Looking Beyond Recognition: Exploring Indigenous Resistance Through Literature

by

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Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that the accompanying thesis by Cynthia L. Abrams has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Honors in Environmental Studies-Politics.

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Table of Contents

Introduction: A Sorry Apology

"To acknowledge a long history of official depredations and ill-conceived policies by the Federal Government regarding Indian tribes and offer an apology to all Native Peoples on behalf of the United States."

—Congressional Resolution of Apology to Native Americans (SJ RES 14)

In 2009, President Barack Obama signed joint resolution S.J.RES.14—the Congressional Resolution of Apology to Native Americans. Later hidden within a larger and unrelated piece of legislation titled the 2010 Defense Appropriations Act, the bill went under-publicized and signed without any indigenous members present. In fact, across my research on acts of repatriation and monetary reparations, I didn't come across the resolution until reading Layli Long Soldier's poetry collection *Whereas* (Long Soldier 2017, 57).

Offering an "apology" on behalf of the people of the United States (language that inherently others and excludes the indigenous communities from the "people of the United States"), rather than the federal government itself, the resolution addresses, in vague terms, historical wrongdoings against Native Americans. However, it offers little more than a commendation of state governments that have begun reconciliation efforts and encouragement for others to do the same. This statement, which is arguably the closest to the resolution's urging of action, is immediately followed by a disclaimer: "Nothing in this Joint Resolution— (1) authorizes or supports any claim against the United States; or (2) serves as a settlement of any claim against the United States." This

declaration not only abdicates the federal government of any responsibility, but also marks the conclusion of the document. Ending the resolution on this note effectively separates the Apology from any tangible action. Further, the silence surrounding the bill (the Apology was never publicly read aloud by President Obama, only by Senator Sam Brownback (R-KS) to a gathering of five tribal leaders,[1] five months after it was signed) further removes the act from visibility, diminishing its significance (Long Soldier 2017, 57).

The passage of such a resolution is surprising in some sense, due to the serious lack of legislation regarding reparations and repatriation. The only existing legislation to date is the 1990 Native American Graves and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), which works to repatriate human remains, funerary and sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony. However, repatriation of land remains without a standardized protocol across history. The first recorded act of federal land returned to an indigenous nation occurred in 1970 with 48,000 acres of federal land (previously considered within Carson National Forest) re-allocated to the Taos Pueblo (Gordon-McCutchan 1991, 11).

This thesis project began as an exploration of land repatriation and acts of Indigenous resistance. I was inspired by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation's determination to reclaim a large swath of land erased from their 1855 treaty, now under the oversight of the United States Forest Service, to further understand what this process entails. However, a deeper dive into the history of Indigenous resistance led me to reevaluate litigious examples of resistance, and instead look to more unconventional avenues of reclamation. As poet Layli Long Soldier stated in a 2017

[1] Across the United States, there are 573 federally recognized tribal nations ("Tribal Nations," 2020).

interview, “In American culture, we’ve just recently started to entertain some new kinds of language like ‘truth and reconciliation’” (Long Soldier 2017). In order to accurately understand the state of reparations, repatriation, reclamation, and Indigenous resistance, we must look to the historic treatment of Indigenous communities across North America.

The United States’ pitiful attempt at an apology implies a comparable history of “granting recognition” via reparations and repatriation, leading me to the question: what does “granting” recognition mean in the context of the settler colonial state, and what does Indigenous resistance look like when it does not conform to this model? I argue that, given the inherent settler colonial nature of “recognition” itself, traditional forms of reparations and repatriation to Indigenous communities merely perpetuate the system that necessitated recognition in the first place. Therefore, we need to look outside the realm of government-mandated recognition practices, and instead toward resistance that inserts the Indigenous presence into colonial institutions, subverting the power itself. I contend that literature, specifically revolutionary works of contemporary poetry, can serve this purpose by breaking down the settler colonial infrastructure without falling into the same traps as the traditional politics of recognition model.

In making this argument, I draw upon the work of Dene (First Nations) scholar Glen Sean Coulthard and, later, Australian author Bill Ashcroft, to understand the fallacies of the traditional politics of recognition model. An examination of Coulthard’s essay “Subjects of Empire: Indigenous Peoples and the Politics of Recognition in Colonial Contexts,” provides the theoretical grounding for the downfalls of the model, ranging from its adherence to the colonial state (who dictates what recognition looks like) to its failure to address the subjective realm of colonialism. I establish that the politics of

recognition ultimately perpetuates the structure of settler colonialism and I proceed to elucidate this contention through a history of American Indian Policy, focusing on the dispossessive effects of legislation like the Dawes Act, Indian Reorganization Act, and the Indian Claims Commission Act (ICCA). The aftermath of the ICCA led me to examine specific examples of claims, and, ultimately, reparations—*United States v. Sioux Nation*, the repatriation of land to the Taos Pueblo, and, finally, the more recent 2018 Western Oregon Tribal Fairness Act. These examples demonstrate the settler-colonial structure of the United States, and the push to assimilate to it. Further, understanding the examples of reparations and repatriations is fundamental to the critique, as they clearly illustrate how the politics of recognition model produces functions of the state. Even in instances where the "recognition" is described as for the benefit of the subject, "recognition" is carefully crafted by the federal government to support the settler colonial structure, thereby continuing the cycle of oppression.

Following the conclusion of the futility of the recognition model, I look toward Australian post-colonial scholar Bill Ashcroft, whom Coulthard discusses in his essay. Ashcroft asserts that language and writing can be utilized to subvert the maintenance of settler colonialism. Using this as a jumping off point, I then explore alternatives to Indigenous resistance techniques via two collections of poetry—Tommy Pico's *Nature Poem* and Layli Long Soldier's *WHEREAS*—whose work, respectively, defies expectation. Through a textual analysis of Pico's contemplation of his identity and Long Soldier's critique of the occupation of language, I discover the power of political resistance that resides in literature.

Indigenous Recognition Politics—Productive or Pretend? A Coulthard-Based Analysis

The "politics of recognition" refers to the recognition-based models of liberal pluralism that aim to reconcile Indigenous nationhood with the settler colonial state through the state institutions' accommodation of Native identities. Reparations, particularly in the form of land repatriation—that is, returning ancestral homelands to Indigenous nations (typically following forced removal or treaty violations)—clearly fits in this model: while recognition-based models can vary in theory and praxis, they often "involve the delegation of land, capital and political power from the state to Indigenous communities through land claims and self-government processes" (Coulthard 2006, 2). By this definition, reparations and repatriation seem to have achieved success in what they are seeking to accomplish. However, Coulthard, in his "Subjects of Empire" essay, draws upon Martinican theorist Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* to demonstrate how recognition (which forms the basis for reparations and repatriation) does not result in reciprocity: instead it ends in sustained inequality amidst a structure of settler colonialism (Coulthard 2006, 2).

Citing Fanon, Coulthard specifies a critical flaw of the politics of recognition that structures the piece and informs his argument: "In *actual* contexts of domination (such as colonialism) not only are the terms of recognition usually determined by and in the interests of the master (the colonizer), but also over time slave populations (the colonized) tend to develop what he called 'psycho-affective attachments to master-sanctioned forms of recognition" (Coulthard 2006, 2). These attachments enable the

settler colonial structures put into place to persist, illustrating the very reason why a recognition model cannot produce justice. That is why, Coulthard contends, a bilateral approach is necessary to address both the *internalization* of otherness, or racist recognition imposed upon Indigenous populations (that is, the "psycho-affective," subjective realm of colonialism) *as well as* the economic and institutional oppression that transpires (the objective realm) (Coulthard 2006, 7). The internalization of differences occurs in tandem with societal oppression, and therefore cannot be pulled apart and dealt with individually.

Coulthard does draw a distinction between redistribution and recognition, as redistribution (which might more accurately describe tangible reparation efforts) often highlights wrongs in the economic sphere, while recognition addresses injustices in the cultural realm. However, even as he distinguishes the two, Coulthard arrives at a single conclusion: that "dumping all our efforts into alleviating the institutional/structural impediments to participatory parity (where redistributive or recognitive) may not do anything to undercut the debilitating forms of unfreedom related to misrecognition in the traditional sense" (Coulthard 2006, 10). This is because both the redistribution and recognition models are unilateral—they do not incorporate *both* the subjective and objective spheres of colonialism. The lack of acknowledgement of psychological repercussions—which, it may be argued, have the possibility of inconspicuously extending far beyond the objective realm's impacts—is not only risky, but renders the objective efforts futile.

The reasoning behind this can be further illuminated by Coulthard's theorizing. In

analyzing a Canadian case—*Delgamuukw v. British Columbia*—he declares that colonial powers will only recognize the collective rights and identities of Indigenous peoples insofar as "this recognition does not throw into question the background legal, political and economic framework of the colonial relationship itself" (Coulthard 2006, 13). Coulthard arrives at this conclusion after interrogating the *Delgamuukw* decision that declared aboriginal rights could be violated if the government had a "substantial objective" (i.e. any profitable venture, be it agriculture, energy endeavors, construction of infrastructure, protection of endangered species, and so on).

The concept of aboriginal title in itself is questionable. The common law doctrine assumes that Native nations "owned" their lands in a way that allowed for European (and later American) law to address through its notion of "title," (by documenting constructed land boundaries) (Wilkins and Lomawaima 2001, 23). Congress retains the plenary and exclusive power to supersede aboriginal title via purchase or conquest. In a sense, the European construction of aboriginal title was "awarded" to Indigenous communities, simply to be taken away at the behest of the government. Of course, this just highlights the structural imposition of the settler state onto Native inhabitants. Aboriginal title went on to lay the groundwork for treaties and numerous claims, but its origins emerged out of the needs of the settler state. The title's creation was contingent upon the *convenience* for the Euro-American model.

Like the "gifted" nature of the aboriginal title, many politics of recognition models also operate under a similar supposition. Coulthard identifies this as a serious flaw in different politics of recognition approaches, stating that "the assumption that the flourishing of indigenous peoples are distinct and self-determining collectivities is

dependent on their being *granted* cultural recognition and institutional accommodation by and within the colonial state apparatus" (Coulthard 2006, 11). It is clear that, while Indigenous peoples may be receiving "recognition" of some sort, freedom from the system that made this recognition necessary in the first place is impossible. Further, the act of recognition remains moot so long as it exists in the one-sided exchange: the colonizer "awards" the oppressed their recognition, without requiring their own. Because, of course, recognition is unnecessary for the colonizer in a system that is constructed by, for, and around them.

As the settler colonial state has assumed the power to dictate what recognition looks like, it also has molded the way claims are filed. That is, every Indigenous recognition claim—at least those that have a chance of emerging with a "victorious" outcome—only become legible to the courts via settler colonial structures. Either the Indigenous communities craft their claim based on a Eurocentric understanding of rights, sovereignty, property, nationhood, and so on, *or* the federal court distorts the claim to conform to the settler colonial perception of law. Whichever way, Indigenous communities traditionally understand these discourses from a vastly different perspective. As the settler colonial institution is inherently hierarchical, this process, Coulthard points out, "molds how Indigenous subjects think and act not only in relation to the topic at hand (the recognition claim) but also to themselves and with others" (Coulthard 2006, 14). In other words, the dominance of the settler colonial state permeates the psychological mindset of the subject, manifesting oppression from within.

Background: Ever-shifting Indian Policy—Assimilation to "Apologies," 1870 to 1980

Although Coulthard is primarily concerned with Canada (the settler colonial state that presides over his native Yellowknives Dene First Nation), an examination of the United States' history of American Indian policy clearly demonstrates this lens' applicability to Canada's southern neighbor. In order to fully grasp *why* the traditional politics of recognition model cannot succeed, we must reflect on the United States' historical treatment of Native populations. The failure of the model for Indigenous nations in the U.S. was, arguably doomed from the beginning, given European settlers' determination to obtain land and resources at all costs. However, the American government's intentions became resoundingly clear in the late 19th century with host of legislation enabling widespread removal of tribes from their land.

Until 1870, federal Indian policies were dominated by removal, treaties, reservations, and war (Wilkins and Lomawaima 2001, 77). However, the beginning of the decade marked a departure from the earlier policies, and a new focus on assimilation and fracturing. In early 1887, Congress passed the Dawes Act (named after its creator, Massachusetts Senator Henry Dawes), formally referred to as the General Allotment Act (*General Allotment Act* 1887). The approval of this legislation radically altered reservation structure, authorizing the government to divide and parcel out reservation land, which was previously held in common by members of the Native community. Declaring that tribes were no longer independent governments, the United States claimed guardianship over the tribes, thereby authorizing the president to survey and break up

tribal land holdings. The land was then allotted to individual tribal members in units of 40 to 160 acres (Wilkins and Lomawaima 2001, 108). The allotments, in which land quickly proved to be too limited to support livestock or crops, were rooted in the desire to convert Native communities to the Euro-American lifestyle—policymakers held such a strong belief in "the deeply transformative powers of America's Protestant mercantile culture that they believed the mere prospect of private property ownership would magically transform tribal Indians into ruggedly individualistic, Christian, self-supporting yeoman farmers" (Wilkins and Lomawaima 2001, 108).

While only one instance of the assimilative campaign, the Dawes Act represented the mindset of the federal government during the assimilationist era. Throughout Australian historian Patrick Wolfe's seminal essay "Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native" (Wolfe 2006), he continually cites the Dawes Act as a critical element of Indigenous America's historical elimination. Not only is the Dawes-era assimilation program linked to higher mortality rates, but, as Wolfe states, "reformers' justifications for it (saving the Indian from the tribe, giving him the same opportunities as the White man, etc.) repeatedly included the express intention to destroy the tribe in whole" (Wolfe 2006, 40).

Beginning with the implementation of the Dawes Act, the notion that private property ownership would integrate Indigenous communities into "civilization" began to permeate Indian policy. One year after the enactment of the Dawes Act, the 57th Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs was released (U.S. Dept. of Interior 1888). Named for John H. Oberly, the commissioner under the Department of Interior at the time, the 1888 Oberly Report details the financials of the fiscal year of 1887-1888 and

other policies in place, ranging from boarding schools to allotment. However, the conclusion included a clear statement on the intentions of the federal government:

> And the Indian should be taught not only how to work, but also that it is his duty to work; for the degrading communism of the tribal-reservation system gives to the individual no incentive to labor, but puts a premium upon idleness and makes it fashionable. Under this system, the laziest man owns as much as the most industrious man, and neither can say of all the acres occupied by the tribe, "This is mine." The Indian must, therefore, be taught how to labor; and, that labor may be made necessary to his well-being, he must be taken out of the reservation through the door of the general allotment act. And he must be imbued with the exalting egotism of American civilization, so that he will say "I" instead of "We," and "This is mine," instead of "This is ours" (U.S. Dept. of Interior 1888, lxxxix)

Composed clearly of the language of the individual, the closing of the Oberly Report demonstrates the American prioritization of individualism. Rooted in land ownership, the report makes a case against tribalism, arguing that the responsibility of the individual—specifically the *Native* individual—is to labor. Citing communism and equating it to the "tribal-reservation system," the larger ideological intentions of the American government come to light. The collective nature of Indigenous communities was viewed largely as a threat to the American structure, resulting in destructive assimilation efforts that attacked the native way of life from every dimension. Patrick Wolfe even invokes the trope of the Faustian Bargain, describing assimilation's own deal with the devil: "Have our settler world, but lose your Indigenous soul. Beyond any doubt, this is a kind of death" (Wolfe 2006, 397). Assimilation was a structural effort, achieved by breaking down nearly every aspect of Indigenous life, from tribalism to language to individual names. While this was accomplished through a host of mediums—boarding schools, the establishment of the Courts of Indian Offenses, sponsorship of Christian missions aimed at proselytizing tribal members—land removal emerged as a key component (Wilkins and Lomawaima 2001, 108).

In “Settler colonialism,” Patrick Wolfe discusses the Choctaw removal from what is today the state of Mississippi, mentioning a number of tribal members who resisted removal. By accepting the allotment provisions and conforming to Euro-American standards of life in 19th century America, thousands of Choctaw were able to remain on their homelands. Wolfe notes that, amidst the largescale removal of the “Five Civilized Tribes,”[2] this was accepted because of their adherence to American structure: “The reason that the remaining Choctaw were acceptable had nothing to do with their being Choctaw. On the contrary, it had to do with their *not* (or, at least, no longer) being Choctaw. They had become ‘homesteaders and American citizens.’ In a word, they had become individuals” (Wolfe 2006, 397). As Wolfe concludes, the removal resulted in exactly what the Oberly Report went on to implore in 1888—a reframing of collectively held lands into individualized allotments. The fragments of what was formerly tribal land were transformed into private property while Indigenous individuals were forced into the roles of agriculturalists, proprietors, individuals. It effectively obliterated the “communism” of tribes, continuing the ideological fight the United States was set on winning (Wolfe 2006, 397).

These assimilation tactics display Coulthard’s theorizing in action: as he explains how the dominant settler colonial state is able to pervade the mind of the oppressed—shaping the thoughts and actions of the subject to conform to the larger system, as well as shifting the way one thinks about themselves. Not only does this go back to Fanon’s theory of psycho-affective attachments, but also explains what was at play in the

[2] This term is often used to refer to the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek and Seminole nations, who were removed to Oklahoma from their traditional homelands in the Southeastern United States during the 19th century.

Choctaw removal—those who were "permitted" to stay were those who had assimilated (Wolfe 2006, 397). The fact that they were granted permission to remain behind did not indicate their recognition—rather, it did the opposite.

Allotment officially ended in 1934 with the creation of the Wheeler-Howard Act, also known as the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA). As two-thirds of traditional Native land had been privatized during the Dawes Era (a result of allottees selling off allotments to obtain funds for taxes they were newly responsible for), the IRA worked to recover some of the land that had been sold.[3] Established by then-Commissioner of Indian Affairs, John Collier, the IRA also pushed tribal governments to adopt United States-style governance. Often referred to as the "Indian New Deal," the IRA marked a shift in policy from assimilation, which had been in place since the enactment of the Dawes Act, to recognition. The legislation states its intentions as:

> An Act to conserve and develop Indian lands and resources to extend to Indians the right to form businesses 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 (*IRA* 1934).

While the IRA did allow for individual land allotments to be consolidated back into tribal hands, the act largely manifested in restructuring tribal constitutions and by-laws in the Anglo-American system of organization. In working to minimize the power of the Department of Interior and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), the act reallocated power to reservation governments. However, the governments established on reservations required the election of council members based upon districts created during allotment policy.

[3] This included land that had been sold to tribal members, who would then lose their individual property under the Indian Reorganization Act.

Because traditional forms of tribal government had been suppressed for so long, it was difficult for governments to restructure along ancestral practices. Instead, the BIA drafted a model constitution to be used by tribes as a starting point for their written documents. Because Congress required that all tribal constitutions be approved by the secretary of interior before enactment, the model constitution simply became the final product for many tribes (Deloria and Lytle 1983, 101-2).

Although the enactment of the IRA did signal a shift in the pendulum-swinging direction of American Indian policy, it continued the erosion of Indigenous governing bodies. Situated in a period of autonomy rather than assimilation, the IRA demonstrates how policies presenting as recognition-based can remain just as destructive as those rooted in violence and force. The Wheeler-Howard Act may not have removed Indigenous communities from their homes, but ultimately, it was "simply another means of imposing white institutions on the tribes" (Deloria and Lytle 1983, 15). The tribal nations that emerged replicated the structure of their oppressor, becoming copies of the legalistic Euro-American form of government. Oftentimes, they were referred to as "boilerplate constitutions" (Deloria and Lytle 1983, 15), as they varied little between Tribal nations.

The Indian Reorganization Act is firmly situated in the era of reorganization and self-government. While it is often upheld as legislation that worked to re-allocate power to tribes, it is clear that the result was a structural replication of the settler-colonial state and did little to alleviate the lasting impacts of allotment. However, this reorganization opened up the possibility for tribes to lodge claims against the United States for wrongdoing. A Court of Claims had been established in 1855 for Americans to litigate

claims against the government, but tribal members were excluded from its jurisdiction on the basis that they were not American citizens (Tsosie 2007, 256). It wasn't until 1946, post-IRA, that the Indian Claims Commission Act (ICCA) was passed. The ICCA acted as an avenue for tribal members to litigate their claims, such as uncompensated cessions of Native land, forced removals from aboriginal lands, failure to comply with treaty responsibilities, and mismanagement of tribal funds and other assets, against the United States (*Indian Claims Commission Act* 1946). While the ICCA acted as a course of action for tribal members to hold the United States government accountable, it was the creative product of the guilty party. Further, it was established with the objective of expunging Indian claims with a 'final settlement,' the ultimate hope being that the government could end their trust relationship with the tribes (and, in turn, ending the burden of financial responsibility for tribes). Its intention, as Yaqui scholar Rebecca Tsosie stated in her essay on the legacy of Lewis and Clark on Native nations, was to "settle all Native land claims in order to pave the ways for the ultimate assimilation of Native peoples into American society" (Tsosie 2007, 249). In fact, the Indian Claims Commission (ICC), the agency created to adjudicate the claims filed under the ICCA, was able to utilize tribes' awards to carry out further assimilative initiatives, such as boarding school placement (Smith and LaDuke 2015, 48).

As it was focused on eliminating financial liability, the ICCA was clearly geared toward monetary means, as opposed to other avenues of recompense. While the act itself did not stipulate that the settlements must be limited to monetary damages, it was expressed in the legislative intent of the statute.[4] However, the United States largely

[4] This greatly benefitted the non-Native attorneys, who received 10% of the final compensatory amount (Tsosie 2007, 257).

viewed the compensation, settled monetarily, as an extinguishment of land claims, thereby rendering tribes' land title (in the eyes of the U.S. government) invalid. Once settled, tribes lost their right to further litigate on the matter and freed the U.S. from treaty obligations with the tribe, "further consolidating U.S. government control over Native lands" (Smith and LaDuke 2015, 48).

Further, the ICCA can be seen as an example of Coulthard's thought that the settler colonial state determines what recognition looks like—and subsequently, the actions requesting recognition. As the settler state has established the claims court itself, they are also entirely responsible for the process by which the claim is filed, handled, and concluded. As was stated earlier, if the claim did not satisfy the requirements of the court, it was at their disposal to adjust accordingly.

Born out of a "federal hand-wash"—or, a sort of unspoken "apology"—and forced assimilation attempt, the Indian Claims Commission Act, in a sense, laid the groundwork for reparations, and, subsequently, land repatriation. However, the act was limited: it only addressed claims that occurred *before* August of 1946, as well as only offered awards through monetary recovery (Wilkinson, Buffalohead, Hart, and Johnson 1986, 153). The settlements' restriction to cash outcomes is incredibly important in distinguishing "reparations" from "repatriation." By definition, reparations are a way of making amends for a wrong one has done. Repatriation takes this a step further, with the roots of the word meaning to "return to one's own country" (*Online Etymology Dictionary*, n.d.). With regards to Native Nations, repatriation has served as a way to rebuild land bases and mitigate the destructive legacy of allotment. Oftentimes, repatriation efforts concern ancestral homelands or sacred lands that, following forced

removal, were incorporated into United States public lands preserves. Purely based on definition, the settlements emerging out of the Indian Claims Commission appear to constitute "reparations," however few actually "made amends" for wrongs committed against Indigenous groups across North America.

For years, Indigenous groups had called for the claims—which often had to do with loss of land—to be settled through repatriation of that land. A clear example of this can be identified through the example of the Sioux Nation's Black Hills land claim. Wamaka Og'naka Icante ("the heart of where everything is"), or, the Black Hills as named by settlers, lie at the heart of the Lakota Sioux's creation story. While the swath of land was included in the Great Sioux Reservation under the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty (which guaranteed the tribe's "undisturbed use and occupation" of the land), in 1877 the federal government seized possession of the Black Hills to extract gold, uranium and timber. This was done without the consent of three-fourths of adult Sioux males, thereby violating the stipulations of the treaty guidelines (Tsosie 2007, 263).

The Sioux attempted to bring a claim against the United States in 1920 under a special jurisdictional statue in the Court of Claims. While the claim was eventually dismissed, the creation of the ICCA enabled the Sioux to revive their claim. The Claims Commission soon found that the land had been wrongfully seized, and awarded the Sioux claimants $17.5 million, plus accrued interest, totaling $105 million (Tsosie 2007, 264). However, given the land's importance in Sioux tradition, the tribe resisted for fear of the land being sold. Eventually, the case reached the Supreme Court in *United States v. Sioux Nation of Indians* (1980), who upheld the Sioux "victory." Less than two weeks after the ruling, the Sioux tribal council unanimously refused to accept any of the monetary award.

Instead, tribal lawyer Mario Gonzalez filed a suit the following year requesting the return of 7.3 million acres of land. The case was quickly dismissed (Goldstein 1984).

To this day, the money remains untouched and the land remains in the hands of the federal government. Because, under the ICCA, the dispersion of the award would result in a full discharge of United States liability (thereby preventing any further litigation after the payment) the Sioux have been unable to pursue further action, despite their desire for *repatriation* rather than *settlement* (Tsosie 2007, 258). Coulthard's critique of the unilaterality of the redistribution and recognition models feels especially relevant here, as the Sioux settlement was strictly relegated to the objective realm of colonialism. The compensation awarded failed to take into account any of the cultural importance of the land. While it has been commended as a victory for the Sioux because of the Supreme Court victory, this is, at best, only addressing the objective realm of colonialism. At worst, it fails to really break into the institutional oppression that is continuing, as the only tangible outcome is an (untouched) collection of cash.

Reparations into Repatriation: Federal Land Returns

Signaling a shift in American policy, the first official act of land repatriation occurred amidst the sixty-year legal struggle of the Sioux. In 1970, 48,000 acres of land were returned to the Taos Pueblo, marking the original instance of this form of repatriation—a stark shift from the history of strictly monetary compensation exchanged for stolen lands. The acreage—referred to as Blue Lake—had been appropriated by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1906 when he established the Taos Forest Reserve (Gordon-McCutchan 1991, 29). The Taos Pueblo had long called for the return of the sacred land, which is "symbolically considered the source of all Taos life and the retreat of souls after death" (Bubar and Vernon 2006, 73). Like the Sioux Nation, they were initially offered monetary compensation. However, after waving this award in 1926 (in hopes of seeing the return of this land), the Taos Pueblo eventually saw the repatriation of Blue Lake under the Nixon Administration, when the President signed HR 471 (*Act to Amend Section 4* 1933). By this time, Blue Lake had been placed under the management of the U.S. Forest Service as a part of the Carson National Forest in New Mexico (Johnson 1999, 154).

One of the leaders in the fight to reclaim Blue Lake for the Taos Pueblo, Paul Bernal, addressed the importance of shifting the management away from the USFS:

> In all of its programs the Forest Service proclaims the supremacy of man over nature; we find this viewpoint contrary to the realities of the natural world and to the nature of conservation. Our tradition and our religion require our people to adapt their lives and activities to our natural surroundings so that men and nature mutually support the life common to both. The idea that man must subdue nature and bend its processes to his purposes is repugnant to our people (Johnson 1999, 154).

Bernal's commentary illuminates the position the people of the Taos Pueblo assumed to convince President Nixon to repatriate their land. In addition to emphasizing the differences in management, the Taos Indians stressed their religious ties to the land. Knowing that their claim would likely be denied if their argument appeared to set a precedent, the individuals of the Taos Pueblo argued that "no other Indians had such strong religious ties to particular land areas" (Gordon-McCutchan 1991, 157). Of course this claim rung untrue, but was politically convenient—even critical—for the Taos Pueblo's eventual success.

A more recent example of land repatriation emerged in 2018 with the Western Oregon Tribal Fairness Act (*U.S. Congress* 2017). Signed by President Trump, the Act transferred 17,812 acres of land in trust by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians. Additionally, it directed the BLM to hold 14,702 acres of land in trust for the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians. The former had signed a treaty with the federal government in 1853 to cede 800 square miles of land—only to see the treaty quickly violated as the U.S. auctioned off sections to settlers, rendering the tribe landless.

President Trump signed the legislation only after it reached the Senate seven times (where it had died in succession six times.) While news coverage of the Act has largely emphasized the repatriation of land to the Tribes (*Office of Peter Defazio* 2018), also tucked into the legislation is the reclassification of approximately 32,500 acres of public domain lands as Oregon and California Lands Act of 1937. This action enables 18 Oregon counties (non-Tribal) to profit from timber sales on these lands, generating widespread objections from environmentalists. Oregon conservationist advocate Andy

Kerr argued that "the currency of compensation by the United States to Native American tribes ought to be the currency of dollars, not that of the irreplaceable and precious public lands that belong to all of us" (Kerr 2018). While Kerr is effectively advocating for a restoration of the outdated policy of monetary compensation for land claims, the Western Oregon Tribal Fairness Act does warrant a level of criticism.

Ultimately, the Western Oregon Tribal Fairness Act only returned 3% of the land that was initially lost. The land that constitutes the repatriated segment was reallocated solely from federal public lands—the basis of Kerr's criticisms. In his commentary, Kerr acquiesces that "the claims of Native Americans to every acre of America's federal public lands is as valid as for every acre of America's private lands" (Kerr 2018). While harboring resentment for public land repatriation to tribes on an environmental level, Kerr implies that if repatriation is occurring on collectively held federal lands, it should be through an exchange of private property. The validity of this claim is obvious—land was forcibly taken from Indigenous communities across North America, regardless of its public or private status today. However, privately owned land is rarely, if ever, considered a viable option for repatriation to tribes. Further, the possibility is difficult to imagine—the American conception of the individualized, private property model was birthed alongside the United States itself and remains entangled in the framework of the nation.

Returning to Coulthard's theorizing on the settler colonial state's ability to permeate the subject's mindset can, once again, be helpful in this instance. While President Trump's motivations behind signing the bipartisan-backed bill remain unspecified, the primary result of reallocating approximately 30,000 acres to the two

different tribes (Cow Creek Band of Umpqua and Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw Indians) was a change in the management and usage of the land. Located in the Pacific Northwest region, the land is densely forested and timber-rich. With regards to management, the tribes have begun a practice of thinning and prescribed burns, the traditional custom of many Northwest tribes for forest fire prevention (*Office of Peter Defazio* 2018). While the tribes are expected to launch conservation efforts on the land, the repatriation of the land also allows them to harvest the timber stands, resulting in economic gains for the tribes. The license to log lies at the heart of conservationist Andy Kerr's qualms with the Act. While his is a purely environmentalist perspective, it does align with Coulthard's analysis. The authorization (again an example of the oppressor "granting" the subject "rights") exemplifies the transformation of Indigenous peoples into what Coulthard terms "Aboriginal capitalists" or "Aboriginal property owners"—those whose "thirst for profit comes to outweigh their ancestral obligations to the land and to others" (Coulthard 2006, 14). Of course, this "thirst" is bred by the settler colonial economic structure that renders residents of the United States (as well as Coulthard's native Canada) dependent for survival. Even with the appropriate attribution of blame onto the settler state, the fact remains: reparations and repatriation of this nature merely perpetuate the system. As Indigenous communities ask for recognition, the colonial state will continue to dictate what recognition looks like—a system established to erode the ethos of Native nations.

In some regards, the land repatriation examples represent progress. No longer are land claims automatically relegated to financial means of settlement, when the claim at hand is regarding land. However, when Tsosie criticized the land claims process, she

stated that “the eminent domain power has been sustained again and again, so long as ‘just compensation’ has been paid. The ‘just compensation’ award is purely a function of the economic value of the land. The cultural value of the land is not even a factor in the inquiry” (Tsosie 2007, 264). In her assessment, the economic value of the land is all that is seen, a value that was imagined and enforced by the federal government, by the oppressor. The “cultural value of the land” remains invisible, and, by association, so do the Indigenous individuals making the claim. Again, the recompense is merely a unilateral approach to “recognition”—a term that remains in quotes as it was created by and for the settler-colonial state, rather than Indigenous peoples themselves.

Indigenous Resistance: Viewing Coulthard in a New Light

Amidst his discussion of various recognition strategies, Coulthard includes a statement from Kahnawake scholar, Gerald Taiaiake Alfred. Alfred writes, "How you fight determines who you become when the battle is over" (Coulthard 2006, 13). If we think about "fighting" as different forms of resistance against the repressive settler colonial state, it has been shown the traditional politics of recognition model remains ineffective. However, this is not to say that other forms of indigenous resistance are not in existence. Further, what constitutes "resistance" is not always immediately visible to the common onlooker—change can emerge from subtle tactics. Coulthard addresses this by examining the work of post-colonial scholar Bill Ashcroft. Ashcroft postulates that the most impactful instances of subaltern resistance have occurred via understated means, accounting for their absence from much of anti-colonial thought. He states that these examples of resistance "involve the tactical 'interpolation' of the colonized into a 'dominant discourse without asserting a unified anti-imperial intention, or a separate oppositional purity" (Ashcroft 2001, 47). In simpler terms, visibly placing the Indigenous presence *into* institutions established by the colonizer can indicate an oft unseen form of resistance.

Coulthard introduces Ashcroft to offer a counter to the classical view of colonial power. However, he *does* take issue with Ashcroft's theory in its failure to acknowledge the radical differences between interpolation experiences in different discursive and institutional settings. He notes, "What he [Ashcroft] does not acknowledge is that interpolation may serve as an extremely empowering form of Indigenous resistance in one realm—for example, literary production—but not so much in another—for example,

in seeking recognition as a means of reconciling the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the colonial state" (Coulthard 2006, 14). Where Coulthard concedes that interpolation can be productive in some areas (where he specifies literary production), he fails to consider the subversive nature that these realms, specifically literature, can hold. Here, I want to turn toward literature examples that may exemplify what Coulthard, by way of Ashcroft, are discussing. While literature does not fit into the explicit mold of land, capital, or political power delegation, contemporary literature (specifically, poetry) can serve as a valuable form of resistance, working to destabilize the settler colonial infrastructure, sans the downfalls of the politics of recognition model.

A Turn Towards Literature

In 1983, scholar Kenneth Lincoln coined the term "Native American Renaissance" in his book of the same title. Lincoln was referring to the increase in the production of literature written by Indigenous writers. It was surmised that this influx emerged out of Kiowa novelist N. Scott Momaday's Pulitzer Prize win in 1969 (Momaday 1968), as well as the period of historical revisionism that had begun, with scholars beginning to (more accurately) review the violent colonial history of North America. In *Native American Literatures*, author Suzanne Lundquist characterizes the Renaissance as a reclamation of heritage through literature, an analysis of early texts by Indigenous writers, and a renewed interest in anthologies of traditional artistic expressions (Lundquist 2004, 38). Many writers rose to prominence during this period—Joy Harjo, Leslie Marmon Silko, Louise Erdrich, James Welch to name a few.

In 2018, some scholars have suggested that a second-wave renaissance had begun, spurred by the 2012 establishment of the first Indigenous-centered MFA program at the Institute of American Indian Arts (Boyle 2019). A number of radical and varied collections of literature materialized, garnering widespread accolades for the formally innovative fiction, prose, and poetry. However, across both periods, the term "renaissance" rings contentious. Associated with the concept of "rebirth," the term (incorrectly) indicates a lack of Indigenous storytelling prior to said "renaissance." For this reason, I would like to dispel the notion that Indigenous literary contributions are not a long-standing tradition. That being said, as I turn to focus on individual collections of literature, I would like to specify that my selections are intentionally contemporary. In the United States, particularly in academic settings, indigeneity is often presented as a

historical occurrence, a relic of the past. In schools, Native Americans are discussed in historical circumstances, while rarely, if ever, in current contexts, effectively disenfranchising Native presence in the contemporary view. Even Coulthard notes this, stating that

> State-sanctioned approaches to reconciliation tend to ideologically fabricate such a transition by narrowly situating the abuses of settler colonization firmly in the past. In these situations, reconciliation itself becomes temporally framed as the process of individually and collectively overcoming the harmful "legacy" left in the wake of this past abuse, while leaving the present structure of colonial rule largely unscathed (Coulthard 2014, 22)

While he is discussing the lack of contemporary recognition with regards to institutional practices, his view is equally as relevant to literary pursuits. While the positing of settler colonization as something in the past has left many accomplished writers out of wide scale recognition, I would like to direct focus onto two very accomplished (with an American Book Award and National Book Award Finalist accolade in tow, respectively) collections of poetry: *Nature Poem* by Tommy Pico, and *WHEREAS* from Layli Long Soldier, both published in 2017.

Literary Analysis through a Coulthardian Perspective

Kumeyaay poet Tommy Pico released his second poetry collection, *Nature Poem*, in 2017, the second installation of a tetralogy. Drawing upon his experience growing up on the Viejas Indian Reservation (located in California), and later relocation to Brooklyn, New York, Pico creates "Teebs": a young, queer, Indigenous, urban-living man working to confront and reconcile the stereotypes imposed upon Native communities in popular culture with his own identity. Throughout the collection, Pico almost exclusively uses the abbreviation "NDN" (a colloquial shortening of Native Indian), a choice that can be interpreted as a sort of reclamation—he steers away from the hotly debated "Native American" v. "Indian" terminology (Zimmer 2009) through a term that indicates his youth, his novelty. As hinted by its title, *Nature Poem* is constructed around the idea of a "nature poem"—which Teebs describes his inability to write early on "bc it's fodder for the noble savage / narrative. I wd slap a tree across the face, / I say to my audience" (Pico 2017, 2). In offering insight to his work, Pico has stated that "oftentimes we're depicted as being 'noble savages,' one with nature and all that shit. It's dangerous to me because then we become features of the landscape, not human beings, things to be cleared and removed" (Staff 2017). Through unorthodox language, humor, and a grounding in lineage, history, and the work of Indigenous writers who came before him, Pico offers a form of resistance to the colonial structures that inspired his collection. As the American Book Award winner, his collection has been "interpolated" into the dominant discourse (like Ashcroft recommends), but what he brings is anything but ordinary.

Early on, Pico confronts said colonial structures. In a poem about Indigenous value being placed on materialistic items as opposed to human life, he describes

"Kumeyaay burial urns dug from context, their ashes dumped and placed / on display at the Museum of Man. Casket art, mantelpieces in SoCal / social well-to-do living rooms" (Pico 2017, 6). This piece concludes with his (oft reiterated) refusal to write a nature poem—in this instance, based on "how statues become more galvanizing than refugees." Here, the preservation of "History"—who Pico personifies, creating a dialogue between himself and it—indicates its role as an American institution that possesses the privilege to *select* who (or what) it wants to memorialize. This can be linked back to faults of the politics of recognition model outlined earlier by Coulthard—particularly, the lack of importance recognition holds for the settler colonial state. Because of this lack of importance, the colonizer is awarded the decision to offer recognition simply when it is convenient, and in a form that can be characterized as "strategic domestication" or the "limiting of the terms of recognition in such a way that the foundation of the colonial relationship remains relatively undisturbed" (Coulthard 2006, 12).

Pico continues his critique of the American maltreatment of Native histories, opening a later poem with the poignant: "It's hard to unhook the heavy marble Nature from the chain around yr neck / when history is stolen like water" (Pico 2017, 60). Pico, via Teebs' struggle with his identity, demonstrates the difficulties of freeing himself from colonizer-imposed stereotypes (such as the conflation of the Native with nature), when history continues to be molded, withheld, and erased by the state. Preceding this poem, he writes about a conversation between two white women overheard in the American Museum of Natural History. As they remark on "how horrible" the destruction of native cultures *was*, Teebs pleads: "I don't want to be seen, generally, I'm a natural introvert, n I def don't / want to be seen by white ladies in buttery shawls, / but I will literally die if I

don't scream" (Pico 2017, 56). In his cry for visibility, Teebs identifies the injustices at play when artifacts behind a glass wall evoke strong emotion from the two white women, but his presence remains unrecognized. However, Pico, by way of Teebs' identity struggle, conveys his understanding that the settler institution—in this case, the American museum—cannot remedy this. Rather, recognition for Pico emerges out of his literary exploits documenting the progression of Teebs' identity.

One of Teebs' first questionings of Teebs' identity arrives in a bar between himself and a romantic interest who inquires about his "nationality." Of course, Teebs is instantly aware that the man is interested in his *race*—"I know that when he says / NATIONALITY he's saying *you look vaguely not like a total white boy*" (Pico 2017, 9)—yet he finds himself torn over his answer: American or Kumeyaay. He finally settles on conceding that he is "from an Indian Reservation near San Diego" without elaborating further. A few poems later, however, Teebs becomes increasingly reactive when "This white guy asks do I feel more connected to nature / bc I'm NDN." Teebs expresses frustration, going on to explain: "He says *I can't win with you* / because he already did / because he always will / because he could write a nature / poem, or anything he wants, he doesn't understand" (Pico 2017, 15). Here, it may be productive to return to Coulthard's critique of the politics of recognition model. As he critiqued the work of American critical theorist Nancy Fraser, her formulations' omissions lead him to understand the critical inclusion of identity: without it, injuries caused by belonging to an oppressed group can undermine the development of a sense of self-worth that is required to participate in someone's community (Coulthard 2006, 10). Many political conflicts include identity-related and psychological dimensions that, without, can leave (at least

part of) the source unaddressed. This understanding attributes validity to the progression of Teebs' own identity, as his interactions with others inform his subjective perception of self, and later, Pico's larger commentary on the persistence of colonialism.

"I'm telling YOU all about ME / In order to prove OUR intelligence, OUR right to live, WE becomes I" (Pico 2017, 16). As Tommy Pico writes these words, he acknowledges the structures at play—in his construction of this collection, he garnered support, earned respect, through the terms of the settler colonial state. The traditional collective ("WE") has suddenly mutated into the American ideal, the individual ("I"), and, as such, he has gained traction as a poet. However, while the structural colonialism persists, Pico revolutionizes the literary tradition, transforming the collection into an act of resistance. In the two poems following the above statement, he presents Euro-American understandings of nature, interspersed with his actual reality. While he doesn't explicitly designate these works as "nature poems," he subtly reinvents the form on his own terms, including anecdotes of urban dwelling, sex, and love. The nature poem no longer constitutes a romanticized version of the "noble savage," rather it presents Teebs, in all his Indigenous, Brooklyn-living, contemporary glory.

The penultimate poem of the collection consists merely of one line: "Admit it. This is the poem you wanted all along." While it may sound like a concession of sorts, in reality it stands alone on a page of blank space, striking a chord as an accusation. Pico flips the script: in a collection that confronts stereotypes relentlessly imposed upon Indigenous communities, he assigns the reader a view, charges them with holding a prescribed understanding of a "nature poem." Further, the line seems to indicate that he has produced this stereotype. But on the contrary—he has not. No poem in the collection

is without statements of Teebs' everyday life, revolutionary portrayals of the everyday "NDN." Even when poems *do* address the natural landscape, they do through colloquial language, abbreviations, pop culture references, and terms like "freaking moron basket case" (Pico 2017, 72). Pico may be giving the reader a nature poem—but it is not necessarily what they "wanted all along." Rather, it is a creation of his own.

A Reclamation of Language

Throughout *Nature Poem*, Pico routinely cites reasons why he cannot write a nature poem. One striking reason he offers is because they are an English tradition: "I can't write a nature poem bc English is some Stockholm shit, / makes me complicit in my tribe's erasure—why shd I give a fuck abt / "poetry"? It's a container" (Pico 2017, 50). The claim is interesting as the collection is written almost entirely in English. However, in Pico fashion, he works to make the language his own, through a pattern of abbreviated words, intentional capitalization, and informal word choice—a rarity in the English-structured tradition of American poetry.

Tommy Pico is not the only contemporary poet to identify that English is "some Stockholm shit," or, in other words, a structural limitation presented as an expectation in the practice of American literature. The concept of an "occupied language" is central to Layli Long Soldier's 2017 collection *WHEREAS* (Long Soldier 2017). Throughout the work, Oglala Sioux poet Long Soldier lyrically cultivates, reorganizes, and documents the construction of a language that has "talked" the United States throughout its history of structural violence. It questions its ability to carry Indigenous histories and criticizes the shape it has taken within governmental contexts. Like Pico, Long Soldier considers

herself a dual citizen, an identity that holds importance amongst the American tradition of "reading a racial or ethnic identity, especially an indigenous language, as an art form" (Diaz 2017). Long Soldier works to tear down this limitation, carving a place for her work in the American literature, thereby finding a place for Indigenous language, as well.

Early on in the collection, in the book's long first sequence made up of five poems (each aptly named by their number), Long Soldier gathers her materials, so to speak. She writes of Ȟe Sápa (the Black Hills), structural violence, the English language, poetic structure, and, in "Four," of what is missing: "As I am limited to few / words at command, such as *wanbli*. This / was how I wanted to begin, with the little / I know" (Long Soldier 2017, 9). Long Soldier acknowledges the disappearing language but does not allow for this to transfer into a disappearing history. Instead, she challenges the country that stole that language, "transforming the page to withstand the tension of an occupied body, country and specifically, an occupied language" (Diaz 2017). While the methodical silencing of Indigenous languages does persist, Long Soldier's work contributes to the changing power structure of American poetry as she incorporates her native language into the linguistic and literary tradition of which it should already belong. However, forging a place for an Indigenous language in such a structure requires confronting the very makeup of the current system. Innovatively, she presents alternatives to the status quo via liberties taken with space, play with redaction, footnotes, and brackets, or cyclical poem structures. The poems are visually engaging, with pieces written into the shape of a hammer, a box, a blade of grass. Her work, through its carefully crafted word choice and relentless battle with language, "critically reclaims and reevaluates the worth of *[her] own* histories, traditions, cultures, and identities against the

subjectifying gaze and assimilative pull of colonial recognition" (Coulthard 2006, 16) which Coulthard (based on Fanon) surmises is critical to altering the psycho-affective state of the colonized, allowing them to identify themselves as self-determining actors of change. There is no question that Layli Long Soldier is aware of the importance of this recognition, as her work quickly devolves into a pointed call for governmental reform.

WHEREAS was, in part, born out of the response to the Congressional Resolution of Apology to Native Americans, discussed in the introduction of this thesis. The collection is divided into two parts, with the second devoted entirely to an interrogation of the language used in this legislation—the majority of poems in this section begin with the formal resolution "Whereas" statements. Legislative resolutions typically require a two-prong format consisting of "whereas" and "resolved" statements (Humboldt State University, n.d.). "Whereas" statements typically provide the rationale for the "resolved" clauses, specifying the course of action taken.

Long Soldier's use of the "whereas" statements applies the colonial government structure—one that thrives off of quick fixes and "federal handwashing," enabled by empty resolutions consisting of "whereas" and "resolved" statements—highlights the failures of such a strict, black and white format. Further, as she uses it to provide a "rationale" for her experience, her identity, criticizing the term while simultaneously reclaiming it. In a poem exploring the meaning of the term itself, she states: **"**Whereas I have learned to exist and exist without your formality, saltshakers, plates, cloth. Without the slightest conjunctions to connect me. Without an exchange of questions, without the courtesy of answers. It is mine, this unholding, so that with or without the setup, I can see the dish being served" (Long Soldier 2017, 79). Throughout this poem, the term

"Whereas" comes to represent the privilege of the non-Indigenous living in a white America. "Whereas" is a conjunction—something she is missing. "Whereas" is a formality, it invokes pressure. However, she resists it, and its power. While she has "learned to exist" in its presence, this collection indicates that she is not complacent in living in its presence. Rather, she confronts it for its power, stretches it from its traditional usage to fit her own. Rather, she resists.

Arguably the most heart-wrenching piece in *WHEREAS* arrives at the end of Part One. Entitled "38" it discusses the Dakota 38—otherwise known as the largest "legal" mass execution to ever take place in the United States (Long Soldier 2017, 79). Ordered by President Abraham Lincoln mere days before he signed the Emancipation Proclamation, he ordered 38 Dakota men to be hanged for their role in the Sioux Uprising. The event followed a series of false promises made to the Dakota people—revised treaties that dissolved land holdings until they were landless and starving. Long Soldier recounts this through a series of simple, grammatically correct sentences, with the stated intention not to dramatize the events. The poem is often interrupted by grammatical notes regarding the vocabulary throughout, a critique of the grammatical precision of the Apology, constructed to avoid any drama, or trauma—in other words, to avoid the historical realities. However, in "38," the violence shines through, creating a striking rendition of the events. While pared down to one-statement sentences with grammatical precision, Long Soldier demonstrates how simplicity cannot strip history of its brutality.

"38" concludes with the killing of Andrew Myrick during the uprising. Myrick, a trader known for saying, while the Dakota were starving, that if they were hungry, "let them eat grass." In the poem, Long Soldier explains:

"When Myrick's body was found,

his mouth was stuffed with grass.

I am inclined to call this act by the Dakota warriors a poem.

There's irony in their poem.

There was no text.

'Real' poems do not 'really' require words."

(Long Soldier 2017, 49-53)

Conclusion

In her connection between the act of retaliation and poetry, Layli Long Soldier conveys the idea that poetry is more than words and forms and structures, more than merely language, more than the institution that upholds it—poetry is an act of resistance. That is, her creation, along with Tommy Pico's *Nature Poem*, along with the countless other Indigenous writers producing radical works of literature at this time, act as vessels for change. Glen Sean Coulthard identifies what he calls "transformative praxis," or, more simply put, the struggle, as a critical part of allowing the colonized to "shed their colonial identities" (Coulthard 2006,11). While it is crucial that these "struggles," he says, pose a foundational affront to the colonial power, it is undeniable that, while at times subtle, these literary works do. Not only do their critiques of the structure in place transcend time, but their respective explorations of identity and language act as reforms to the structure itself. Further, this work takes a step beyond the monetary compensation and land reparation which have been considered the ultimate form of Indigenous resistance for centuries. The tight grip that the state maintains over these forms of reparations prevents any true challenge to the foundations of government and cultural colonial institutions.

In one of Long Soldier's final poems, she discusses an article's apathetic writing on federal fund sequestration on reservations. The latter half of the poem responds to a comment written by a young girl who had "visited a youth group," and was shocked by the living conditions.

> "Dear Fourteen-Year-Old Girl, I want to write. The government has already 'formally apologized' to Native American people on behalf of *you*, your youth group, your mother and father, your best friends and their families. *You* as in all

> American citizens. *You* didn't know that, I know. Yet indeed, Dear Girl, the conditions on reservations have changed since the Apology. Meaning, the Apology has been followed by budget sequestration. In common terms sequestration is removal banishment or exile. In law-speak it means seizure for safekeeping but changed in federal budgeting to mean subject to cuts . . . Dear Girl, I honor your response and action, I do. Yet the root of reparation is repair. My tooth will not grow back. The root, gone." (Long Soldier 2017, 84)

As we return to the Congressional Resolution of Apology to Native Americans, the purpose of the act comes into focus: this apology is merely for the "American" people—the non-Native. The Apology was intended to clear consciousness, to offer "recognition" under the terms of the U.S. government. The "Apology," in effect, was not an apology at all. However, works like *Nature Poem* and *WHEREAS*, not only identify this, but offer a critique, a response. They don't "accept" the apology—rather they *resist*. It is in this struggle that they present recognition of a new understanding, one that has not been "given" by the federal government. It is through their resistance that they pave a new pathway in a nation constructed of roadblocks.

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