenous people's strength to endure and survive on such an ungrateful soil. There is mention of the American Indigenous people, but at no time are they seen as American.

When Crèvecoeur mentions the men that inhabit the frontier, they are referred to as "[…] men [that] appear to be no better than carnivorous animals, of a superior rank […]", or "[…] men [that] are wholly left dependent on their native tempers and on the spur of uncertain industry, which often fails when not sanctified by the efficacy of a few moral rules" (p. 609). Taking from these passages, the settlers who get in touch with the frontier, with the wild areas, may run the risk of being stripped of their civilized manners.

Frederick Jackson Turner points out that the American frontier was an important factor that gave the country unique qualities. In *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (1893), Turner states that: "In the case of most nations, however, the development has occurred in a limited area; and if the nation has expanded, it has met other growing peoples whom it has conquered. But in the case of the United States we have a different phenomenon […]" (TURNER apud INGE, 1987, p. 81). Again, there is no reference to the presence of the Natives; Turner mentions other countries which have conquered areas inhabited by growing peoples, but still states that in his country the process was different. However, the frontier is the point where civilization and wilderness meet. Besides, Turner often brings the frontier as a metaphor for this nation's rebirth, renewal at each advancement, whereas for the Indians it was the exact opposite: the frontier meant death, loss and extermination.

Savagery should actually be used to describe the contact between settlers and Natives. Differently from Canada, the contact between Indians and white settlers/explorers was bloody most of the times[10], and very much devastated the Indigenous population not only because of illnesses, but also because of deliberate killing of those people seen as a threat to the process

[10] John Smith, for instance, in *The General History of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles* (1624), describes some friendly encounters with Natives.

of colonization. William Bradford's account of what he called the "Pequot War" describes in a matter of fact way the massacre of over 400 savages – all with the blessing of God from Bradford's perspective (BRADFORD apud BAYM, 2012, p. 153-155, v. A).

Yet the U.S.A. became known by the metaphor of the "melting pot[11]", as the country claims to have a homogeneous mixture of the nation's components in each citizen – this mixture would then, be the essence of the American people. This metaphor has been used several times, but also questioned at others. St. John de Crèvecoeur declares:

> I could point out to you a family whose grandfather was an Englishman, whose wife was Dutch, whose son married a French woman, and whose present four sons have now four wives of different nations. *He* is an American, who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds. He becomes an American by being received in the broad lap of our great *Alma Mater*. Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labors and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world (CRÈVECOEUR apud BAYM et al, 2012, p. 607, v. A).

Nevertheless, the Indigenous people, who already inhabited the land at the time the immigrants and explorers arrived, do not seem to have been included. In fact, the new race of men that formed America, as Crévecoeur puts it, does not include women either.

Numbers confirm that most of the people who came to the New World were young and male; from these, almost fifty percent were indentured workers or slaves; one third of the people who came to settle were families. On the whole, the colonization of Puritan England was very much family based. Few of the settlers were rich (see TINDALL; SHI, 1989, p. 39-40) and they arrived at the new land looking for a better life.

Besides being considered uncivilized, thus inferior people, the Indigenous Americans were seen as a serious threat to this newly formed society: the tribe women played such a major role in different tribes that it was crucial to social and religious spheres of American society that those women no longer occupied important positions (see ALLEN, 1992, p. 3).

1.2.3 Native American peoples

[11] The term was first used in a 1905 play entitled "The Melting Pot", by Israel Zangwill.

[…]
Caves across the ocean
in caves of dark hills
white skin people
like the belly of a fish
covered with hair.

Then they grow away from the earth
then they grow away from the sun
then they grow away from the plants and animals.
They see no life
When they look
they see only objects.
The world is a dead thing for them
the trees and rivers are not alive
the mountains and stones are not alive.
The deer and bear are objects
they see no life.
They fear
They fear the world.
They destroy what they fear.
They fear themselves.

The wind will blow them across the ocean
thousands of them in giant boats
swarming like larva
out of a crushed ant hill.

They will carry objects
which can shoot death
faster than the eye can see.

They will kill the things they fear
all the animals
the people will starve.

They will poison the water
they will spin the water away
and there will be drought
the people will starve.

They will fear what they find
They will fear the people
They kill what they fear.

Entire villages will be wiped out
They will slaughter whole tribes.
Corpses for us
Blood for us
Killing killing killing killing.

And those they do not kill
will die anyway
at the destruction they see
at the loss
at the loss of the children
the loss will destroy the rest.

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

They will bring terrible diseases

the people have never known.
Entire tribes will die out
covered with festered sores
shitting blood
vomiting blood.
Corpses for our work.[…]
– Leslie Marmon Silko

This extract was taken from an untitled poem in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Storyteller* (1981). The poem brings a story from the past, before Europeans arrived, and these witch people were gathered in a kind of contest. At a certain stage, the witches challenge the one who had not yet showed her charms or powers, so she tells them a story. Because she is laughed at, this witch starts her story/prophecy – included on the extract above. When she concludes the story, all the other contestants agree she could win as long as all that was mentioned in the story would not come true. It is too late, though. The witch shook her head at the others and said: "It's already turned loose / It's already coming. / It can't be called back" (SILKO, 2012, p. 129).

This poem is a fictional story created by Silko, but it does bring much of the true story of the Native Americans. The reference to destruction, diseases and decimation is truthful. White men are shown as separated from the natural world. This separation makes them afraid of everything and this very fear will lead them to destroy everything including the Native population.

The original tribes that inhabited the land that corresponds to current U.S.A. are the ancestors of nations such as the Pueblos, Creeks and Iroquois, and they had not reached the same level of organization and sophistication as the Mayas, Incas or Aztecs had (TINDALL; SHI, 1989, p. 4). Nevertheless, it is untrue to state that at the arrival of settlers in what became America (part of which, the current U.S.A.) the land was unspoiled and hardly touched by human activity (p. 40). For thousands of years, the inhabitants of that land had been transforming it, mainly with hunting and planting:

> Indian hunting practices over the centuries had produced what one scholar has called the 'greatest known loss of wild species' in American history. In addition, the

> Indians had burned woods and undergrowth in order to provide cropland, to ease travel through hardwood forests, and to make way for grasses, berries and other forage for the animals they hunted. Such 'slash and burn' agriculture had halted the normal forest succession and, especially in the Southeast, created large stands of longleaf pines, still the most common source of timber in the region (p. 40).

This description only reinforces the fact that the way Natives were seen was very much "constructed" by White settlers, who wished to diminish them by simply disregarding their culture, values and practices. How come most History books bring no such information? Why are most students (unlike Native people) still learning about the "discovery" of the so-called "New World"?

The gynocracies were strong enough to have survived the settlers, were it not for the strategies used by the White men, such as the Acts passed by the government that, similar to what happened in Canada, managed to "divide and conquer" the Indigenous people.

According to Arnold Krupat, in the Introduction to his *Native American Autobiography:* an Anthology (1994), after the frontier was "won" by the Americans, whether the Indians would reject "civilization" or not was a matter of survival to them (p. 12). Krupat mentions how the Dawes or General Allotment Act of 1887 contributed to the transformation of Indians into hyphenized Americans (Indian-Americans) as well as to the "vanishing" of some (p. 12). This Act basically destroyed tribal culture by attacking the community aspect of it, by breaking the reservation lands into individual allotments to be distributed among members of the former community (p. 12). There were, however, several problems that rose after the passing of this Act: besides the crushing of basic tribal values, some alloted lands were not suitable for agriculture, or due to the policy of distribution among individuals, became too small for planting and harvesting, or even became useless because despite owning the land, some Natives could not afford the material to work in their properties[12].

Furthermore, this Act excluded some of the Native peoples in the country, since it stated that:

> […] the provisions of this act shall not extend to the territory occupied by Cherokees, Creeks, Choctaws, Chickasaws, Seminoles, and Osage, Miamies and Peorias, and Sacs and Foxes, in the Indian Territory, nor to any of the reservations of the Seneca Nation of New York Indians in the State of New York, nor to that strip of territory in the State of Nebraska adjoining the Sioux Nation on the south[13].

[12] From: http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=50 Last accessed on March 2nd 2014.
[13] From: http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=50 Last accessed on March 2nd 2014.

So, with the passing of this act, many people believed that if "[…] a [Native individual] adopted white clothing and ways, and was responsible for his own farm, he would gradually drop his Indian-ness and be assimilated into the population[14]". Krupat declares that there was resistance on the part of the Indians, but its results were seen only in the 1930s, when the concern to undo the harm done by the Dawes Act was actually understood (KRUPAT, 1994, p. 13).

It was in 1934 that the Wheeler-Howard Act (or Indian Reorganization Act) was passed, and it gave Native Americans the chance to decide the way they would live (p. 13). It was "[a]n Act to conserve and develop Indian lands and resources; to extend to Indians the right to form business and other organizations; to establish a credit system for Indians; to grant certain rights of home rule to Indians; to provide for vocational education for Indians; and for other purposes[15]". Nevertheless, Krupat explains that the decisions made by Native Americans regarding how they would live had to go through the federal government by parliamentary means, and this process was considered by many Natives as repugnant. Still, the Wheeler-Howard Act was a way the government found to show they acknowledge the potential viability and worth of Native American peoples (KRUPAT, 1994, p. 13).

In the 1950s, the government determined that would end its relations and obligation to the tribes (KRUPAT, 1994, p. 13). In this decade, the "termination", "[l]ike most federal Indian policy, […] had the encouragement both of those who wished to see the Indian 'independent' and strong in the modern world and of those who wished to be done with an inconvenient burden" (p. 13). In the 1960s, though, the ambiguity concerning Native Americans lied upon the terms "self-determination" and "civil rights" (p. 14), that is, Natives should seek their rights and speak for themselves rather than depend on the government.

When the 1969 Pulitzer Prize was awarded to Native American writer N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* (1969), the "Native American Renaissance" seems to have started or been highlighted in the country (KRUPAT, 1994, p. 14). From them on, many other writers have made contribution to Native American literature, such as the Laguna-Pueblo Leslie Marmon Silko, Blackfoot and Gros Ventre James Welch, Ojibwe and Chippewa Louise

[14] From: http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=50 Last accessed on March 2nd 2014.
[15] From: http://www.uintahbasintah.org/papers/indianreorganizationact.pdf Last accessed on March 2nd 2014.

Erdrich, Anishinaabe Gerald Vizenor (p. 9), Muscogee (Creek) Joy Harjo and Laguna-Sioux Paula Gunn Allen[16].

There have been several attempts to erase Native culture and practices, but "[t]ribal systems have been operating in the 'new world' for several hundred thousand years. It is unlikely that a few years of colonization will see their undoing" (ALLEN, 1992, p. 2). In fact, there are still individuals who lead their lives based on traditional values, although they are perfectly acquainted with non-Indian values and culture (KRUPAT, 1994, p. 14). Most of the writers of Native American literature fit this pattern.

1.2.4 Native American women authors in native American literature

Paula Gunn Allen states that "[l]iterature is one facet of a culture" (ALLEN, 1992, p. 54), and it is not hard for someone to see the relevance and level of complexity, or symbolic significance of her/his culture's literature (p. 54), but it is sometimes hard to appreciate another culture's literature. The belief that all creatures share the creation process, making all things sacred (p. 57) very much influences the structure of Native American literature – that "[…] is determined by its relation to creative empowerment, its reflection of tribal understandings, and its relation to the unitary nature of reality" (p. 59) – making it hard for non-Indian readers to fully understand it.

Native American literature has often been misread, being called "primitive", "pagan", "childlike", "savage" by naïve readers (p. 54). When it comes to the Western literary canon, there are texts that publishers, reviewers, teachers, "educated people", and government agencies have presumed to be the best, or to count most (KRUPAT, 195, p. 8-9), while there are no such texts to refer to the Native American canon. However, some authors have been considered the most important, such as Momaday, Silko and Erdrich, for instance, who have been highly regarded due to their novels (p. 9). It was after Momaday's Pulitzer, that many non-Indians started to show appreciation for his work, and therefore turned him into a renowned Native American writer.

[16] These author's notorious works are: *Ceremony* (1977), *Fools Crow* (1986), *Love Medicine* (1984), *The Heirs of Columbus* (1991), *How We Became Human New and Selected Poems* (1975-2001) and *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* (1983), respectively.

According to Arnold Krupat, in the first moment, Native literature was a response to white invaders (p. 10), and soon became a way to show whites that the Natives could write about themselves, highlighting cultural differences, subverting genres, and teaching non-Indians some of the values that were important to them. As Paula Gunn Allen states, the purpose of traditional American Indian literature is never self-expression. The tribes seek the depiction of a private self in harmony with her/his reality "[…] to verbalize the sense of the majesty and reverent mystery of all things, and to actualize, in language, those truths that give to humanity its greatest significance and dignity" (ALLEN, 1992, p. 55).

As women are central to most Native American communities, there is no subversion (from Native perspective) when women are authorized to sign literary works. Actually, the fact that they wrote literary works was actually subversive, since in traditional culture, there was no such thing as literary works. However, to Western culture, framed upon patriarchalism, having women not only as artists, but as *authors* – which according to theorist Mary Eagleton, implies "authorising" and "authority" (see EAGLETON, 2005, p. 2) – meant twice as much if we take into account that Native women are minorities, or ex-centric (see HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 62-63) and, for being Native *and* women, doubly-oppressed. Moreover, for being multiply influenced, Native women's writing tend to deal with several influences instead of containing only features from Native cultures.

The appropriation of Western genres is just one feature of Native American literature, and the mixed-genre narratives seem to be a mark of feminine writing. As previously mentioned, Native women writers tend to go through a "mimetic idealization", just like postcolonial women authors (see LIONNET, 1995, p. 14-15), as they internalize many ways of the colonizers, which explains the appropriation, for example.

Native-American writer Leslie Marmon Silko has been highly acclaimed by (Western) readers, and has become a reference to Native American women writers for her novel *Ceremony*, from 1977. Even though she had started writing short stories, it was with a novel, a canonical genre *par excellence* that she reached success in her career. However, its plot very much involved the mixture of traditional Native American and non-Indian environment. Later, she published *Storyteller* (1981), which is a mix of poetry, prose and photographs, also bringing fiction and autobiographical stories/poems intermingled. However, it was not until 2010 that Silko published her first deliberately autobiographical work: *The Turquoise Ledge: a Memoir*, and showed how the way she conceived herself influenced her writing.

2 **LEE MARACLE'S *BOBBI LEE INDIAN REBEL*: POLITICAL WRITING OPENING DOORS TO NATIVE CANADIAN LITERATURE**

The writer, poet and political activist Lee Maracle is a granddaughter of Chief Dan George, daughter of a Métis woman and a Salish man. Born on July 2nd 1950, she went to school up to the eleventh grade, when she dropped out[17]. Despite having left school at such early age, Maracle became a writer and stated, in interview to Jennifer Kelly[18], she did all kinds of writing, but after 1988 she decided to become a serious writer (p. 73).

Lee Maracle started her writing career in the 1970's – an important moment to the rising of the literature of minorities – and, because of that, she is seen as a "pioneer of sorts" (p. 73) since right after the watershed *Halfbreed* (1973), by Maria Campbell, her autobiographical work *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel* (1975) was published. After that, Maracle has published several works of fiction, poetry and non-fiction, among which are *I Am Woman: A Native Perspective on Sociology and Feminism* (1988) and *Sojourner's Truth & other stories* (1990). In *I Am Woman*, Maracle presents her point of view on feminism and different types of oppression suffered by women "[…] in poetry and stories, and couched not so carefully on essays" (MARACLE, 1996, p. vii). It is her "[…] attempt to present a Native woman's sociological perspective on the impacts of colonialism on us, as women, and on [herself] […] personally" (p. vii). This work represents a struggle to put an end to sexism and racism and empower women in general, but especially Native women.

Sojourner's Truth & other stories, just like *I Am Woman*, has a strong connection with the African-American's struggle to be heard because the title of both works are related to African-American slave and lecturer Sojourner Truth, whose most famous speech is entitled "Ain't I a woman?"(1851). This 1990 publication of short stories also brings an autobiographical account, "Lee on Spiritual Experience", in which bits of her daily life can be

[17] From: "Coming out of the House: A Conversation with Lee Maracle", by Jennifer Kelly. Available in: < https://www.google.com.br/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&ved=0CC0QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ariel.ucalgary.ca%2Fariel%2Findex.php%2Fariel%2Farticle%2Fdownload%2F101%2F98&ei=wtXmUtS4BKjksATcqYGgDQ&usg=AFQjCNGagdeBQZdqL6GFwbys4VPw7DJxg&sig2=zWPfO_PY_BnM4whuj3fHgA&bvm=bv.59930103,d.cWc>. Last accessed on January 27th 2014.

[18] From: "Coming out of the House: A Conversation with Lee Maracle", by Jennifer Kelly. Available in: < https://www.google.com.br/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&ved=0CC0QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ariel.ucalgary.ca%2Fariel%2Findex.php%2Fariel%2Farticle%2Fdownload%2F101%2F98&ei=wtXmUtS4BKjksATcqYGgDQ&usg=AFQjCNGagdeBQZdqL6GFwbys4VPw7DJxg&sig2=zWPfO_PY_BnM4whuj3fHgA&bvm=bv.59930103,d.cWc>. Last accessed on January 27th 2014.

found, along with tender (but realistic) comments on her relationship with her husband and witty remarks on her children's teenage years.

Despite not having adapted to school, Maracle was self-taught and has received awards several times, including the 2000 J.T. Stewart Voices of Change Award and an American Book Award from the Before Columbus Foundation, and in 2009, an Honorary Doctor of Letters from St. Thomas University. Besides, she has held some academic posts such as the Stanley Knowles Visiting Professor in Canadian Studies at University of Waterloo, Distinguished Professor of Canadian Culture at Western Washington University, Writer in Residence at University of Guelph, Writer in Residence in the Aboriginal Studies Program at the University of Toronto and Traditional Cultural Director for the Indigenous Theater School in Toronto. She is also a co-founder of the En'owkin International School of Writing, a learning institute with an Indigenous Fine Arts Program and an Okanagon Language Program, in British Columbia[19]. All the awards Maracle has won, along with the positions she held in universities, show how determined she was to write and give visibility to the plight of Native Canadians

2.1 ***Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel:*** **the 1975 and the 1990 editions**

The 1990 edition of *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel*, the most cited and also the most easily found edition of this work, includes the complete text of the first edition, and is the one used in this dissertation. Throughout my research, I could notice that wherever there was information about this work there was reference to the 1990 edition on the bibliography. Nonetheless, the 1975 edition brings a lot of features that very much contribute to the analysis of this autobiographical work.

The number of theses and articles on the revised second edition of 1990 is tremendous. Nevertheless, there was not a single article read for this dissertation that brought as a reference the first edition of this work. In fact, searching for information on the 1975 edition is a difficult task too, as there are few references to the original book cover, and hardly any

[19] All the content of this paragraph was taken from: <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/en/article/lee-maracle/>. Last accessed on January 27th 2014.

copies available for purchase. However, while searching for a copy of the first edition of *Bobbi Lee*, I discovered that Lee Maracle's name is not the one on the cover. In fact, I have found Donald Barnett's name filling the space destined to the author alone, as well as followed by the word "Editor"[20], showing how unclear the authorship of this work is. There is even a website in which the description of the book brings the author's name as Bobbi Lee – which is the name of the main character and narrator –, along with both editors of this first edition[21]. Another website brings Bobbi Lee, Lee Maracle, Don Barnett, Liberation Support Movement and Rick Sterling as authors[22].The point here is that the first edition, and consequently the second, were written collaboratively, as Maracle writes on the Prologue to the 1990 edition:

> There are two voices in the pages of this book, mine and Donald Barnett's. As-told-tos between whites and Natives rarely work, when they do, it's wonderful, when they don't it's a disaster for the Native. Don never intended it to be a disaster for me. The first *Bobbi Lee* was the reduction of some two hundred pages of manuscript to a little book. […] We had disagreements over what to include and what to exclude, disagreements over wording, voice. In the end the voice that reached the paper was Don's, the information alone was mine (MARACLE, 1990, p. 19).

This kind of work is called collaborative life writing by theorists Smith and Watson (2010), who state that we usually think of two people involved: the investigator and the informant; the first would be the one to interview and put together material from what was told, the second is the one who tells the story (p. 67). This seems to be what happened in the writing of *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel*, as states Jeannette Armstrong in the Foreword to the second edition: "This book spoken and then edited into written form, is reflective of the wonderful orality that the spoken version must have been delivered in" (MARACLE, 1990, p. 15). Originally, Maracle's life story was tape recorded as part of a life writing project sponsored by the LSM – a Marxist political group to which she belonged called Liberation Support Movement – entitled "Life Histories from the Revolution Series"; then, Don Barnett and Rick Sterling transcribed the 80 hours of tape and a manuscript three inches thick was edited – all of which became the slim volume under the title *Bobbi Lee, Indian Rebel:*

[20] Sites such as <http://www.biblio.com/book/bobbi-lee-indian-rebel-don-barnett/d/5927422> and <http://www.amazon.com/Bobbi-Lee-Indian-Rebel/dp/B000PS8MN4>. Last accessed on January 31st 2014.
[21] From <http://www.worldcat.org/title/bobbi-lee-indian-rebel/oclc/1878018>. Last accessed on February 6th 2014.

[22] From <http://www.isbns.im/isbn/9780919914629>. Last accessed on Februrary 6th 2014.

Struggles of a Native Canadian Woman (1975)[23]. Before the publishing of her life narrative, Lee Maracle had joined Barnett's group "[…] at the lowest level of their highly structured, centralist group" (MARACLE, 1990, p. 221). On the epilogue of the 1990 edition, Maracle states:

> It wasn't before long his structure, top heavy and undemocratic, began to weigh on the Native members and one by one left. I really tried to stay. It seemed ridiculous we could all have the same set of political principles and not be able to work together. I didn't realize then but the style of organizing that people choose is also intensely political. […] [The] [t]aping and transcribing of *Bobbi Lee* had already begun and I left somewhere in the middle of the process of transcription (p. 221).

With the reduction of about 80 hours of recording and about two hundred pages of manuscript to a little book, it is clear that a lot has been left out. But the main issue is: what was the criterion to edit that material? Why were incidents deliberately left out by these editors? And was this edition out to benefit any of the people involved in the process?

In fact, while working on the writing of this book, Maracle claimed she didn't, she couldn't tell Barnett everything, there were too many obstacles in her path (p. 19). Nevertheless, she also claims how much Barnett inspired her to get command of her voice, but because "[…] his idea of political struggle was riddled with arrogance […], [she] jumped ship before [she] got too caught up in his style of organization with its centralist leadership" (p. 19). Besides, she criticizes much of his "white male narcissism that kept him arrogantly rooted in autocratic behavior […]" (p. 20). Still, she dedicated both volumes of her life history to the memory of Don Barnett (p. 18).

2.1.1 The 1975 and 1990 book covers

The description and comparison of the book covers of both editions are useful to give readers a little more of information on the work in question, or even to infer some of the intentions of the editors and author. On the cover of the 1975 edition[24] for example, there is no reference to authorship: there is the title, a Native symbol and a reference to the LSM

[23] Information taken from http://press.anu.edu.au//aborig_history/indigenous_biog/mobile_devices/ch09s02.html Last accessed on February 2nd 2014.
[24] See annex A.

project ("Life Histories from the Revolution / Internal Colonies / Canada 1"). The yellowish cover brings no other information about the content of the book, but by analyzing it, I can speculate about some of the editors' intentions. Firstly, by placing a Native symbol on the book cover, Barnett and Sterling were probably trying to place a visual instead of a textual element to reinforce what already came in the title: that this work is about a Native (woman). Secondly, the lack of authorship on the cover may be misleading, as readers at the time might have conceived it as a work written by a Native woman – which would render this narrative genuine and quite subversive for the time.

On the 1990 edition's cover[25], there are many other non-textual elements, along with a new piece of information: Maracle's authorship is acknowledged. This cover brings a drawing representing Bobbi Lee – who very much resembles a young Lee Maracle – wearing Western clothing, sunglasses, and earrings. On her sunglasses, the attentive reader can see what seems to be the reflection of what she sees: a violent man threatening women that bend fearfully, as well as a woman bending and writing despite what surrounds her. The drawing, so far, brings nothing that would make readers think of Natives whatsoever, but, behind the image of the young woman, Native drawings can be seen – probably a representation of this young lady's cultural background.

The now shortened title (*Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel*) is soon followed by the words "by Lee Maracle" – which means much more than just the name of the author. Fifteen years after the publishing of the first edition of *Bobbi Lee*, Maracle's name can be finally seen on the cover. This appearance may be intricately connected to Mary Eagleton's notion of "author". In the introduction to her work *Figuring the Woman Author in Contemporary Fiction* (2005), Eagleton states that she has chosen the word

> […] 'author' rather than 'artist' or 'cultural producer' or 'cultural worker' as the generic term because it contains within its etymology connotations of 'authorising' and 'authority', both of which have been highly problematic concepts for women in the cultural sphere and for the development of a feminist cultural criticism (p. 2).

In 1975, Maracle had no authority to sign the work based on her own life, but in 1990, she could claim authorship of that work and in fact put her words and voice on those pages, by adding the sections "Oka Peace Camp – September 9, 1990", "Foreword", "Dedication", "Prologue" and "Epilogue".

[25] See annex B.

It is possible to state that this sense of authorship displayed on the book cover was gained after her publishing of *I Am Woman: A Native Perspective on Sociology and Feminism* (1988), which according to Maracle, includes some of the memories that were not written in the epilogue to *Bobbi Lee* (MARACLE, 1990, p. 201). And to ratify this authority, at the bottom of the cover there is "Foreword by Jeannette Armstrong". With this foreword, Maracle's *Bobbi Lee* was endorsed by a respected Native Canadian author, artist, activist and theorist. On the back cover of the book[26] there are also excerpts of reviews by other renowned authors, such as Dionne Brand, Beth Brant and Joy Harjo.

2.2 ***Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel*** **and its contribution to native literature**

According to Professor Agnes Grant, "'Native literature' means Native people telling their own stories, in their own ways, unfettered by criteria from another time and place" (GRANT, 1990, p. 125). If we take this definition and try to apply it to *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel*, we can say it is not Native literature. The intervention of her white male editors certainly did not allow her to say it all, or say it in her own way. Besides, this autobiographical work was intricately bounded to the time it was published: there was a crying need to make a statement about the situation of her people in the 1970s. So, many questions may come to contemporary readers. Is this work not Native literature? Can it be considered Western literature? What is there of literary in this text?

On the one hand, Marta Dvorak, in her article "Yes, but Is It Literature?" (1995), posits that it is questionable whether *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel* (1990) should be included in the literary canon. In Dvorak's opinion, its "[…] linear time frame with conventional chronological markers (four months later, when the summer came, after we moved, by the time I was nine, for the next week or so…), and banal use of ellipsis, with no distinction made between diegetic time and narrating time" (DVORAK, 2009, p. 23), show how much this work brought nothing new. Dvorak is actually right in pointing out all these elements from *Bobbi Lee*, and in fact, this work is absolutely straightforward (which can be understood as lacking any aesthetic appeal to readers), but still, this work was appreciated by readers so

[26] See annex C.

much so that it was re-issued and revised. On the other hand, Brazilian Professor, researcher and theorist Liane Schneider, in her article “Entrelaçamentos entre o estético e o político na literatura de mulheres de grupos não-hegemônicos” (2006), has stated that Maracle, due to her life-history marked by oppression, wrote about her life as a way of self-organization to show resistance, not representing any search for “literary excellence” (p. 179-180). Schneider claims that by questioning the literariness of Maracle’s work, Dvorak is also questioning those who read and study it (p. 179). Besides, Dvorak’s perspective, just like the canon, can be thoroughly discussed, and in disqualifying *Bobbi Lee* due to its register and the lack of the author’s control over the narrative, the critic isolates it, making impossible its dialog with postmodern works, whose authors sometimes “lose control” over the narrative on purpose (p. 179).

This narrative is written in chronological order, telling Bobbi Lee’s life history from her birth to her early twenties. It is narrated in the first person and it can be said to fit the Romanesque genre called *bildungsroman*, that according to Eliane Campello in her doctoral thesis, *O künstlerroman de autoria feminina: a poética da artista em Atwood, Tyler, Piñon e Valenzuela* (2003), consists of a narrative encompassing the learning, education of a character from his/her childhood to maturity (p. 25). Indeed Bobbi Lee’s formative years are depicted throughout *Bobbi Lee*, and considering that we are dealing with a representation of Lee Maracle, a writer who has published several other works of fiction and non-fiction, as well as articles in newspapers as the book mentions, it is possible to classify this work as a *künstlerroman* – a narrative that represents the figure of an artist or a work of art playing an essential role in the story, narrating (or not) the physical and psychological development of the protagonist or of any character (p. 25).

Even though the *bildungsroman* has traditionally been considered as the novel of the development of a young man, since the 1970s, the female *bildungsroman* has been identified as a new genre, a novel that comprises the development of a woman character (FUDERER, 1990, p. 1). Before the 70s, there have been several mentions to *bildungsromane* of women, such as Mme. De Staël’s *Corinne*, but the rise of contemporary feminist movement, in the last decades of the twentieth century, has contributed to the recognition of this genre (see FUDERER, 1990, p. 1-2).

According to Eliane Campello, the *künstlerroman* is a German term for the novel of an artist or art, but it does not exclude the *bildung* in it: it is possible then, to have a narrative

bringing the coming-of-age of a character who is/becomes an artist (CAMPELLO, 2003, p. 25). Campello then defends the (most common) notion about the relationship between both genres: that the *künstlerroman* usually deals with the blossoming of an artist, attaching then, the *bildung* to the *künstlerroman*. As stated by Mary Eagleton, with the renewed interest in the *kunstlerroman* authored by women "the female author is achieving a sense of her coming-into-being and her validity in what is represented as both a self-authorising and a wider social acceptance" (EAGLETON, 2005, p. 2). Nonetheless, some critics state that "[…] if individual development and integration into the community have appeared difficult for the female protagonist, the obstacles are greatly compounded when that protagonist faces racial prejudice in addition to restrictive gender roles" (FUDERER, 1990, p. 4).

Maracle's *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel*, then, portrays the coming-of-age of a Native-Canadian woman *author* who, despite having to deal with (and overcome) all the prejudice and hardship she had gone through, was still able to use her writing and her political awareness as a great source of strength. As the plot unfolds, despite rebelling against "White" institutions and imposed ideals that still survived after colonialism, Bobbi Lee tries hard to find her own self amidst all the turmoil of her life. Maracle's text does not follow Native notions about storytelling, since, as it is claimed by Paula Gunn Allen (1992), the Indian tends to view time as cyclical and space as cyclical, whereas non-Indians see time as chronological, sequential and space as linear (ALLEN, 1992, p. 59). It is quite possible that Barnett and Sterling have determined *Bobbi Lee*'s chronological order, and that the story should be told in a linear fashion. Even so, Marta Dvorak points out that the work brings a "lexicon of oral speech, colloquial mixed liberally with slang […]" (DVORAK, 2009, p. 24) showing the strong presence of orality.

More important than the structure of the narrative, the relevance of the period in which it was written is crucial. As Maracle underscores in the Epilogue to the 1990 edition, back in the 1970s, "[y]oung Native people from all parts of the province and the country were coming together, tribalism, the village focus was breaking down. […] A ground swell, a tide, everywhere in the country little groups of Red Power youth were springing up" (MARACLE, 1990, p. 208-209). And she goes on:

> Youth everywhere were holding conferences, chiefs were meeting, everyone was talking about our rights; rights we didn't dare to believe existed in the 1950s. By some sort of miracle, we recalled the response of Native people to their early civil rights movement. In our kitchens, those without television came to our house to

> watch the news from Birmingham and the young preacher, M. L. King Jr., that led his people to grand and glorious civil disobedience and somehow we all knew that this had everything to do with our own lives. Somehow we were all connected (p. 209).

The time this work was first published is meaningful because the narrative itself has as its main purpose to denounce the appalling conditions Native Canadians were living in. This purpose, then, might have contributed to one's misreading the text as strictly political, with no contribution to literature whatsoever. Nonetheless, based on the historical panorama, *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel* was a way (it might have been the only way, at the time) Maracle had to make a statement. As she was involved in political groups such as the NARP (National Alliance for Red Power) and the previously mentioned LSM, the urge to speak, be heard and perhaps help others with it was immense. Actually, this urge is added to the "void" in literature felt by Natives, that is, the lack of literary material available about them. So, even though Native works are often considered not to be literary, Grant points out that most of the critics' concepts and ideas about "good style" are actually framed on Western traditions (GRANT, 1990, p. 124). Thus, is it fair to reduce *Bobbi Lee* to a political work, with no contribution to literature? And when we do so, do we take into account the fact that it was a collaborative work? It is very complicated to work with such a hybrid text[27], literarily speaking, and judge it from the eyes of either Western tradition or Native traditional literature.

There have been several attempts to define literature, and according to literary theorist Terry Eagleton (2003), it can be defined as "imaginative" writing, when it comes to fiction, but it is clear that there is much more in literature than just fictional works (p. 1). In fact, the line between fiction and non-fiction is too fine to use that as an argument to define literature. Eagleton, then, tries to define it from a different perspective, claiming it uses language in peculiar ways that differ from ordinary speech (p. 2). So, if these two points raised by Eagleton were to be considered, *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel* could not be literature in the Western sense of it either. It is not completely imaginative writing, nor completely fiction; and the issue of language differing from regular speech is actually what this work does not bring: the presence of this "ordinary" language, as if the narrator were speaking, actually telling the story, is one of the features that may lead readers and even theorists to link it to Native culture, as orature is predominant among Native people.

[27] By hybrid, I mean a text influenced by both Native-Canadian and non-Native cultures.

Luckily, Eagleton has established a definition which very much applies to *Bobbi Lee*, since he argues that:

> Some kinds of fiction are literature and some are not; some literature is fictional and some is not; some literature is verbally self-regarding; while some highly-wrought rhetoric is not literature. Literature, in the sense of a set of works of assured and unalterable value, distinguished by certain shared inherent properties does not exist (p. 9).

Eagleton goes on claiming that there is no "essence" of literature, once any piece of writing can be read "non-pragmatically" – that is, serving no specific purpose – as well as "poetically" (p. 8), just to corroborate his position that "the definition of literature [is] up to how somebody decides to *read*, not the nature of what is written" (p. 7). This power given to the readers, then, opens up for *Bobbi Lee* a place in literature.

Such a broad definition then, was able to encompass what has been happening with literature ever since the 70s: the inclusion of several works into the realm of the literary. Even though this inclusion has happened throughout the West, my focus here will be on Canadian literature. In Canada, the great watershed moment was the 1967 Centennial of the Confederacy, which inspired nationalist feelings and "[…] witnessed an explosion in Canadian publishing of multiple voices trying to come to terms with their past" (DVORAK, 1995, p. 22). Ever since, works of minority groups such as Natives, Blacks, immigrants and women have started to be recognized and included in renowned anthologies of Canadian literature. In *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* (1997), the first entry on letter A is "Aboriginal legends and tales", soon followed by "Aboriginal literature: Native and Métis literature", and "Inuit literature", for instance. All the same, professor Liane Schneider (2006), comments on the fact that this recent visibility does not mean the literature produced by Native writers did not suffer with prejudice (p. 178). Marta Dvorak, for instance, claims the works of minorities are focused on content, have undeniable sociological value and very often helped to denounce the injustices done to minority groups, they usually don't bring many new features, or much of literary[28].

Even though *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel* does not fit definitions of Native, or of Western traditional literatures, it is important to state that the concept of literature has been changing, and we now have room for works by Native writers in literature as well. Maracle's *Bobbi Lee*

[28] While it is undeniable that Dvorak is a respected critic, her generalizing posture, evaluating *all* work produced by minorities as not "literary" is reductionist at best.

might be seen by some as a cliché, and even nonliterary, but the point is that this work has opened doors to many other literary works by Natives, and, thanks to its political engagement it has encouraged many other Natives to share their stories, be it through fiction or non-fiction.

2.3 ***Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel*** **and the autobiographical genres**

Concerning autobiographies, Georges Gusdorf, in his essay "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography" claims:

> The man who takes delight in thus drawing his own image believes himself worthy of a special interest. Each of us tends to think of himself as the center of a living space: I count, my existence is significant to the world, and my death will leave the world incomplete… The author of an autobiography… looks at himself being and delights in being looked at—he calls himself as witness for himself; others he calls as witness for what is irreplaceable in his presence (GUSDORF apud HEIBLMN, 1986, p. 14).

That is, according to him, autobiography is intricately connected to one's significance, but not just *anyone*: a *man*'s significance in the world. Moreover, this man's irreplaceable character is supposed to lure readers into perceiving his most relevant deeds. Gusdorf's previous statement is indeed connected to autobiographies, its writers and its writers' purposes; nevertheless, it is not encompassing enough. When bearing in mind the relatively recent recognition of the presence of women in the field of autobiographical writing, one is likely to associate Gusdorf's positioning with the image of an individual – a man – whose identity is fixed and whole, and for that, is able to conceive himself as significant to the world since he is able to know himself fully[29]. This man that is mentioned sounds like Stuart Hall's definition of the "Enlightenment Subject" – a "person [conceived] as a fully centered, unified individual, endowed with the capacities of reason, consciousness, and action, whose 'center' consisted of an inner core which first emerged when the subject was born, […] remaining essentially the

[29] It is important to state that women have been writing autobiographies for centuries, but they haven't been taken seriously. In fact, theorists Smith and Watson (2010) claim that "[…] the lyric poems of Sappho of Lesbos (c. 600 B.C.E.) present the voices of a woman candidly exploring her emotions and the somatic designs of love and physical desire, often with self-mocking wit, as feminist scholars have recently argued" (p. 104).

same" (HALL, 2007, p. 597) – not as a contemporary individual, that is, according to Hall, "conceptualized as having no fixed, essential, or permanent identity" (p. 598).

It is known that women have received proper recognition in the realm of autobiography only from the 1980's on, but, quite often, their works have not fit most theorists' conceptions of autobiography as they have brought to the foreground different perspectives and issues to be dealt with. In order to find an identity to be the center of a narrative, women had to perceive themselves as others, as different, since there was no recognition of their practice of individuality by men. Because of that, there is very little resemblance to the patterns established by men in women's autobiographical writing (HEIBLMN, 1986, p. 16). It is based on this lack of similarities that theorist Susan Stanford Friedman criticized Georges Gusdorf for not having considered women or minorities' models of the self. Friedman states that Gusdorf's theory is inapplicable to women's writing for two main reasons: "First, the emphasis on individualism does not take into account the importance of group identity for women and minorities. Second, the emphasis on separateness ignores the differences in socialization in the constructions of male and female gender identity" (FRIEDMAN, 1998, p. 72). The theorist goes on to claim that women "[i]nstead of seeing themselves as solely unique, often explore their sense of shared identity with other women, an aspect of identity that exists in tension with a sense of their own uniqueness" (p. 79). In sum, from both an ideological and psychological perspective, Gusdorf overlooked that the "individualistic paradigms of the self ignore the role of collective and relational identities in the individuation process of women and minorities" (p. 72).

Philippe Lejeune, in his seminal essay "The Autobiographical Pact"[30], has defined autobiography as a "[r]etrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality[31]" (p. 4). Firstly it is important to state that Lejeune's statement (just like Gusdorf's) is extremely exclusionary. Even though both his essay and *Bobbi Lee* were published in 1975, Lejeune makes absolutely no effort to include minorities. In fact, the

[30] From <https://edocs.uis.edu/Departments/LIS/Course_Pages/LNT501/RN/Rosina's_on-ground_course_storage/Rosina's_LNT_501_Readings/On%20Autobiography%20pp3-30%20%20by%20Philippe%20Lejeune.pdf >. Last accessed on February 7th 2014.

[31] It is important to state here that even though Philippe Lejeune has revised his "The Autobiographical Pact", the passage used in this dissertation is from 1975, because both Lejeune and Maracle's autobiographical account were published in the same year.

recurrent usage of the pronoun “his” is already a clear proof that he was writing about “man” only. Further on, the genre is defined in a strict frame.

When it comes to the autobiographical work we have been focusing on, it is important to state that the protagonist does not share the author’s name, breaking, then, one of main prerequisites of autobiography proposed by Lejeune: author and narrator should carry the same name; they should be the same person. In *Bobbi Lee*, the first-person narrator is Bobbi Lee – who would be Lee Maracle’s representation. In the 1975 edition, then, as neither the authors/editors and narrator shared the same name, nor the same gender, I assume that readers at the time may have read this book as fiction.

Although it cannot be classified as autobiography in the traditional sense of the word, the life of Lee has too many similarities with Maracle’s to be classified as fiction. In fact, during my research, due to the lack of material found on the 1975 edition of this book, I believe it is possible that the creation of Bobbi Lee had as main purpose to separate Maracle from that plot, without classifying it as fiction either.

Philippe Lejeune discusses some genres that are autobiographical, but do not contain all the features mentioned by him, and when it comes to the narrator, the “personal novel” and the “biography” have different points of view. In the personal novel, the narrator is not identical to the author, or to a real person (p. 4), while the biography brings the narrator as someone completely different from the author, making both of these genres possible to encompass *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel*. The personal novel is a possible classification as both editors to the 1975 have chosen to re-name the main character with no clear purpose. Unless it was under Maracle’s request, there is no other reason to have the main character’s name changed other than to be able to have no obligation with Maracle over her life history. On the other hand, in 1990, already authorized to sign the book cover, Maracle made sure readers realized Lee and Maracle shared the same life history. Further on, keeping Bobbi Lee might have been a way to separate the young Maracle from the more mature one whose voice is present in the 1990 edition. The biography is a very unlikely option, for even though author and narrator are different people in both editions, the main character is not a real person, but a representation of one.

An important question that arises at this point of the analysis is why Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed* (1973), which has also been through editing, did not bring any kind of representation of the author. The first-person narrator in *Halfbreed* is also named Maria, and

besides being politically engaged, the narrative also has as main purpose to denounce injustices. As *Bobbi Lee* was published after Campbell's autobiography, it made no sense to try to "protect" Maracle somehow – if that was really the reason for the creation of Bobbi Lee.

"People often confuse life writing and fiction" (SMITH; WATSON, 2010, p. 9). The very sentence that opens the section entitled "Life Writing and the Novel", in Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's book *Reading Autobiography* (2010), can trigger an endless discussion on the fluidity of the boundaries between genres. There are some features shared between fiction and life writing – as "plot, dialogue, setting, characterization […]" (p. 9-10) – that only make matters more conflicted. Because of that confusion, "many contemporary writers deliberately blur the boundary between life writing and the kinds of stories told in the first person novel that some call 'faction', others 'autofiction'" (p. 10). Jana Evans Braziel also refers to "autofiction" as a kind of hybrid genre, and still brings another concept which fits the work under scrutiny here: alterbiography. According to Braziel, alterbiography is "[…] a textual rending of autobiography through the inscriptions of alterity and difference" (p. 20), and this description has a lot to do with Maracle's life history. In *Bobbi Lee*, it can be said that the main character is the epitome of the oppressed Native: she is a poor, uneducated woman, who realizes from a very early age that people treat her differently because of her background and skin color.

2.4 **The editors and the political bias**

It is from the first pages of the 1990 edition that it is possible to notice the political tone Maracle's life history is about to take. Even before the foreword by Jeannette Armstrong or the preface or dedication, there are a few pages on the Oka Crisis, that reached its highest point on September 1990. This seven-page "chapter" opens by stating: "The tension is thick, heavy with the reality that here on the eastern end of the country there have been 400 years – 400 years of colonial battering" (MARACLE, 1990, p. 5). This sentence sets the mood for *Bobbi Lee*, as it denounces long lasting injustices and criticizes the colonial system.

Ever since the Mohawks, one of the First Nations tribes, were dispossessed, they had been struggling in order to possess a piece of land where they could settle down. After several treaties passed by the government, the Mohawks still could not truly claim a land as their own and the fact that private companies intended (and succeeded) to transform part of their sacred burial grounds into a golf court triggered the Oka Crisis. Why did those White entrepreneurs choose *the Mohawks' cemeteries* to build an entertainment center? About that Maracle claims:

> Peace: freedom from conditions which annoy the mind. It annoys our minds to sleep under the dome of imperialist lust which is constantly looking for newer and more effective means of attacking our homelands, clawing and digging at them, extracting the insides, covering our graves with roadways, golf grounds, housing projects, offices, or what-have-you. (…) It annoys our minds to imagine golfers tramping on the grave of Mohawk grandmothers. It annoys our minds to think, to feel, that we are less than sovereign people in our homelands. And it annoys a good many Canadians now too (p. 9).

From making the Mohawks' pain also hers, from the frequent use of the pronoun "we" and "ours" it is clear how, despite being a Métis, Maracle feels that every blow aimed at the Native Canadians is a blow aimed at herself.

Notions such as valuing the earth, human and animal life are also mentioned in this first passage, and are of utmost importance to make of this work truly "complete". Because this story was "told" when she was twenty-five, in the epilogue to the edition of 1990 Maracle affirms that some of her memories were left out and, now that she was older, things were much clearer. At twenty-five, she had buried the memories she had of those Indians who contributed to her upbringing, all their teachings and stated her inside was indigenous, while her outside was covered with "a foreign code of conduct, its sensibility and its cold behavior" (p. 200). Perhaps these memories were present in the manuscript or the tape recording, but Barnett and Sterling might have decided not to include it, and Maracle, out of respect or intimidation, decided not to put the blame on them.

In the 1975 edition, though, Barnett and Sterling might have edited the text under the influence of how they perceived the young Lee Maracle. As they were involved in political movements, both men focused on the material related to her "political side", and probably left out much of what was not related to politics. That explains the predominant political tone of this life history, and even Maracle's statements that have might been left out.

2.4.1 On welfare, corruption and injustices

Because their family was destitute, Lee and her siblings had to start working very soon while their mother worked to exhaustion. They would always question why they could not support themselves fairly from all the work they did, and "mom" would often "cry and talk to [Bobbi Lee], saying she couldn't understand how it was she could work so hard and yet be so poor… and grumbling under her breath that she would never accept their dirty welfare money" (MARACLE, 1990, p. 32). By bringing the issue of welfare to her narrative, the author is able to make several points concerning this "dirty money". Welfare is government money given to Indians who would ask for it, and to "mom" and other generations of this family, it has been a matter of pride not to "go on welfare".

There is a very intricate issue behind welfare: the struggle against it is a way to stand up to government's laws and prohibitions that were little by little demoralizing and undermining the basis of Native families. Some of the laws passed, concerned the abolition of one of the most common practices on certain Native communities: fishing. In the chapter entitled "Fish-In!", the narrator explains:

> Seems the main issue was that the fishing and other rights guaranteed by the Medicine Creek Treaty were being violated by the government. The treaty said that the Indians had the right to fish "as long as the grass grows" – forever and ever. The State, however, kept imposing regulations on their fishing, arguing things about conservation and so forth. The Puyallup wanted to practice their own methods of conservation and complained about sport fisherman being allowed to fish all year round while they were being prohibited from doing commercial net fishing. They had a good case because a Federal Supreme Court ruling had reaffirmed that all their treaty rights should be recognized. But the State of Washington didn't agree; (…) They kept passing this illegal legislation restricting Indian fishing rights, then harassing people with game wardens, state troopers, court actions, and so on (p. 151).

Besides expressing her total disregard for the government, the narrator manages to denounce the dishonest police officers she had encountered. As Lee and her partner Ray had been involved in politics through the NARP (Native American Red Power) – an organization focused on the empowering of Natives which even worked with the removal of drunk and drugged people from the streets, and fought for the rights of Native people in education and in

politics – there was a specific occasion (but not the only one) in which the police was depicted as absolutely corrupt:

> […] as I was passing through Cache Creek, I saw Ray coming out of the jailhouse. He was really mad. The cops had picked him up the night before on his way to the Thom's place and taken him to jail for "questioning". They kept him awake all night asking the same stupid questions. He kept asking, "Well, what are you going to charge me with?" "We're not charging you with anything, yet. We have the right to hold you for 24 hours for routine questioning," they said. "Why don't you ask me some questions then?" But they kept keeping him awake with bright lights and questions like, "What's your name? Where do you live? Where do you work?" and so on (p. 185).

This happened because while Lee's group was distributing leaflets in a Stampede against government using CPR property, the police officers came and told them they could no longer hand their leaflets because they were causing trouble. The content of these leaflets was related to the rights of the civilians involved in the Stampede, and one of the instructions in it was that they were not obliged to answer the police officers' questions about their personal information. This angered the officers to a point that they said they would go and get the group Bobbi Lee was in, after the end of the movement. And so they did.

2.4.2 On denouncing racism and overcoming addiction

Bobbi Lee was disappointed both with the system and with White people. Her father figure[32] was a white man as well as a drunkard who would abuse her and her entire family. There were white neighbors who would tease her and her siblings, school teachers and colleagues who managed to disappoint her to a point she came to hate them. Much harder than facing the whites' contempt in the streets, as a child, she was coping with the fact that her white stepfather, in moments of anger, called her "dirty old squaw" (p. 34) – an offensive term used to refer to Native women, especially wives.

This kind of prejudice mentioned above is not portrayed as one-sided by the narrator. At the age of sixteen, Lee moves to Visalia, a border town in California, to live with her sister

[32] This figure corresponds to her mother's partner, who lived with the family. Her biological father was not White, he was Native (Salish).

Toni, and there, she experiences what she calls “blatant racism” (p. 53), which was so common, that people wouldn’t even reflect upon it. In there, even the Whites – who are allegedly the source of prejudice towards the non-whites – are also victims:

> If a gringo came to the Mexican side of town he would get the same snipe I got: they’d just ignore him; nobody would serve him; he’d be treated like he wasn’t there. It was something that would happen to a Mexican on the white side of town. It was just the accepted way of life (p. 54).

However, according to Lee’s experience it is clear that being an Indian in Visalia would not free her from being discriminated either:

> Once, soon after I’d arrived in town, I went into this store and asked a white woman for the time. She just stared right through me; didn’t say a word. So I asked some guy and he did the same thing. I began to wonder: “What’s going on? Do I have leprosy or something?” Then the owner said, “Get out Mex. No one’s got the time for you in here!” It finally dawned on me: “They think I’m Mexican and the racist bastards won’t even give me the right time!” (…) It would have been worse if they’d known I was Indian (p. 54).

As it can be observed, there is a certain hierarchy when it comes to racism in Visalia: first come the Whites, then the Mexicans and then the Indians. Racism towards the Blacks, however, is said to be different, for unlike what happened with Mexicans, a relationship in which there would be certain reciprocity, when it came to the African-Americans there was no such thing:

> There were just no good “niggers” in Visalia. Whites rarely passed a black man without saying something vulgar to him or his wife. There [*sic*] were always subject to racist attack. Not like the Mexican, who would be passed in the streets as if he wasn’t there. I don’t know how to say it, but with Mexicans and whites it was more like a reciprocal relationship whereas black people seemed to be subjected to a more one-sided racism (p. 55).

This contempt towards white people by minorities described in *Bobbi Lee* is a consequence of mutual prejudice, but it can also be seen as a reaction to continuous discrimination. In fact, while referring to the narrator’s childhood, similar passages of deeply-rooted on prejudice can also be found:

> Then there was Jimmy Waddel. His family lived above the store and his father worked at McKenzie Barge and Derrick, a boat-building outfit. Jimmy and the older Korris boy down the street always picked on my brother and the younger kids from

> the Reserve. Whenever we played they tried to bully us around. So one day we decided we'd had enough. It was quite funny. Ten of us little kids were making faces at Jimmy from around the corner of a house, calling him 'dirty old man', 'whitey', 'whitey boy', and things like that (p. 27).

Concerning the racial issue, the narrator mentions the fact that young Bobbi Lee wasn't aware of the existence of different races. The way the system works and the prejudice internalized by citizens, with time, opened Lee's eyes to prejudice and racism. In a description of the children in her neighbourhood, she states:

> Six families, most on welfare, lived in boathouses built up on stilts. The dredger's house was on stilts too, but it was really nice. He was from South Africa and his wife was mulatto. She talked a lot about racism back home – about how they'd had to leave because her husband, a white, had married a coloured woman. They moved into the neighbourhood when I was four and I played a lot with their son, Brian. I didn't know what Blacks were then; I just knew they were different, much friendlier to us (p. 26).

At this time of innocence, the young narrator would still consider herself the same as others. Perhaps, she was aware there were boys and girls, as well as men and women, but the social strictures and racial issues hadn't become part of her reality yet. Not for long, though. In the same chapter, the narrator mentions the first time she realized she was an Indian:

> Three months after I entered school I became aware that I was an Indian and that white people didn't like me because of the colour of my skin. I talked about it with kids on the reserve but they would just say "We don't like whites either". Even the older people didn't like whites. Many worked in the white communities, around white people, but they had no white friends. Like most of the kids, when some white called me a name or abused me, I fought back. But otherwise I just ignored them like everyone else, fighting their contempt with my silence (p. 33).

The fact that there is mention to how this prejudice was perceived and ended up corrupting a little girl is quite shocking. The aim of this seems to be to induce readers to feel empathy for that girl and reflect upon how many other Native children went through similar experience.

The narrator also denounces how the system feeds prejudice against Indians, by means of the media, with stereotypical and essentialist depictions of that people, especially the effect all this has on children: "You know, like when you're eleven and watch TV stuff about cowboys and Indians you just don't associate the racist crap with your own existence or with your parents' attitudes; it's just exciting and something to do after dinner" (p. 49). How does the media get to show such racist scenes on prime time and still make it acceptable by

society? This apparently harmless cowboy movie shows Natives as ignorant and mere obstacles of greater deeds to be accomplished by the white cowboys. As a consequence, the perpetration of this Indian stereotypical figure is internalized by the Natives, who start feeling as the allegory or token the cinema, literature and the arts make of them. This contributes to a great "void" inside Natives, discouraging them to be proud of themselves and lowering their self-esteem. In fact, this criticism shows how unaware of racism the youngsters – and people in general – usually are.

As Bobbi Lee grew up, school became a place she no longer wanted to be in. And as it happens quite often among Natives, she eventually dropped out of school and getting into trouble became a rule. Abusing drinks and being thrown out of her mother's house triggered her rebellion years.

The reference to drugs and alcohol addiction is another topic that might contribute to the identification of the readers with her work. According to Smith and Watson (2010), some narratives of addiction have placed it as a consequence of social, economic and political disenfranchisement (p. 147). To Natives, in particular, addiction may be associated with injustices that they have been through – not only personal injustices, but the ones suffered by the whole community – as clearly mentioned by Maria Campbell, in *Halfbreed*: "I really didn't need an escape anymore. I had nothing to escape from. I was afraid I wouldn't feel anything for her either and if I did feel something, what would happen? I'd be full of guilt and shame and I'd end up on dope again" (CAMPBELL, 1982, p. 121). This openness, with which Campbell dealt with her addiction, is the same with which Bobbi Lee dealt with hers:

> I'd started shooting just once in a while, for kicks. Then it was once a day, twice a day, and so on. I just about overdosed a few times but I could really take a lot. I think that unconsciously I wanted to overdose; I really hated my existence. I had taken this path deliberately, not out of ignorance or naïveté, and was just giving up on life. I knew the stuff would eventually kill me, yet I kept on taking it. And in the meantime I started feeling completely dehumanized, like a vegetable (MARACLE, 1990, p. 105).

The way these issues were exposed may have led readers to feel empathy towards these stories because:

> In the increasingly depersonalized and dispersed communities of late-capitalism, readers seek the intimacy of an one-on-one reading experience, imagining a personal connection with a narrator whose story of addiction resonates with their own struggles to find wholeness and meaning (SMITH; WATSON, 2010, p. 148).

2.5 **Further considerations**

Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel is an autobiographical work narrated in the first person, and has as main purpose "heal" the author (and perhaps a whole community). By denouncing prejudice and injustices, she can come to grips with herself after all the suffering she had been through. In the Epilogue, Maracle claims:

> My misspent youth, the craziness of internalized racism, my own confusion and the holes rent in my memory had come back at me like cruel bill collectors wanting their pound on flesh. In 1975, at the time *Bobbi Lee: Volume One*[33] was first printed, I was pregnant, with my third child, the only one I wanted before I became pregnant and had begun the long process of unraveling what it would take to get back to the little girl and the woman that lived inside me but who was paralysed by huge amounts of garbage collected for some twenty-five years (p. 199).

As posed by Smith and Watson, this kind of life narrative is "as a moving target, a set of shifting self-referential practices that, in engaging the past, reflect on identity in the present" (SMITH; WATSON, 2010, p. 1). As a Native Canadian woman author of autobiographical works, Maracle is in fact exercising her agency, that is, "relating actions in which people exercise free choice over the interpretation of their lives and express their 'true' selves. […]" (p. 42). However, Smith and Watson also claim "[…] we must recognize that the issue of how subjects claim, exercise, and narrate agency is far more complicated" (SMITH; WATSON, 2001, p. 42).

In fact, the process of telling her story has surely contributed to soothe her pain, and might even have served as therapy to Maracle. Theorist Suzette Henke has created the term "scriptotherapy" and certain life writings may serve this cathartic purpose (SMITH; WATSON, 2010, p. 147). Smith and Watson, on their "Tool Kit", place some questions in order to determine whether a life narrative is therapeutic or not:

> […] Are those traumatic memories of a personal and/or political sort? […] Does the narrator discuss the therapeutic effects of writing in the text? Is the therapeutic value of writing itself a major theme? Does the process of writing seem to have changed the narrating "I" and the life story itself? Does the act of reading a narrative of trauma have therapeutic effects on the reader? Where and in what ways does the

[33] Maracle uses this title to refer to *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel* (1975). As already mentioned, volume two would be *I Am Woman* (1988).

> narrator offer the reader a possibility of community in identifying with the narrator? Where and in what ways does the narrator ask the reader to see his or her own identity differently? (p. 250)

When it comes to *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel*, the traumatic memories are various and their political bias is clear. Even passages that encompass Bobbi Lee's childhood offer political insights, such as the following: "It was the first time in my life I'd been open to friendship with white girls, and now their concept and ostracism forced me to conclude that all whites were the same: creepy, cruel racists that I wanted nothing more to do with" (MARACLE, 1990, p. 37). The account of her teenage years also underscore the unfair treatment received by Indians:

> Then there was another thing which turned me off to the system. I tried to apply for welfare and really got worked over the bureaucracy. At first they told me I had to prove I wasn't a registered Indian. "How can I prove that?" I asked. "Maybe I can prove what I am, but how can I prove what I am not?" But that's the way it was. So then I go over to the Indian Affairs Bureau and they ask me to prove I was registered. Well, I thought it would be easy, but being a Métis from B.C. with no papers they just refused to believe me. So, that was that: no welfare from the city because I couldn't prove I wasn't a Registered Indian, and no assistance from Indian Affairs because I couldn't prove I was a Registered Indian (p. 93).

As Bobbi Lee grew up, she became actively engaged in politics:

> So, toward the end of 1968, NARP was slowly becoming a more serious organization, beginning to move beyond social drinking and idle conversation to do some organizing work in the Indian community and trying to start a few programs like the discussion at the Indian Center (p. 143).

Still, the narrator mentions the therapeutic effects of her writing throughout the text by claiming on the Epilogue of the 1990 edition:

> I began writing stories about this time to save my sanity. Poetry and the comfort of my diaries – of my books of madness I called them – where truth rolled out of my inner self, began to re-shape me. […] I did not really want to write, I needed to. In my diary, I faced my womanhood, indigenous womanhood. I faced my inner hate, my anger and the desertion of myself from our way of being. I reclaimed that little innocent child. It took twenty-five years to twist me and only ten to unravel the twist. I still wrote for the demonstrations Native people held, but I began putting my need to write poetry and stories ahead of the political words that our people needed written. I became a woman through my words (p. 230).

With this passage, the question “Does the process of writing seem to have changed the narrating ‘I’ and the life story itself?” (SMITH; WATSON, 2010, p. 250) is answered: writing has changed Lee Maracle – even through the book has been edited by two men, the manuscript to the first edition, as well as the 1990 edition’s additions to the original text definitely served this purpose.

Now, as this narrative involves plenty of issues, such as addiction, politics, racism, familiar structure, and schooling for Natives, the final question can be answered because of the reception of this work by the readers. In fact, many have named Maracle one of the pioneers in Native literature in the 70s. I believe that one of the main purposes of this narrative was to make Native readers identify with this young woman’s experiences and be able to see that overcoming obstacles is possible, that writing about her life made of Lee Maracle a role model to be followed by other Native people throughout Canada or other countries. So, *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel* does have a therapeutic effect on readers.

In fact, the effect went much further than just over readers. It actually contributed to a much wider movement, which is mentioned by Jeannette Armstrong in the Foreword to the 1990 edition of *Bobbi Lee*:

> Yet the clear path towards transformation through personal resolve, resistance and clear thinking is a path that Bobbi sharpens into focus, strong as the formative ideals that burgeon into a strong native political and cultural renaissance immediately following the period the book covers (p. 15-16).

Other than being just a political work, Lee Maracle’s *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel* has, ever since it was first published, opened the doors of Native literature so other writers could contribute to the cultural and political renaissance of her people.

3 LESLIE MARMON SILKO'S *THE TURQUOISE LEDGE: A* MEMOIR: A HYBRID WORK

The wind moves past the screen
no sound
the curtain billows back.
This indeterminate Spring
is dreaming
older days outreach the Sun
higher and beyond
memory is a metaphor
not the thing itself
but enough it may fool us
listening for the green edge along the canyon
Never certain
when the next rain may come.
Leslie Marmon Silko

Leslie Marmon Silko is well known for bringing to her written works much of the Native culture, and doing so in quite a poetic way. In her autobiographical work, *The Turquoise Ledge: a Memoir* (2010), Silko has written down a mix of memories, with bits of her imagination, prose and poetry, all of it woven as if it had been told directly to the reader – in a stream of consciousness, but still politically engaged.

Born Leslie Marmon on March 5th 1948 to Mary Virginia Leslie and Leland Howard Marmon, Leslie Marmon Silko is a renowned poet, novelist and essayist, famous for the lyrical way with which she brings to literature much of Native culture as well as several of their issues[34]. Even though Silko was born and raised in the Laguna Pueblo reservation in Albuquerque, New Mexico, she is of mixed heritage – this influence of German, English,

[34] The content of this first section of my dissertation is based on several sources, such as:
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leslie_Marmon_Silko#The_Turquoise_Ledge:_A_Memoir>,
<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/leslie-marmon-silko>,
<http://voices.cla.umn.edu/artistpages/silko_leslie.php>,
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/544533/Leslie-Marmon-Silko>,
<https://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/1104>. Last accessed on February 11th 2014.

Scottish, Mexican and Cherokee cultures does not mean she was not raised under Native precepts, though. According to *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* (2012), Silko was kept in a cradle board[35] during her first year of life – a typical custom of the people – and despite being a complicated issue, she sees her mixed ancestry as a source of strength (BAYM, 2012, p. 1049, v. E). In fact, the way she tells stories is closely connected to the way she was brought up: influenced by Laguna Pueblo and non-Native cultures.

As a writer, Silko is well-known for fighting for the preservation of Native traditions and ceremonies, but also for making political statements concerning Natives and minorities, denouncing racism, unfair immigration policies, violence against women as well as the deficient education of Natives, among other issues.

Her first contact with school was inside the reservation, and in this institution she was prohibited to speak Laguna, her people's language. On fifth grade, Silko was transferred to a Catholic school in Albuquerque, and in 1969, she got her bachelor's degree from the University of New Mexico – the same year her first story "The Man to Send Rainclouds" was published. From 1971 to 1974, Silko published several other short stories and poems that have come to be gathered in her book *Laguna Woman:* Poems (1974). But it was not until 1977 that she published her first novel, *Ceremony*, and received significative attention from critics. Her first novel rendered her the title of first Native American woman writer, and her importance as a novelist only ratified her significance to the Native American renaissance, that began in the late 1960s.

From 1977 on, Silko published several works in poetry and prose. Her 1981 *Storyteller* brings an interesting mixture of short stories (fiction and non-fiction), poetry and photographs, and according to professor Peônia Guedes (2013), *Storyteller*, as well as *The Turquoise Ledge*, tell the life experiences of the author/narrator/protagonist (p. 134). Her novel *Almanac of the Dead* (1991) focuses on the struggle between Native Americans and Europeans that go back a long way. In 1999, her last novel, *Gardens in the Dunes*, was published, and it reveals the contrast between Native American traditional culture and European upper-class culture. These three works are just a few from the list of Silko's productions.

[35] According to Silko in *Storyteller* (1981), her people believed the cradle board protected a child, so they would speak to the board asking it to take good care of the child (p. 102).

In 1971, Leslie Marmon Silko won a National Endowment for the Arts Discovery Grant, only the first in her career. She was also awarded a Pushcart Prize for poetry, a Rosewater Foundation Grant, the MacArthur "Genius" Fellowship and the New Mexico Endowment for the Humanities "Living Cultural Treasure" Awards. In fact, it was due to the MacArthur fellowship that Silko was able to quit her teaching job and dedicate herself fully to the writing of *Almanac of the Dead* – which took her ten years to finish. Silko taught at the Navajo Community College in Arizona – currently called Diné College – and at the Universities of New Mexico and Arizona, in Tucson.

For Silko, the grants, awards, works published and the university teaching brought visibility to her and to Native Americans.

3.1 **On *The Turquoise Ledge: a Memoir***

It was eleven years after publishing Leslie Marmon Silko's last novel that her autobiographical work *The Turquoise Ledge: a Memoir* (2010) was published, bringing out much of her Native roots in her memories and, as she claimed, pinches of fiction too. In this work, Silko writes about her childhood, youth and adulthood, but throughout the pages of the book, we sense that her bond with nature and animals seems to be much stronger than with human beings.

In the preface, Silko starts by problematizing the nature of memories, and by signaling the fluid boundaries between fact and fiction:

> A great deal of what I call 'memories' are bits and pieces I recall vividly; but the process we call 'memory', even recent memory, involves imagination. We learn to ignore the discrepancies between our memory and a sister's memory. We can't be certain of anything. […] I make myself a fictional character so I can write about myself (p. 1).

Silko's statement in an interview that appears in the Penguin Group website throws further light into the strategies utilized by the author to compose this piece of "*creative nonfiction*" (my emphasis):

> I don't pay much attention to what form or genre my writing takes. I simply keep writing and as the piece develops, I can see that it wants to be poetry or fiction. Some subjects, some materials, seem to take a more poetical form than others so I don't interfere with this. Sometimes the writing becomes a combination of both poetry and fiction because that is what the subject needs in order to be communicated completely. I feel most comfortable with fiction and poetry, so in writing *The Turquoise Ledge*, which is a memoir or creative nonfiction, I included poetical expression and elements of fiction"[36]

So, the amount of fiction present in her work will never be known. However, the presence of several typically Native elements, such as the ceremonies, the language, the traditional stories, nature and spiritual beings, make this narrative a mirror of who Silko really is: a mix between writer (non-Native) and storyteller (Native).

It took Silko over thirty years to write her most autobiographical work, and the reason why this happened can be connected to the author's claim that she much preferred writing fiction, because when writing about herself she "had to stand back or stand apart from [her]self to get away from self-consciousness[37]" and be able to write about the facts surrounding her life. Nevertheless, her memoir, is not limited to narrating incidents that make up her life-story. Readers can notice the ever present landscape of the Sonoran desert along with constant references to animals, spiritual beings, and, as the title might suggest, turquoises, all of which are paramount in Silko's self life-writing. As Paula Gunn Allen emphasizes in *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (1992), to Native people the material world – including human beings and animals – is interconnected with the spiritual realm (p. 59-60).

Divided into five parts and sixty chapters, *The Turquoise Ledge*, devotes its first part, called "Ancestors", to a description of her surroundings, to a stream of recollections of Silko's past as well as information about her ancestors, all narrated in a non-linear fashion. Many of her reminiscences are intertwined with present time narration, as it can be seen in chapter 2, for example, which starts with a recollection of an incident that took place when Silko was twelve years old and then moves to a recent time. The link between the segments in this chapter is her interest, fascination even, for turquoises.

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[36] From <http://www.us.penguingroup.com/static/rguides/us/turquoise_ledge.html>. Last accessed on February 12th 2014.

[37] Leslie Marmon Silko in an interview to Kimberly Banti to *Seattlest*, a Seattle blog. Available on <http://mobile.seattlest.com/2010/10/19/interview_leslie_marmon_silko_on_th.php>. Last accessed on February 12th 2014.

Despite narrating some life events, the recurrence of natural and spiritual elements even in the part destined to her ancestors is undeniable – the very first paragraph that opens this life narrative already takes readers to the rough terrains of Arizona: "My friend Bill Orzen taught me to speed walk on flat ground in town, but I prefer the hills to the city, so I adapted the speed walk to the steep rough terrain. The walks took me back into the Tucson Mountains to the old trails where I rode my horse thirty years ago when I first moved here" (p. 5). In chapter 3 the focus is on "cloud beings" and other manifestations of love from friends, family members and ancestors before or after death. The connection between natural and spiritual world, as well as the belief that both world may function harmoniously stand out in the chapter. That which may require a suspension of disbelief for a non-native seems to be accepted naturally by Silko, such as the appearance of a small grackle, quite unusual in the desert area, right before an old friend died (p. 14).

In part two, readers are acquainted with very important characters in this work: rattlesnakes. The respect and admiration for those animals come from her Cherokee Grandmother (mentioned in the first part of the book), who was terrified of rats, and, believed that rattlers should be very much liked and respected, since they ate rats. Silko's mother, then, took such belief from her mother, and taught her daughter to respect snakes – even though her husband used to kill them (p. 59). Part three is entitled "Star Beings", spiritual beings who bring the narrator back to painting and drawing. Part four is named after the precious stone from the title, while part five brings another spiritual figure, in the shape of a grasshopper, "Lord Chapulin". This division roughly shows how the occurrence of spiritual and natural elements outnumbers the appearance of Silko's close family members and ancestors, as well as friends. Writer Louisa Thomas, in a review of *The Turquoise Ledge:* a Memoir, to The New York Times on November 26th 2010, stated that Silko's work "[…] is less autobiographical than an exploration of her relationship with the natural and spiritual worlds – and it's a very close relationship[38]". Thomas also writes that this work has very little of her relationship with other people, as the references to natural elements are frequent, and that "[s]he refers only glancingly to marriage and children, and a mention of friends tends merely to lead her to the outdoors"[39].

[38] From <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/28/books/review/Thomas-t.html?_r=2&>. Last accessed on February 12th 2014.
[39] From <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/28/books/review/Thomas-t.html?_r=2&>. Last accessed on February 12th 2014.

This memoir, then, shows how Native values have influenced Silko's conception of self, and therefore, have helped her to pursue and achieve empowerment (MIHESUAH, 2003, p. xvii) through writing, breaking with many Western assumptions about this autobiographical genre.

3.1.1 *The Turquoise Ledge: a Memoir* and its covers

The featuring of nature is such a relevant issue that the two different covers of *The Turquoise Ledge* bring similar images.

On the cover of the paperback edition[40], a mixture of nature and writing can be seen on the cover. A species of cactus in the foreground, a few green plants, dry dirt and the horizon in the background already hint to readers that the desert landscape will play an important role in the book. Right below this picture, there is the author's name, and a reference to her 1977 novel *Ceremony* – which does reinforce Silko's authorship. According to Philippe Lejeune in his "The Autobiographical Pact" (1975), the author is the person who writes and publishes, and in the case of autobiographies, is the one who stands between the text and the world-beyond-the-text. Lejeune claims that one perhaps becomes an author from his second book onward, as the name on the cover becomes a common factor between two texts; if the autobiography is the first, the author is still unknown[41], if the second, the reader can already connect this author to other texts (usually nonautobiographical), which is indispensable to what Lejeune calls "the autobiographical space". In Leslie Marmon Silko's situation, there has been more than just *Ceremony* – even though she has gained respect because of this novel and its connection to the historical moment of the time of publishing. There were also several awards and anthologized texts.

Below the author's name, comes the title, as if hand-written on a sheet of paper. The subtitle, on the other hand, comes in a much smaller font if compared to the first part of the title. There is however, a ring around it, giving the impression that a glass (or perhaps a cup of coffee) had been left accidentally over that sheet leaving a mark. Besides having both title and

[40] See annex D
[41] In that respect, Maracle's *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel* was the first (autobiographical) work by the author and did not bring any reference to previous works.

subtitle resembling handwriting, the presence of this ring around the words “a memoir” calls the attention to them. The reader may also get the impression that he/she is about to read a manuscript, or a text that has not been through a thorough process of rewriting and editing, or perhaps Silko is allowing the readers to become intimate with her life and piece of writing.

On the front cover of the hardback edition, hues of turquoise predominate, going from lighter (bottom) to much darker shades (top), while in the center a lonely cactus can be seen as well. This photo seems to have been taken at sunset, as the background is dark, but sunlight can be seen on the left. Instead of a glimpse of other features of the desert, in this edition, the readers only get the cactus. Similarly, the cover brings Silko’s name on the top of the page, soon followed by the words “author of *Ceremony*”. The title is written down in big letters, but it does not resemble handwriting, nor does it emphasize the subtitle – on this edition the subtitle is in small letters, below the title. However, underneath the jacket, on the bound volume initials LMS are featured, suggesting that the reader is about to open a diary and enter a private world.

The hardback edition did not bring on the front cover any other kind of information, while the paperback edition brings, on the top left hand corner, a quote from The New York Times Book Review[42], praising the book and functioning as an endorsement. Furthermore, both covers feature a lonely cactus and sunlight of some sort. Even though there are clear differences between the two covers, the cacti, which are closely associated with desert landscape, apparently have been chosen to show readers beforehand that the setting very much focuses on desert creatures. Silko, as the main character, seems to be one of them, perfectly at home in the dry environment. In fact, the lack of rain throughout this memoir is very much remarkable. Passages such as: “The drought began in 1985” (p. 87), or “The air is so dry even if rain did fall from the clouds in a gossamer veil of blue, it would evaporate before it reached the ground” (p. 88), appear throughout the text.

3.2 ***The Turquoise Ledge: a Memoir*** **and native literature**

[42] “Evocative…An exploration of Silko’s relationship with the natural and spiritual worlds.” – THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW.

It is important to state that Leslie Marmon Silko is of "mixed ancestry" (p. 28), and in her memoir she overtly states that she "[…] was a mix of Mexican, German and English […]" (p. 30), Cherokee and Scottish (p. 37). Besides being influenced by several cultures, this varied ancestry brings a history of violence, racism and subjugation – all of which were triggered by colonization[43].

Even before she was able to understand about prejudice and injustice, Silko recalls that as a child she sensed the tensions between the Pueblo and non-Pueblo members of her family. She was fascinated with how the different sides of the family talked about the other, and she states:

> I was fascinated with how the different sides of the family talked about the other. I always felt such anguish when one side of the family said something mean about the other branches of the family. […] Of course I was a young child then and did not yet understand the injustice that fueled the undercurrents between the Marmons, the other family branches, and the rest of the Pueblo. (p. 25)

Actually, Leslie Marmon Silko should not have her identity seen as something fixed, but, rather, seen as *identification* – an ongoing process. Cultural theorist and sociologist Stuart Hall asserts that identity "arises, not so much from the fullness of identity which is already inside us as individuals, but from a *lack* of wholeness which is 'filled' from *outside* us, by the ways we imagine ourselves to be seen by *others*" (HALL, 2007, p. 608), leading to the fact that Silko's process of identification is thoroughly shaped by the others (those who are *not* her) who see her as the other. According to Bill Ashcroft et al. in *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Studies* (2001), psychoanalyst and cultural theorist Jacques Lacan brings a useful definition between "Other" and "other" under the scope of post-colonialism. To Lacan, the other, with a small "o", is the other who much resembles the self, as the one seen by the child when looking at the mirror. In post-colonial theory, this other refers to those marginalized by the colonial discourse, who are mastered by the "center", or the imperial "ego". The Other, with capital "O", refers to the center, which shapes the identity of the colonized (p. 169-170).

As a consequence of Silko's identification process, it is assumed here that her life narrative somehow shows the influence of her mixed ancestry and hybridism. Furthermore, it

[43] From <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/28/books/review/Thomas-t.html?_r=2&>. Last accessed on February 12th 2014.

cannot be left unsaid that Leslie Marmon Silko is a woman, a Native-American (Laguna Pueblo) woman, and the way she was raised very much makes of this facet of her identity the most important one. The fact that she was raised, and therefore influenced, by the women in her family and that she had access to books and also to oral stories of her people while growing up, are blended together to shape this hybrid narrative that is *The Turquoise Ledge*.

3.2.1 Native American women in *The Turquoise Ledge: a Memoir*

According to Paula Gunn Allen, in *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (1992), Modern Native women, just like the non-Native ones, are currently going through a process of self-redefinition. In order to accomplish their goals, there must be reconciliation between "traditional tribal definitions of women with industrial and postindustrial non-Indian definitions" (p. 43). However, Allen makes sure she points out how mutually exclusive these two definitions are, and how Native women have to cope with balancing both. To Native women, tribal identity is what defines them, but their role in the tribes may vary, as Allen states:

> In some [tribes] she is devalued, in others she wields considerable power. In some she is a familial/clan adjunct, in some she is as close to autonomous as her economic circumstances and psychological traits permit. But in no tribal definitions is she perceived in the same way as are women in western industrial and postindustrial cultures (p. 43).

When Allen refers to those women, there is reference to the Madonna, which is passive and whose main function is childbirth. Besides, women are often seen as "[…] mindless, helpless, simple, or oppressed" (p. 44). Allen, while showing her own perspective on tribal women, recollects:

> My ideas of womanhood, passed on largely by my mother and grandmothers, Laguna Pueblo women, are about practicality, strength, reasonableness, intelligence, wit, and competence. I also remember vividly the women who came to my father's store, the women who held me and sang to me, the women at Feast Day, at Grab Days, the women in the kitchen of my Cubero home, the women I grew up with; none of them appeared weak or helpless, none of them presented themselves tentatively. I remember a certain reserve on those lovely brown faces; I remember the direct gaze of eyes framed by bright-colored shawls draped over their heads and

> cascading down their backs. I remember the clean cotton dresses and carefully pressed hand-embroidered aprons they always wore; I remember laughter and good food, especially the sweet bread and the oven bread they gave us. Nowhere in my mind is there a foolish woman, a dumb woman, a vain woman, or a plastic woman, though the Indian women I have known have shown a wide range of personal style and demeanor. (p. 44)

There is also the other side: the presence of abuse, alcoholism, depression, prostitution, fighting and beatings among tribal women. Allen claims her memories are varied, and she remembers "[…] tired women, partying women, stubborn women, sullen women, amicable women, selfish women, shy women, and aggressive women" (p. 45). In other words, Allen shows that there is a wide variety of tribal women, helping to deconstruct stereotypical views about Native women.

Also a Laguna Pueblo woman, Leslie Marmon Silko, wrote about women in her memoir and showed how strong some of them were and how they contributed to the writer she became – Silko's mother, aunt Alice and her grandmothers were the role models she knew.

Mary Virginia Leslie, the mother, is depicted as the "[…] more dependable and practical […]" (SILKO, 2010, p. 59) parent, the breadwinner of the family as well as a well-educated woman and teacher; nonetheless, she was an alcoholic. This strong woman had phobia of rats, appreciated snakes, taught home economics, cooked, sewed and helped out on the family store. Despite all that, Silko explains:

> My sisters and I felt protective of our mother because we sensed she was troubled. My mother didn't scold us or whip us like my father did. She was afraid of him too just as we were when he was angry, although he never touched her. She always helped us with our homework and encouraged us at whatever we wanted to try. […] My mother loved to dance and have a good time. She loved to repeat jokes she heard. She was the life of the party. She was devoted to our dogs and cats, and once had a canary she loved. She was also very attached to her goldfish and liked her tarantula so much she set it free. I come by my love for creatures wild and tame from my mother. (p. 60)

In this memoir, there is reference to Aunt Alice gladly telling stories to the children, and this seems to have made of her the person who very much influenced Silko to become the woman she is today. This aunt was married but had no children; Silko's mother considered Alice "sexually repressed" (p. 49), and the stories she told functioned as her outlet. Aunt Alice used to tell the girls "old-time, hummah-hah stories. The stories about Kochininako, Yellow Woman, being abducted by strange men who turned out to be supernatural beings

were Aunt Alice's favorites." (p. 49). Alice also had a mania for order and cleaning, saved every penny she had earned, and searched the dump for things that might still be useful. Silko writes that Aunt Alice might have been an eccentric, but she has taught her to love solitude and to be self-reliant (p. 52).

Both grandmothers very much represent the mixed-ancestry Silko refers to. Grandma Lillie – or grandma Whip, as she was known by her grandchildren – was her father's mother, and because of her German background, used to give children terrible whippings that horrified the Laguna Pueblo people. She would, on the other hand, also play her role of grandmother to the young Leslie Marmon: she told her several stories and through them tried to teach her granddaughter about her ancestors and their past. Grandma A'mooh – who was called this way because of the way she referred to Silko and her sisters: *a'mooh*, an endearment term for girls – was the one who used to kneel on the floor to grind green chilli with garlic cloves on her grinding stone (p. 18). A'mooh, besides being responsible for perpetuating Native traditions, was also partly responsible for Silko's success at school: since the child started kindergarten, her grandma would not speak Laguna to her anymore, only English (p. 43). This, very much influenced her first years at the BIA (Bureau of Indian Affairs) school, since she did not need to learn English at school and could go to the first grade, with older children, because she already spoke English (p. 41).

These women, despite differences in their cultural background, all contributed to make of Silko such a hybrid individual. In fact, the stories told her about her ancestor's past, added to the ones read by her in books have probably shaped her and helped her perfect her multi-faceted writing style.

3.2.2 The influence of stories in the narrative

The source of Leslie Marmon Silko's passion for books seems to have come from her great-grandmother A'mooh, Aunt Susie and Aunt Alice to whom "[…] books were precious, and because of their love of books [Silko] grew up surrounded by books. They placed the highest possible value on education because the Pueblo people have always believed that knowledge from all sources, including books, is necessary for survival" (p. 28).

Oddly enough for Western culture, these women were highly influential not only to the then little Leslie Marmon, but also to men in the family[44]. This strong influence is intricately connected to the great power and influence women had. In fact, traditional stories bring several powerful women. Author Stephanie A. Sellers, in her *Native American Women Studies:* a Primer (2008) explains that one of the bases of these nations' traditions were women as key elements in their creation stories: their bodily functions, their psycho-spiritual experiences, their healing powers, their political abilities and leadership were ever-present traits in these stories (p. 3-4). Not to mention the belief that the creator of everything was Thought Woman and that without her blessing and her thinking, nothing is sacred (ALLEN, 1992, p. 13).

These women, were not only influential but also responsible for passing on stories and knowledge. Ever since her childhood, Silko listened to stories and soon came to love them, as stated in *The Turquoise Ledge* (2010):

> Stories themselves have spirit and being, and they have a way of communicating on different levels. The story itself communicates with us regardless of what language it is told in. […] But what I love about stories is they can survive and continue in some form or other resembling themselves regardless of how good or how bad the storyteller is, no matter what language they are told or written in. This is because the human brain favors stories or the narrative form as a primary means of organizing and relating human experience. Stories contain large amounts of valuable information even when the storyteller forgets or invents new details. (p. 45)

By showing that the insertion of invented parts in stories does not diminish their value, Silko only ratifies the fact that the experiences she is narrating in her memoir are more important than the accuracy of her memories.

In the first part of chapter 9, Silko reiterates her fascination for the stories she was told as a little girl. Her relationship with nature was mediated by stories, which helped her never feel afraid of the land she inhabited, as she herself claims:

> I never felt alone or afraid in the hills. The hummah-hah stories described the conversation coyotes, crows and buzzards used to have with human beings. I was fascinated with the notion that long ago humans and animals used to freely converse. As I got older, I realized the clouds and winds and rivers also have their ways of communication; I became interested in what these entities had to say. My

[44] These women influenced Silko's father to become a book lover as well and Mr. Lee Marmon was the one who was always encouraging his daughter to become a writer, for she could live wherever she wanted, and still do her work (p.28).

> imagination became engaged in discovering what can be known without words. (p. 45)

Having been affected by both books she read and stories she was told, influenced her style when it came to writing. She even claimed that her sense of narrative came from the stories she heard from Aunt Alice, Aunt Susie and Grandpa Hank, so much so that when she took a course in creative writing in her second year at the University of New Mexico, the hardest thing for her was to use English words to convey the meanings or evoke the experiences she had while listening to those stories (p. 45-46). In her narratives, the presence of Native languages can be perceived, in several instances, such as when she explains the meaning of the word *Ca'cazni*, the Comcaac or Seri word for rattlers (p. 82), or how she was taught useful expressions in Laguna by Grandpa Hank (p. 41), or when she refers to *Ma'shra'true'ee*, the sacred messenger snake (p. 73). These are just a few examples of the presence of Native languages throughout Silko's memoir.

The stories from Silko's childhood have shaped the way she tells stories: her experience as a Native woman, the meanings only Native languages are able to convey, Native prayers and songs are a few characteristics that feature in *The Turquoise Ledge* and make of it a hybrid narrative intertwining Native and non-Native elements.

3.2.3 The narrative and native literature

When it comes to Native literature, *The Turquoise Ledge*, just like its author, brings many features that ratify the presence of Native cultural aspects; on the other hand, there are features that make of the narrative a mix of cultural influences as well.

According to Allen (1992), American Indian literature should not be taken simplistically, as it can be very confusing. Actually, the tendency to separate things – literary forms, persons, species – make it difficult for Native literature, culture and life to be understood, because:

> It is reasonable, from an Indian point of view, that all literary forms should be interrelated, *given the basic idea of the unity and relatedness of all the phenomena of life*. Separation of parts into this or that category is not agreeable to American

> Indians, and the attempt to separate essentially unified phenomena results in distortion. (p. 62, my emphasis)

This separation does happen, though. Silko's memoir is divided into five parts and sixty chapters. However, the purpose of this division is, at many times, not clear enough to Western readers. Chapter 39, for example, opens with Sandino – one of Silko's parrots who had recently been under attack by owls and got severely injured – and an update on his health conditions. The second part of the chapter mentions the finding of a turquoise stone the size of Silko's thumb, while the third part mentions flowers that are blossoming because of the cooler weather. This chapter is divided into eight parts whose themes vary from turquoises to rain, to walks through the desert. At no moment do any of the parts of chapter 39 go back to Sandino. To a great extent the part of the chapter resembles the type of annotations we find in a diary at times. As Professor Alan Cheuse observes: "[…] the memoir shape shifts into something more of a day-book […][45]".

The presence of chapters to divide the narrative seems to have been used as a way to make this memoir fit Western modes, but as there are several references to Native American culture, many of the other influences sometimes may lose their actual purpose; the division of the narrative into chapters is one of them.

Still concerning the structure of *The Turquoise Ledge*, it is comprehensible to connect the non-linear structure of the narrative, as well as the stream of consciousness that permeates it – giving readers the impression of how Silko's mind works – to what theorist Linda Hutcheon, in her *Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988), classifies as postmodern writing (see HUTCHEON, 1988). Sometimes readers come across different "times": the narrator's present moment, the narrator's childhood, her adolescence as well as adulthood blended together throughout the chapters. In part two ("Rattlesnakes"), for instance, this blending is quite clear when the narrator starts a paragraph by stating: "When I first came to this old ranch house there were the remains of a mesquite log corral below the hill […]" (p. 82); soon after, only a paragraph later she writes: "Other big rattlesnakes live near the old corral but these snakes are shades of light brown and beige […]" (p. 83). On the following paragraph, she recollects the time she was seven, and, under the influence of her father (a snake-killer), shot a rattlesnake with her gun in early September (p. 83). There are also lexical choices used to refer to time that may be rather confusing to readers. The use of the adverb "now" in passages which refer

[45] From: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=130866292>. Last accessed on March 9th 2014.

to past events contributes to this effect, such as "[m]id-October now" (p. 106), "mid-July now" (p. 115), as well as other structures as "[a]lthough it is late September, the days are still very warm" (p. 147), "[i]t's the beginning of June […] today […]" (p. 157), to name but a few. Yet, the occurrence of this unusual perception of time might have a connection with her upbringing since she claimed:

> I learned the world of the clock and calendar when I started school, but I've never lost my sense of being alive without reference to clocks or calendars. My great grandmother didn't know exactly when she was born; none of her generation did. Calendar age wasn't important. Time was very much present time; even the way the old folks talked about the ancestors and their time was located in the present. (p. 47)

Having been raised by family members who did not have the same notion of time as the Western world, probably made her feel as if time were basically the present moment; hence, the recurrence of the adverb "now", even though she was writing a memoir.

Actually, the multiple cultural influence that makes Silko's *The Turquoise Ledge* seem discontinuous has more to do with Native culture than with postmodernism. Louisa Thomas claimed that readers perceive this different relationship Silko has with time, as distinctions between "is" and "was" seem not to matter – her "vigilant presence" is what really matters[46]. Paula Gunn Allen has also underscored how different Indians and non-Indians conceive time: the former see it as circular, without any focus on special events, while the latter abide by chronological order, linear time (p. 59).

There are indeed several features that can be said to be postmodern, though. The fact that there is a blending of fiction and non-fiction in *The Turquoise Ledge* is one of them. As aforementioned, Silko has already stated her belief that the bits of fiction in her memoir are not a problem at all; with that, she has crossed the boundaries between real life and literature. Linda Hutcheon refers to this kind of postmodern writing as "autofiction", since all remembrance is fictional (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 10), but the fact that this work is deliberately described as a memoir leaves the fictional feature on the realm of memory. Hutcheon also mentions that in postmodernism, literature has to deal with a frequent blending of genres, what she calls the "typically postmodern transgressing of previously accepted limits: those of particular arts, of genres, of art itself" (p. 9). Silko is known for blending

[46] From < http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/28/books/review/Thomas-t.html?_r=0>. Last accessed on February 17th 2014.

together prose and poetry, along with the lyrics of songs she had created and prayers of the Nahuatl people, as the one shown below:

> Ca! Caca! Hey Frog!
> Cacalachitli clay rattle
> Cacalotl cacapaca Raven clapping
> Atlatlacamahmanilitzi thunderstorm
> Ayahuitl fog mist of ghost warriors
>
> "Atlatlacamahmanilitzi" is made of the sounds of a thunderstorm: "atla atla camahma" is rolling thunder and "nilitzi" is the crackle of lightning. (SILKO, 2010, p. 247)

Considering that Silko's memoir is heavily marked by the presence of stories – either from her past, from books or the ones about her people's myths – as well as of nature and supernatural beings, it is possible to relate this author's memoir to wider meanings: Silko then, may have meant more than her own self when she uses the pronoun "I". In fact, according to Professor and theorist Hertha Wong, in her essay "First-Person Plural: Subjectivity and Community in Native American Women's Autobiography" (1998), "[…] [a] Native autobiographer, whether a speaking or writing subject, often implies, if not announces, the first-person plural – we – even when speaking in the first-person singular" (p. 171). Due to cultural aspects of most Native American communities, the collective aspect of life is of utmost importance. When discussing hierarchies and how different these are among Westerners and Natives, Stephanie Sellers (2008) claims that "[w]hat is central or 'number one' to Native peoples is the 'We' of the nation and the biosphere, not the 'I' of one human self" (p. 22). Sellers elaborates on the issue, pointing out that to indigenous cultures, all beings in the planet (including Mother Earth) are considered to be: "members of the community; in relationship with each other; intelligent, sentient, conscious, and having spirit; able to communicate with human beings if they wish to" (p. 23).

In fact, the connection between Silko and nature is clearly stated throughout the memoir. As a child, while her sister liked to play with dolls, she wished she was an animal, as she stated: "I wanted to have four legs and be able to run free in the hills as a deer or a horse. For a long time I wished I wasn't a human being. Whenever I ran, I pretended I was a deer or a wild horse" (SILKO, 2010, p. 23). Further on, there are references to the desert creatures in the pronoun "we", as in the following passage: "In the desert one seldom dies without quickly becoming a meal for another; thus we aren't dead for long before we become part of the living

creatures and plants"(p. 166). These quotes undoubtedly display how strong the connection between Silko and nature really is.

Moreover, perhaps to reinforce the lack of hierarchy between humans and animals, Silko refers to most rattlesnakes – very common in the area in which she lives in and very much respected by her – as if they were beloved pets, not just ordinary rattlers. Aside from offering a perspective of how rattlers are likened to humans in the narrative, this behavior may also show how much the author knows about these creatures, how acquainted and intimate she is with them, apparently able to tell whether those snakes are male or female. So, the rattlers found in the area around her house are either "he" or "she", as in: "[…] [there] was a small silvery blue rattlesnake, maybe a Mojave and not a Western diamondback. He made no sound or move. He pressed himself flat in his pancake posture […]" (p. 150), or in: "I shook the red plastic dustpan in the face of the small-light colored rattler who thinks she owns the front patio" (p. 133). Instead of referring to these snakes using the pronoun "it", Silko decides to show her respect for them, and, consequently, for nature as a whole.

Taking into account the fact that in Leslie Marmon Silko's memoir, the "I" is often compared to, or even likened to natural or spiritual beings, it is possible to infer that the author considers herself, along with nature, part of a whole. The constant references to animals, the weather, turquoises, the desert and plants in her memoir are further clues to this connection between humans and natural elements in the indigenous cultures.

3.3 *The Turquoise Ledge: a Memoir* and the autobiographical genres

In *Reading Autobiography:* A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives (2010), Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson make a didactic exposure of what life narrative is, and how many other terms can spring from it. Both authors define life narrative as a wide term, which can encompass autobiographical (meaning self-referential) works of any kind, while life writing is another general term, but it refers strictly to writing about one's self or another (p. 4). So, in order to accurately classify Silko's work, it is important to narrow this definition down: under the general term of life writing, there is the autobiography, which is a term rooted in

traditional Western literature, more specifically, connected to the Enlightenment subject[47] – a fully centered man awarded with the capacity to reason (HALL, 2007, p. 597) and therefore to know himself well enough to write about his life. As many scholars from an earlier generations claim, the autobiography is seen "as the highest achievement of individuality in western civilization" (SMITH; WATSON, 2010, p. 3).

In the original version of "The Autobiographical Pact" (1975), Philippe Lejeune defines autobiography as a prose narrative, told in retrospective, by a person whose main focus is his existence and personality[48] (p. 4), all of which partially fits *The Turquoise Ledge*. Firstly, Silko is not a man, so, her work focuses on *her* existence. It is also crucial to state that in Silko's case, although her individual life is present throughout the book, there are also natural/spiritual elements that appear frequently as integral/inseparable/interconnected parts of her existence; therefore making Lejeune's definition[49] absolutely inaccurate for such work. Furthermore, the retrospective aspect of Silko's work is rather questionable due to the myriad of shifts from present to past moments in the narrative.

Due to the incompatibility with the concept of (traditional) autobiography, the book is referred to here as autobiographical. Perhaps for perceiving how strict his concept was, Lejeune claimed there are genres closely related to autobiography that do not necessarily meet the requirements of the same – the first mentioned in his list is the memoir (p. 2).

According to Smith and Watson, the memoir, in contemporary writing, has served as the term most frequently used in popular and scholarly fields, and is the term used by publishing houses to describe several autobiographical practices (p. 3). As it was not recently coined, the memoir had been used to label "recollections by the publicly eminent who chronicled their social accomplishments" (p. 3) – which did not usually encompass the individual's entire life-span. Theorist Julie Rak claimed that the memoir has been attached to popular culture for a long time, and it was a graphic sign of the content of the narrative:

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[47] Despite being often connected to the Enlightenment subject, it does not mean that the autobiography had its first appearance back in the eighteenth century. In fact, one of the first records of this literary genre goes back to the third century, with St. Augustine's *Confessions* (398 AD). Concerning the first use of the term, authors Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2010) point a 1797 review of Isaac D'Israeli *Miscellanies,* by William Taylor of Norwich (p. 1-2).

[48] Philippe Lejeune's "The Autobiographical Pact", p. 3-30. Available on: <https://edocs.uis.edu/Departments/LIS/Course_Pages/LNT501/RN/Rosina's_on-ground_course_storage/Rosina's_LNT_501_Readings/On%20Autobiography%20pp3-30%20%20by%20Philippe%20Lejeune.pdf>. Last accessed on March 3rd 2014.

[49] It is important to state here that Philippe Lejeune has revised his work throughout the decades. He did not, however, mention specifically autobiographies by women.

scandalous and unknown events of one's life, often written by the socially marginal (RAK apud SMITH; WATSON, 2010, p. 4). Currently, Smith and Watson affirm the term memoir labels autobiographical works marked by dense language and self-reflexivity about the writing process, showing a more precise branch of autobiography, "foregrounding historical shifts and intersecting cultural formations [so] readers are invited to think about the significance of that choice and the kind of reading it invites" (SMITH; WATSON, 2010, p. 4). Again, Silko's work does not properly fit both authors' concept: firstly, the dense language cannot be related to this memoir since Silko has used rather simple language, and because of that, her ideas are easily grasped by the readers despite the constant shifts of time and place. Moreover, it is very unlikely that Leslie Marmon Silko would drift away from the influence of orature while writing, especially because of the role models she had, as she mentions on the following statement:

> All my life at Laguna I was surrounded by people who loved to tell stories because it was through the spoken word and human memory that for thousands of years the Pueblo people had recorded and maintained their entire culture. The stories I loved to hear were part of my early training; from these early years of listening my imagination raced off to make up my own stories (SILKO, 2010, p. 27).

Not only does she use this passage to clearly show how deeply influenced by stories she was, but she also speaks her mind, during an interview, on the way she conceives an artist, as it can be seen on the following passage: "I think artists – and when I say artists I mean painters, musicians, etc. – are sort of sponges. We soak in subtle hints and clues from the community and world around us. No artist works in complete vacuum"[50].

Despite the absence of the dense language attributed to the memoir by Smith and Watson, *The Turquoise Ledge* does depict a woman reflecting upon the writing process, however not the writing process of her life exclusively, as one might imagine. On the passage in which the narrator expresses her anger towards the trail of destruction that has been left by men on the arroyo[51] near her house, she claims:

> The day I discovered the destruction I didn't tell anyone. […] I didn't want to write about it; I didn't want it to be in the *Turquoise Ledge* manuscript, I had decided

[50] Leslie Marmon Silko in an interview to Kimberly Banti to *Seattlest*, a Seattle blog. Available on <http://mobile.seattlest.com/2010/10/19/interview_leslie_marmon_silko_on_th.php>. Last accessed on February 18th 2014.

[51] Typically from the Southern U.S., an Arroyo is a narrow and dry channel on the ground, which can become a stream after heavy rains. (Available on:< http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/american-english/arroyo?q=arroyo>. Last accessed on July 24th 2013)

> before I started the memoir that I wanted as much as possible to avoid unpleasantness and strife and politics as much as possible (SILKO, 2010, p. 169-170).

As even the self-reflexivity concerning her writing is intricately involved with nature, it is possible to claim that the recurrence of spiritual and natural elements in the narrative is intricately connected to its author's hybrid identity. As a child, Leslie Marmon Silko would spend her days around her family and observe their moves. Actually, "[w]hen adults talked, [she] listened while the other children went off to play" (p. 25), and as she eavesdropped, she could sense how different both sides of her family were, and how they would talk about each other. Because her great-grandfather was white, her family was not originally from Laguna – the community where they lived – but had Pueblo origins instead, her upbringing was quite affected by several different influences. As she posited, during her "early training" (p. 27) listening to stories, Silko was not only shaped by both sides of her family, but by members of the Laguna community as well, since as "[she] was of mixed ancestry, the older people in the community looked out for [her]" (p. 28) and tried to teach her things they were afraid she might not learn at home.

As we are dealing with a hybrid piece of literature, there is a lot of Native, with some of Western influence too. Taking into account the strong Native influence and the way many Native women weave their life-narratives (including myth, history, stories), it can be said that their writing differs a lot from the traditional way, as Hertha Wong states:

> This structure challenges canonical Western notions of autobiography in several ways: it replaces the model of an autonomous individual narrating a single (and singular) life with a relational subjectivity narrating on individual (but affiliated) life; and it extends the autobiographical project temporally by stretching the boundaries of one person's life (no longer just from birth to death) and insisting on the mythic and historical networks of identity formation. Community and its values, restraints, and obligations are woven into the narratives so that they do not need to be explained, except to clarify to a younger Native readership (their primary audience, as the women see it) as well as to non-Natives (WONG, 1998, p. 174).

In fact, concerning this challenge of traditional notions of autobiography, despite having been entitled a memoir, *The Turquoise Ledge* has several passages that resemble a diary, which according to Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2010), consists of a "form of periodic life writing, [that] records dailiness in accounts and observations of emotional responses. […] While diaries may seem incoherent or haphazard in their preoccupations, they

'gather force by accretion of experience, always chronological'" (SMITH; WATSON, 2010, p. 266). Writer Louisa Thomas also claims *The Turquoise Ledge* "[…] has the loose feel of a journal. Though sometimes evocative, Silko's writing can also be repetitive and flat, as if she's giving us notes instead of a narrative[52]". The already mentioned frequent references to present time at different moments in the narration, at times give readers the impression of reading a diary. There are, in fact, passages in which Silko mentions the creation of a diary, and perhaps these passages may have been included in her memoir, mixed with the bit of poetry, as she claimed: "So, in the beginning, I got to know the snakes and pack rats because we were neighbors. I began to keep notes about my encounters" (SILKO, 2010, p. 82), and also: "In 1997 I started writing little notes about the sky, the clouds, and all *us* desert creatures anxious to have the rain" (p. 87, my emphasis). The disconnection between different parts of a same chapter may also have to do with this facet of Silko's writing: as Thomas stated the feeling that readers are having access to notes, very much ratifies one of my speculation on the cover of the paperback edition – that we are about to read a manuscript, or a very intimate piece of writing.

So, if the indigenous context is taken into account, we cannot help but remember Hertha Wong's observation: "[…] it is understood that to speak or write about oneself, calling attention to one's own accomplishments (as is often the case in autobiography), reveals a poor upbringing (displaying an inappropriate and exaggerated individuality that may diminish communal values)" (WONG, 1998, p. 169) – all of which thoroughly invalidates traditional autobiographies. By the same token, it is important to bring to the fore that Native women, other than sharing a sense of shared identity with other women, also share certain beliefs that make this sharing more complex: not only with women, but with the whole universe, always looking for balance.

3.4 **The political undertones of Silko's memoir**

Despite having been acclaimed and highly respected for the lyrical way she weaves her stories, Silko is clearly not the personification of the traditional conception of a renowned

[52] From <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/28/books/review/Thomas-t.html?_r=0>. Last accessed on February 18th 2014.

Western author. As a matter of fact, it was not until the 1960's that previously silenced groups – marked by different races, ethnicities, genders, sexual preferences, native statuses, social classes – were inscribed into history with the help of the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S.A. (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 61-62). The differences that used to be binary (black/white, male/female, center/margin, east/west), have become now multiple and "[b]lacks and feminists, ethnics and gays, native and 'Third World' cultures, do not form monolithic movements, but constitute a multiplicity of responses to a commonly perceived situation of marginality and ex-centricity" (p. 62). According to Hutcheon (1988), when the margins break their silence, the once universal concepts begin a process of self-deconstruction (p. 59). It is then, in postmodernity, that the universalizing notion of cultural homogenization starts to show its flaws, leading the way to heterogeneity, which no longer perceives culture as formed by several fixed individual subjects, but on the contrary, perceives it as a constant flow of identities "contextualized by gender, class, race, ethnicity, sexual preference, education, social role, and so on. […] This assertion of identity through difference and specificity is a constant to postmodern thought" (p. 59). Hutcheon goes on claiming that the connection between difference, heterogeneity and discontinuity is not difficult to understand. From such a perspective Silko's discontinuous narrative – especially considering her Native roots – is more easily understood.

When it comes to ethnicity, there are several issues that afflict indigenous people – especially those of the same community – such as prejudice, injustices against them, disregard from government officials, among others. In *The Turquoise Ledge*, even though Silko shows some hesitation to mention certain issues, such as the disregard of white men towards the desert for example, many passages in this memoir have a bitterly denouncing nature.

Silko attended the BIA school through fourth grade and when she started attending a day school in Albuquerque she was dismayed to discover how far behind she was because the BIA teachers "[…] had not bothered to teach [the Indian children] the times tables" (SILKO, 2010, p. 27). This incident denounces the lack of investment and even commitment when it came to teaching young Natives. Silko's discomfort was probably felt by other members of her community, who happened to go through similar experience, or even those who were aware of this disregard. So, as Wong points out, this narrating "I" is a "[…] multivocal self – constituted by 'the forms of the ideological environment' and characterized as multiple, shifting, and relational" (WONG, 1998, p. 169).

As if reinforcing Wong's words, Silko does not dwell on her own condition. Her concern with nature, with the damage done to the community and to the environment by the White men is paramount in her writing. In the beginning, the frequent references to the mines opened in the community's territory lead to a growing concern about the harm caused by them to the Earth and the population:

> The U.S. Federal Government by way of the Department of the Interior/Bureau of Indian Affairs forced the Laguna people to allow Anaconda to blast open the Earth near Paguate for an open-pit uranium mine. The tribe tried to resist but the Cold War politics fed the frenzy for uranium for atomic bombs. In early 1950s the above-ground testing at Jackass Flats in Nevada began. (SILKO, 2010, p. 69)

After the testings many areas got dusted with radioactive fallouts, including the area Silko's community inhabited. To make matters even worse, the Government used to send x-ray machines in vans to have the Laguna population tested for tuberculosis, and, to save money, the small children of the Bureau of Indian Affairs day school were given x-rays at a strength meant for adults (p. 70). Not only were the small children exposed to the radiation that came from the mines, but they also had to withstand high levels of radiation from the government machines. This unfortunate incident has much to do with Sara Ahmed's claim, in her *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), that overcoming the pain of others is intricately connected to the Western will to give. After exposing the Indian population to contamination by radiation, the Government showed its concern by having people checked for tuberculosis. It was a way to give, but "*in the moment of giving, repeat[ing] as well as conceal[ing] the taking*" (p. 22).

Through Silko's memoir the reader also learns about a political/historical incident that affected the Laguna Pueblo. Although the event chosen to exemplify the presence of history in Silko's work is actually unofficial history, it only underscores the fact that the only place Native-Americans have left was the margins of History. The passage Silko mentions dates from the 1950's when the Pueblo of Laguna Tribe filed a lawsuit in the U.S. Court of Federal Claims since "[m]illions of acres of Laguna Pueblo land had been taken by the Federal Government in the early 1900's for national forest and public land" (SILKO, 2010, p. 26). In fact, the most important evidence in the lawsuit was in their stories and accounts, and at that time the Laguna Pueblo people told their stories in their own language to stand against the injustices to the community. Although the decision from the Court of Federal Claims did not

fully rectify the injustices done, the inclusion of this historical event is important, for it shows how

> […] the old folks told their stories in their own words, in the Laguna language, and that together they stood the test in a high court of an alien culture. Maybe this is where [Silko] got the notion that if [she] could tell the story clearly enough then all that was taken, including the land, might be returned (p. 26).

Leslie Marmon Silko's emotions come through clearly whenever any kind of harm is done to nature. During one of her walks in the arroyo, she came across a hole made by a machine – where there used to be stones and pebbles. Upon discovering the destruction, she decided to tell no one, but, despite her unwillingness to include destruction in her manuscripts of the book, she could not help but letting out her anger: "The loss and outrage I felt choked me. I knew the local authorities didn't bother to enforce the laws intended to protect the land from damage, and that angered me even more" (p. 169). And she goes on:

> The owner of the grotesque house could have easily afforded to buy rock and sand excavated legally from a quarry. Instead he acted out what he saw as his manifest destiny: to destroy whatever he wanted to destroy willy-nilly no matter the impact on others or himself – that's the credo of southern Arizona, and much of the West. (p. 170)

This destruction made by men triggers a severe imbalance in the ecosystem. This only increases Silko's anger towards these men as she claimed: "[…] I blame the men in the bulldozers who crush the desert. I blame the imbeciles in Pima County government who fail at everything except collecting taxes and bribes" (p. 207).

The Turquoise Ledge is not a memoir focused on loss and pain, either personally or collectively. Silko is able to lyrically weave her story, and the subtleties of her pain then, lie on the fact that despite her unwillingness to write about it, Silko ends up, perhaps rather unconsciously, writing about what she conceives as herself – which encompasses much more than the "Western self" does. Her feelings related to her community, her close family members and even nature are present, but she is also successful at preserving much of her culture and traditions through writing, and about that Wong claims: "For many Native American women reclaiming their own histories and cultures is not a Romantic retreat to a lost past, but a political strategy for cultural (and national) survival and personal identity"

(WONG, 1998, p. 171). So, "[p]ain is hence bound up with how we inhabit the world, how we live in relationship to the surfaces, bodies and objects that make up our dwelling places. Our question becomes not so much what *is* pain, but what *does* pain do" (AHMED, 2004, p. 27). Letting her pain show in her memoir is part of Silko's identification process, and in writing herself she lets some of her wounds show.

3.5 **Further considerations**

According to Paula Gunn Allen, contemporary narratives by Native American authors are usually a hybrid, because elements of the oral tradition, such as structure and theme, always appear in contemporary works by American Indians, and elements from non-Indian works sometimes appear in contemporary tribal social literature (ALLEN, 1992, p. 4). In *The Turquoise Ledge* it has not been different.

As stated by Orhan Pamuk, "to tell one's story is to tell many stories simultaneously" (PAMUK apud SMITH; WATSON, 2010, p. 162). This is a true paradox, but couldn't have fit better the current purpose: Silko, willing to write about her own life and personality, inserted many other stories in her narrative – be it of family members, the traditional Laguna-Pueblo stories or the story of the desert landscape and its creatures.

Because she is an artist, shaped by stories she listened to from a very young age, after her "near-death" experience[53] Silko decided to move to the desert so she could fulfill her objectives as a writer, but also to seek her personal growth. In fact, *The Turquoise Ledge* seems to be a way to make official her intimate relationship with the desert and its natural elements, and, at the same time, criticize all kinds of aggression towards nature – deeds often connected to the white man and their capitalist whims. From this perspective, *The Turquoise Ledge* may also be considered an *ecoautobiography*, which according to Smith & Watson (2010), is usually marked by the link between "immersion in nature to expanded human possibility and emotional growth" (p. 161) and/or by the fact it "can be a site of manifesto, a textual place from which to call for an ethic of care for the environment" (p. 161). As for that,

[53] This near death experience refers to the ectopic pregnancy, and consequent rupture Silko suffered in 1977 (Chapter 13). At the time, she had to go through surgery, and recovering meant that she needed to take responsibility for what she did in her life, so two months later, she moved to the desert.

there couldn't have been a better way to close this memoir than with a thank you to natural elements as Silko wrote on the last lines: "Gentle warm rains from the south have already graced us. Venus is a night sun brighter and larger each night. This is a good place to end. Gratitude to all of you beings of the stars" (SILKO, 2010, p. 319).

Having made clear through the narrative her fascination for animals, turquoises, spiritual beings, the desert landscape as a whole and for stories as well, Silko shows how she has absorbed "all the waves of experience" (p. 47) from people around her so she could be a storyteller herself and register what she considered worth writing about. Concerning her first attempt at autobiographical writing, her memoir, it could be said that this is not a "me-moir", but a "we-moir" – what according to Hatian-American writer Edwidge Danticat[54], is not just one's own story, but many stories intertwined – since Leslie Marmon Silko and desert beings are part of a whole, complementing each other.

[54] Edwidge Dandicat in interview to Martha St Jean from *The Huffington Post.* Available on: <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/martha-st-jean/genius-a-talk-with-edwidg_b_295040.html>. Last accessed on February 18th 2014.

CONCLUSION

In the introduction to this dissertation, Native culture was discussed as a whole, and then, after the colonial period followed by the creation of two independent nation states in question, namely, Canada and the United States, our discussion focused on the Native population of each country. We did so because there are several issues that led each nation to deal with their Natives differently. In Canada, for instance, there were several acts that would determine who would be entitled to lands, or who could be considered Native. In the U.S., there was an act that divided the communal Native lands among individuals, undermining one of the most important values of this people: the sense of community.

Both literary works analyzed in this dissertation have very much contributed to give visibility, agency and self-esteem to Natives, especially Native women, often doubly oppressed simply for being who they are in such a patriarchal society. Despite having used different strategies in their autobiographical writings, both authors have succeeded in empowering their Native readers, and in teaching non-Natives about themselves.

Despite having had her speech recorded and then edited back in 1975, Lee Maracle has gained enough authority to become a writer and to place her signature on the cover of the 1990 edition of *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel*. Confirming her claim to authorship, Maracle has added parts to the "original" story and was able to truly place her voice in the 1990 edition, something she had not been able to do before, since the voice in the 1975 edition was Don Barnett's (MARACLE, 1990, p. 19). Having started her career with this collaborative autobiographical work has definitely empowered Maracle herself, as well as other Natives. Even though fiction is powerful, autobiographical writing, in this particular case clearly based on the experiences of a human being, can be even more appealing because of its claim to authenticity and because readers can relate to certain experiences. Thanks to the identification with the character/writer, readers may gain hope and believe that like Maracle they may also succeed one day. Besides, my analysis has also very much defended that despite the overt political tone, *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel*, can and should be read as literature. Moreover, it has opened the doors of Native literature to other Native writers, that like Maracle, were able to overcome obstacles and help others with their life histories.

Leslie Marmon Silko, on the other hand, has devoted herself to fiction and poetry throughout her career. Even though *Storyteller* (1981) brings family pictures as well as references to stories she listened to while growing up, for instance, the deliberately autobiographical *The Turquoise Ledge: a Memoir* came out only in 2010. Silko's autobiographical narrative as we have seen, is quite different from Maracle's. This difference, of course is related but not limited to the fact that Maracle's work appeared at the beginning of her career while Silko is among the most acclaimed Native U.S. writers. The fact that the two works were written in different historical moments also accounts for the different strategies employed. The first edition of Maracle's *Bobbi Lee* came out at a time of political effervescence, when Native Canadians were fighting for justice and empowerment. Silko's memoir appeared at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century. Of course all the injustice and oppression suffered by Native Americans should not be forgot, and Silko certainly doesn't forget them. Yet, from what well may be the peak of her career, Silko seems much more interested in looking at herself in harmony with the natural and the spiritual worlds – in true Native fashion. In 1977, with the release and ensuing critical acclaim of *Ceremony* – a fictional narrative that featured Native traditions as significant in a Native person's life – Indigenous people and their struggles gained visibility. Furthermore, the existence of a piece of literature, which was actually acknowledged by Western critics as literary, and brought about Native issues and placed their traditions as source of strength definitely had an impact upon Natives who could identify with this narrative, and perhaps, consider seeking for their community's traditions in order to overcome injustices and obstacles.

In *The Turquoise Ledge: a Memoir*, Silko ostensibly focuses on recording her experiences. Yet her Native roots and beliefs show throughout the text, so that her story is also the story of Native people from their ingrained belief about the interconnection between material and spiritual worlds to their fight for empowerment.

Another issue that is extremely relevant to the analysis of these works is the fact that these writers have hybrid identities. As aforementioned, Stuart Hall has claimed that identification would be the right word to define subjects whose identities are not fixed, but an ongoing process (see HALL, 2007, p. 608) – the way Maracle and Silko's works are organized is intricately connected to the fact that they have mixed ancestries; the former is a

Métis, daughter of a *Métis* woman and a Salish man, while the latter is of German, English, Scottish, Mexican and Cherokee descent.

In Maracle's case, it is difficult for readers to realize how much of what is now published in *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel* has been changed or omitted when compared to the original recording, but its Epilogue brings influences from Western literature, such as the fairly chronological order of its divisions, as "Discover Libraries[55]", "With Child", "Think Indian" and "Child" – as well as the influence of her mother, grandmother and the Native traditions, such as the reference to this saying among her people: "'If you live right the grandmothers will take care of you,' conversely, 'if you don't live right they will forsake you and you will sicken and die'" (MARACLE, 1990, p. 199).

With Silko, the presence of her "nativeness" in *The Turquoise Ledge: a Memoir* is much more evident. The lack of a strict chronological order, along with the presence of nature as one of the central characters, the respect and connection with animals and the desert as a whole are a few examples. Silko uses often the pronoun "we" to refer to herself and the land or animals, as one, as interconnected – this sense of community is an important feature of Native culture. If on the one hand, the decision to write a memoir has a lot to do with Silko's Western influence; on the other hand she subverts this canonical genre, because the focus of the narrative is not solely on her life, but on what she conceives as herself: the desert landscape, animals, plants, writing, spiritual beings as well as her family and friends. Her conceiving of a memoir has been affected by the "nativeness" in her. So, there is a mix of influences in *The Turquoise Ledge: a Memoir*.

Because they end up being hybrid works, both *Bobbi Lee* and *The Turquoise Ledge* should be analyzed carefully before criticism. The fact that those women writers were subjects interpelled by multiple influences, their autobiographical works could not have been different. In fact, the hybrid nature of the texts is often the reason why they are not seen as literary by some critics; it is important that theories and criticism become more flexible so those works can be fairly criticized and better understood.

So, as these works reflect the "Native" in their authors, it is not unusual that experiences related to prejudice, racism, violence, drugs, or the government's disregard for them are part of their weaving. Besides, both works bring political issues regarding their

[55] This section mentions the time when Lee Maracle first discovered libraries. She must have been about fourteen years old.

people as a way to “talk back” at their oppressors and resist, show that they can tell their side of the story, even though they are not heard by those who are supposed to be their representatives, or by other members of society. The presence of these experiences throughout the pages of *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel* and *The Turquoise Ledge* is a way to empower Native people, and as theorist Agnes Grant has claimed, literature is indeed a source of strength and personal development (see GRANT, 1990, p. 195). About that, Paula Gunn Allen, mentions how the restoration of Indian dignity has contributed to encourage other empowering events, such as the movie *Dances with Wolves*, which according to the results to a query from *The New York Times*, “[…] provided [Natives] with the sense of pride and safety they needed to publicly affirm their Indianness” (ALLEN, 1992, p. x).

Lee Maracle and Leslie Marmon Silko are true assets to Native literature in North America. They have written about themselves, but as in Native culture, there is no “I” detached from a community, but a “we” implied throughout the selected works. *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel* and *The Turquoise Ledge: a Memoir* are hybrid autobiographical works of resistance and struggle to help a people rediscover their pride, confidence and power by means of these women’s words.

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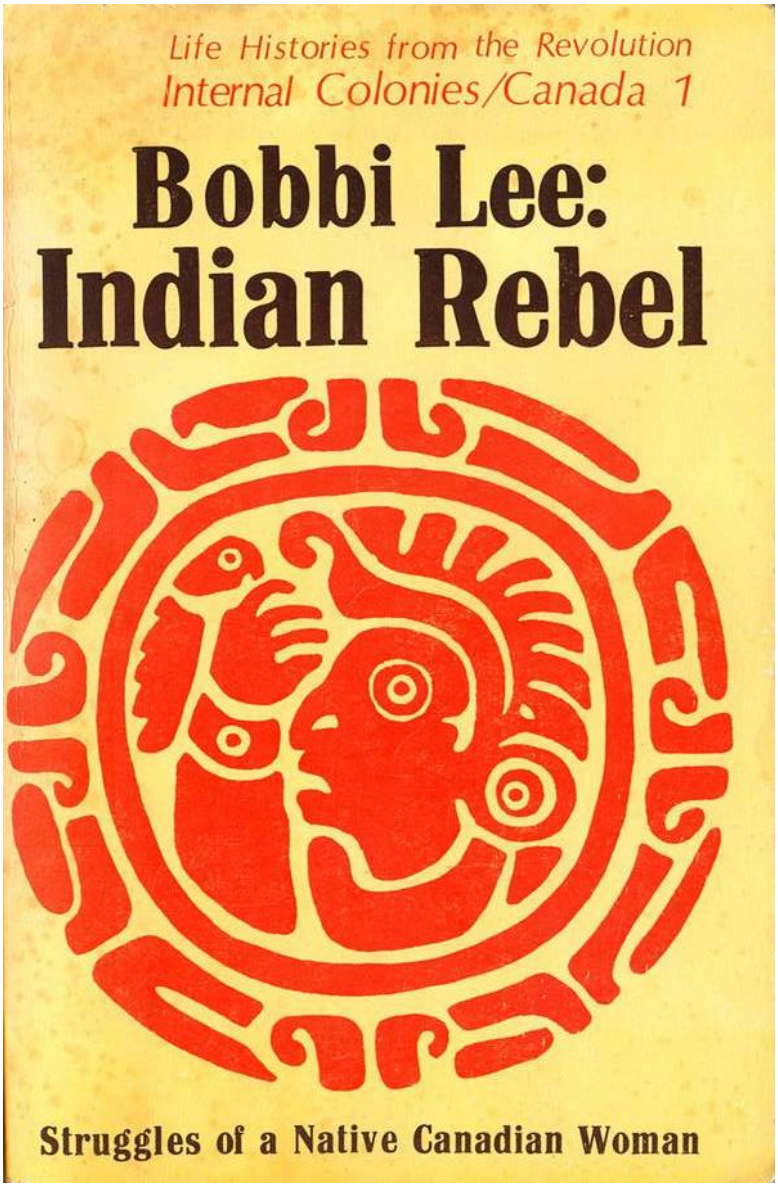
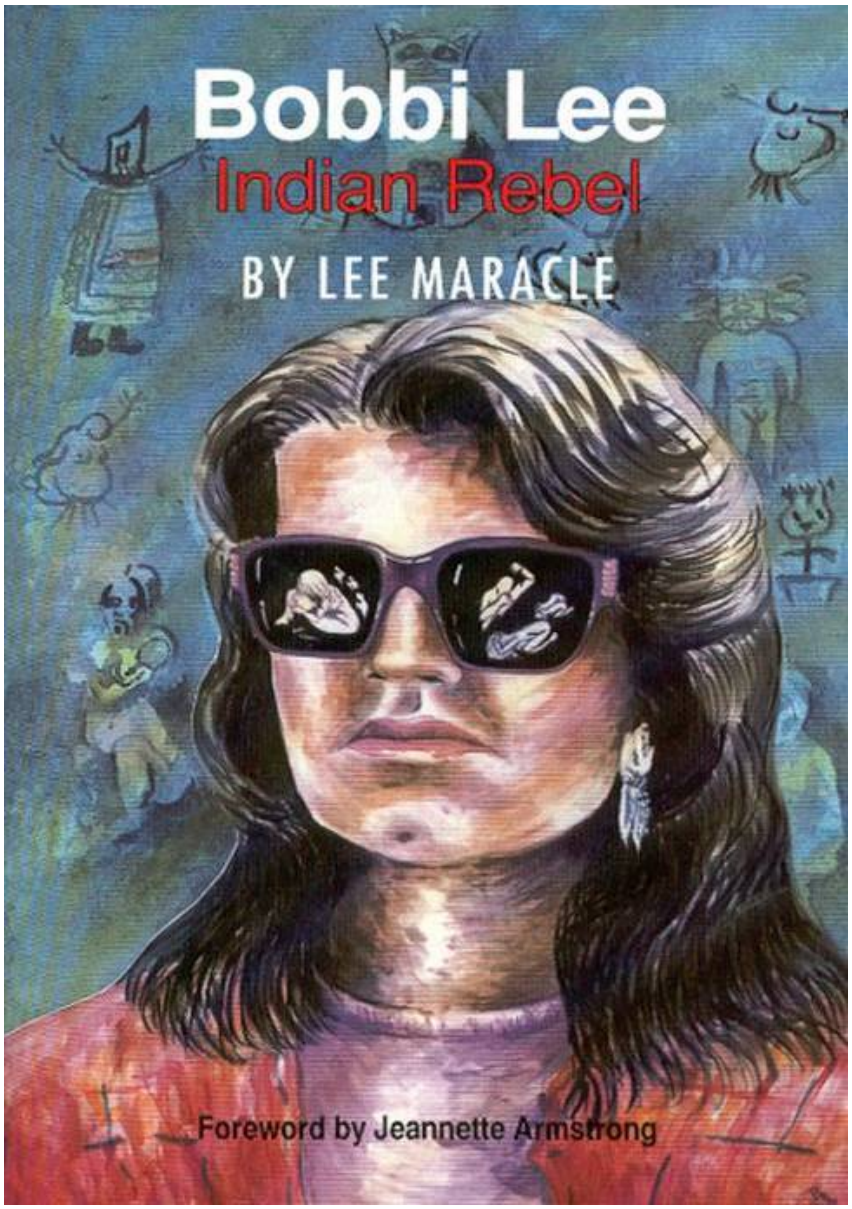
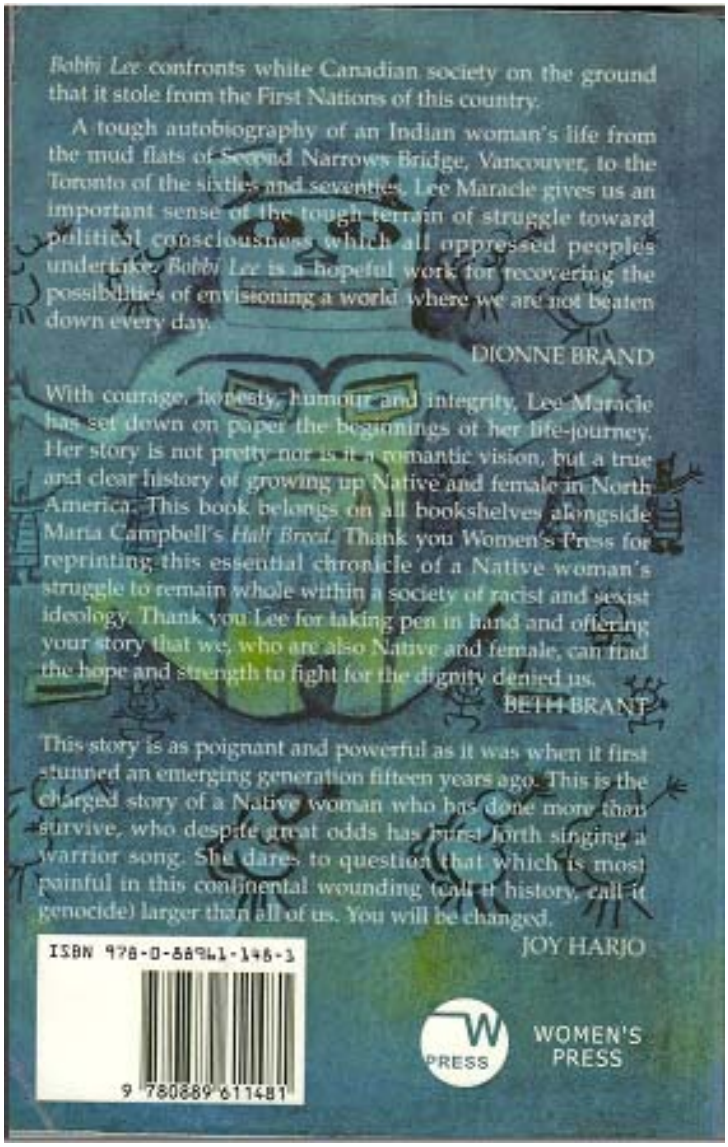
ANNEX A – The cover to the 1975 edition to *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel*



ANNEX B - The cover to the 1990 edition of *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel*



ANNEX C - The back of the 1990 edition of *Bobbi Lee Indian Rebel*



Bobbi Lee confronts white Canadian society on the ground that it stole from the First Nations of this country.

A tough autobiography of an Indian woman's life from the mud flats of Second Narrows Bridge, Vancouver, to the Toronto of the sixties and seventies, Lee Maracle gives us an important sense of the tough terrain of struggle toward political consciousness which all oppressed peoples undertake. *Bobbi Lee* is a hopeful work for recovering the possibilities of envisioning a world where we are not beaten down every day.

DIONNE BRAND

With courage, honesty, humour and integrity, Lee Maracle has set down on paper the beginnings of her life-journey. Her story is not pretty nor is it a romantic vision, but a true and clear history of growing up Native and female in North America. This book belongs on all bookshelves alongside Maria Campbell's *Half Breed*. Thank you Women's Press for reprinting this essential chronicle of a Native woman's struggle to remain whole within a society of racist and sexist ideology. Thank you Lee for taking pen in hand and offering your story that we, who are also Native and female, can find the hope and strength to fight for the dignity denied us.

BETH BRANT

This story is as poignant and powerful as it was when it first stunned an emerging generation fifteen years ago. This is the charged story of a Native woman who has done more than survive, who despite great odds has burst forth singing a warrior song. She dares to question that which is most painful in this continental wounding (call it history, call it genocide) larger than all of us. You will be changed.

JOY HARJO

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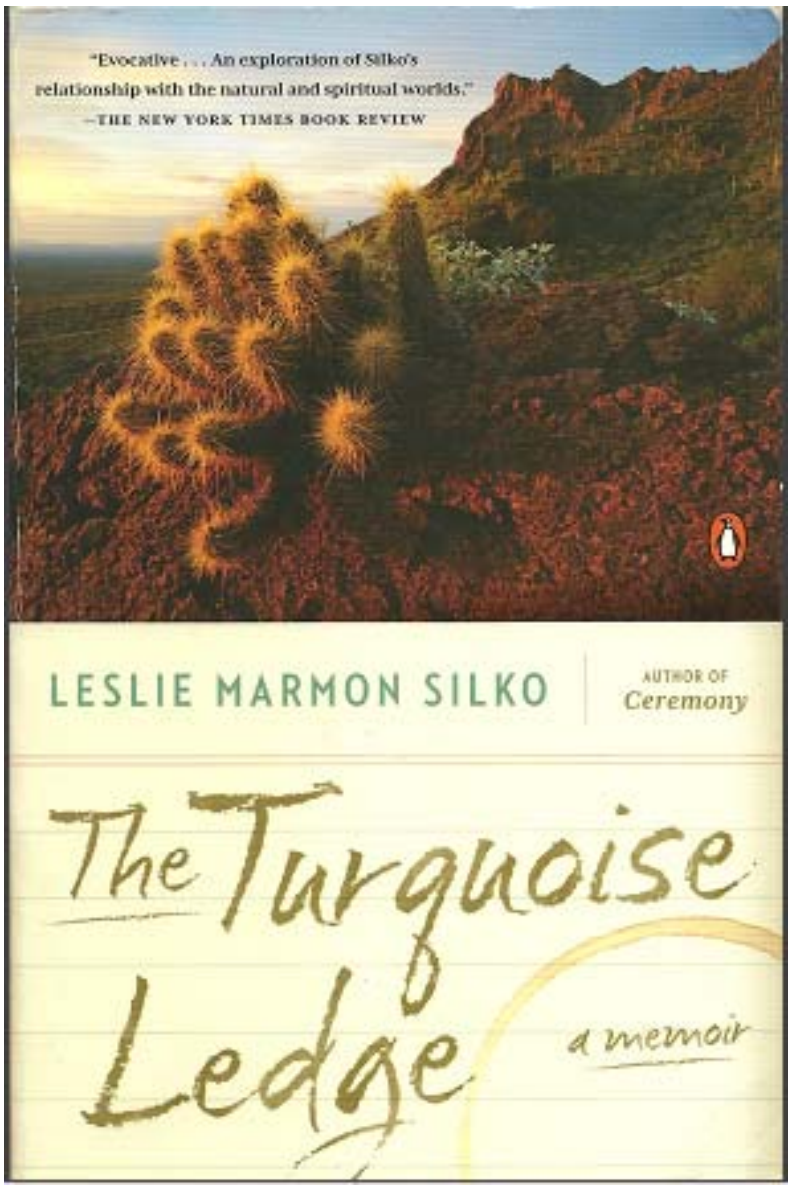
ANNEX D - The paperback edition cover of *The Turquoise Ledge: a Memoir*



ANNEX E - The hardback edition cover of *The Turquoise Ledge: a Memoir*