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Kim Griffin

University of North Georgia, kbgrif5724@ung.edu

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Abstract

Boundaries, Borderlands, and the Built Environment in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*

Almanac of the Dead not only influences readers outside of its native culture, but embodies the transitional state of societies, cultures, and politics worldwide. Silko's characters interact with one of American society's major alterations, neocolonial and industrial, which is the built environment. The built environment exhibits the industrial infiltration of the natural world on human health. It encompasses not only the tangible industry, but society's dependency on speed and value rather than quality and connection. For the native, poor, and oppressed characters in *Almanac* originating from diverse backgrounds, the insurgence of the built environment overshadows the traditions used for personal identification and self-worth. Albeit, Silko's novel speaks to the animate place, unlike the built environment. The artificial structure of the built environment is counter-productive to the cultural fluidity living inside Silko's characters. The animacy of *Almanac* mimics the natural world Silko's characters are working to restore. The borders then constructed on the growing industrial marketplace that once was a land for ceremony and tradition disconnects Silko's characters from the organic places they call home. Although Silko's characters travel from Tucson to Africa, physically and mentally, they are frantically searching for their natural environment free from the wasteland erected by the New World. With that, Silko's characters also experience personal dissonance because they too contribute to the waste strengthening the borderland space separating them from not only their own culture, but acceptance in the new American society. *Almanac of the Dead*, as an ecological piece of literature, highlights the negative impact of the built environment on the innate nature of

Silko's Native and non-native characters forced to face boundaries they are not ready to transcend.