LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

The Translingual Toponym: from Minnesota to Mnisota

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Abstract: In this essay I explore Layli Long Soldier's use of orthography to replace the toponym 'Minnesota' with the Dakota word 'Mnisota.' By drawing poetic attention to the names on the map the poet confronts the reader with a plurality which is suppressed by settler colonial place-names, revealing Mnisota within the blind spot created by settler history and toponymy. Examining the poem through the lens of translation studies and translingual poetics I show how the poem constructs an alternative image of place by estranging the language of empire and those discourses that are not in touch with the land. I contextualize the background against which Long Soldier writes by contrasting the 'imperialist poetics' that the poem condemns with other toponymic practices in which the place-name is not considered finalized but ongoing, to be continually renewed by the people. I analyze the trope of grasses that runs through the text and discuss how the poet creates figures for speaker and audience to establish that the poem must portray both decolonial and settler colonial perspectives and show them in relation. I contextualize the poem within a broader range of decolonial scholarship regarding toponymy, history, and literacy in the Oceti Sakowin world.

Keywords: decolonization; translation studies; toponymy; translingual poetics; poetry

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'I don't trust *nobody / but the land* I said'
Layli Long Soldier

In the poem '38' Layli Long Soldier discusses important events in the history of what we now call 'Minnesota'.It is a work in the style of 'docupoetry' (a poetic work that cites extensively from other documents and relates historical narrative), but it also breaks the conventions of that style by incorporating two nonverbal texts into her poetic account (Harrington 2011). These texts – the memorial act of the Dakota 38 + 2 Riders and a poetic act of Dakota warriors during the Sioux Uprising – are actions inscribed on the land. They are presented as historical documents that are invisible to the official historical record and in presenting them, writing a piece that she doesn't consider a 'creative' work,'

Long Soldier seeks to confront readers with erased and elided perspective on the history of the Sioux Uprising (Long Soldier 2017: l. 5). In contrast to the nonverbal texts, the story of the Sioux Uprising cannot be explained without reference to written documents. These are "the Minnesota Treaties" that dispossessed Dakota people of their land and which, through many acts of abrogation and dishonest deeds, left the Dakota impoverished and starving. While she reproduces the nonverbal texts mentioned above, Long Soldier does not cite or reproduce any text from these treaties. The reason is that these written documents so crucial in dispossessing the Dakota of their land do not offer understanding, they obscure it.

In these two instances we observe a trend in Long Soldier's representation of truth and writing in this history: the United States uses abstract language and complicated written documents to deceive, while the truth can more easily be observed by returning our attention to the land and all that US treaties and settler histories obscure. '38' challenges the truth of any knowledge rooted in a settler epistemology by bearing witness to what it doesn't explain and what it erases. Long Soldier's writing suggests that history based solely on the written record is untrustworthy because, in the context of settler colonialism, that record creates a blind spot within which it conceals atrocities. Even the toponyms used by a settler state, which become the identity of the land for settlers, conceal the history and the present of the places they name.

Layli Long Soldier is an enrolled member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, the Oglala being one of the Lakota nations. Along with the Dakota and Nakota, the Lakota form the Oceti Sakowin or Seven Council Fires, a confederacy of culturally, linguistically, and historically close nations of North America. Long Soldier graduated with a B.F.A from the Institute of American Indian Arts in New Mexico and an M.F.A. from Bard College in New York. A poet and visual artist, her work grapples with what it means and what it takes to live in the dual citizenship of the United States and a Native nation. Long Soldier writes that she must live every moment in her life in this dual citizenship and in her poetry she demonstrates how it can be exhausting, alienating, exasperating, and dangerous. It is also the perspective from which Long Soldier can craft a response to the United States and its settler colonial self-regard and relationship to the land.

Her first collection *Whereas* is largely a response to the Congressional Resolution of Apology to Native Americans that was signed into law in late 2009. That apology was made (with a single exception) only in writing; the US government presented it to no one, as if Native Americans were not there to apologize to. Long Soldier's collection responds to both the form and the presentation of the apology, demonstrating its hollow use of language and offering a response that the apology does not welcome.

Her work is especially attuned to such experiences of alienation that occur within and through language. The collection takes its title from the Whereas Statement which, Long Soldier explains, marks all language between the word 'Whereas' and the next semi-colon unenforceable in congressional documents. This trick of legal language allows the authors to write things they have no intention of honoring in the future. In responding Long Soldier confronts her reader with a discussion that never did, but should have happened. The poems work deftly to show that there even is a perspective from which someone might reply, and challenge the assumptions of the monologuing settler state.

In this essay I will explore poems from first section of the collection, 'These Being the Concerns,' which are not direct responses to the apology but which frame that response. My primary goal is to analyze and contextualize Long Soldier's use, in the poem '38,' of orthographic shifting to replace a common English word, 'Minnesota, with 'Mnisota.' This subtle substitution of the toponym puts the reader in a position slightly outside the limits of US English when considering the state. Long Soldier confronts her reader with the existence and viability of an alternative to the settler place-name.

The very possibility of other, actual names for the land is anathema to the practices of settler place-naming. In the first section of this essay I will outline the tenets of settler place-naming drawing on Eric Cheyfitz' work in translation studies. What Cheyfitz calls the poetics of imperialism is a set of practices informed by the belief that the English language and the US appellations are final, even perfect and immutable – even when those names are loan words taken from another language (Cheyfitz 1991: xx-xxiv). Thus settler colonialism is carried out not only through overt military-political acts, but in using language and place-naming to erase and obscure the identity of the land it takes.

I use another account of place-names and place-naming to outline how people and peoples can relate to the land otherwise. In *Wisdom Sits in Places* Keith Basso argues that giving a place a name is not always as imperious as it is in settler colonialism. Place-names do not finalize the land and make it entirely past. Instead Basso writes of people who relate to the land as though its history were ongoing and place has a role in teaching and an ethical impetus on people (Basso: 37-68).

I thus argue that Long Soldier's presents a decolonial gaze on the land itself. Long Soldier writes about sacred sites--Ȟe Sapa-- and ecologies -- the grasslands of the Great Plains-- throughout the book, not just in '38.'Long Soldier creates a trope of grasses which command her, instruct her, and both shape and reshape her identity. The world is split into untrustworthy people and people who 'understand the grasses' (Long Soldier 2017: ll. 40). I take this to mean, roughly, those who relate to the land as settlers, according to the poetics of

imperialism, and those who relate to the land as relatives. On the basis of this decolonial perspective I contextualize the orthographic shift in '38' as a decolonial act.

'38' is in great part about the interconnection of literacy, written documents, the expulsion of Native peoples from their lands and the erasure of Native perspectives from history. The poem implies that the rules of writing are part and parcel of the sinister, ongoing process of colonization, and connects them to the mass execution by deploying the words 'capital' and 'sentence' with multiple meanings (Long Soldier 2017: ll.1-3). It likens US law to crime by referring to the process of presenting treaties only to ratify altered versions of them or alter them after ratification – paying heed only to the written text the US controlled and not the spirit of the accords – as 'trickery' (Long Soldier 2017: ll. 31). As stated above, it contrasts the discursive notion of history – a settled affair laid down in text – with the example of the memorial acted out by the Dakota 38 + 2 Riders – an action that remains in contact with the real world.

The shift from Minnesota to Mnisota is an act of decolonization because it activates a Dakota word and makes the settler toponym relative. The Dakota word serves, fittingly, as an instrument for demonstrating the historical contingency of the English word. In staging this collision, Long Soldier shifts the referent from the hermetic and discursive domain of US law and forces the reader to think Minnesota as Minnesota/Mnisota, once again in contact with the land, history, and everything that more than a century of broken treaties has severed it from.

However much this decolonial shift reframes and changes perspectives, though, it doesn't replace one name with another. This is because in the context of settler colonialism decolonization, rather than meaning the end of the settler-indigenous relationship, or its reversal, means maintaining the settler-indigenous relationship and establishing indigenous permanence (Veracini 2011: 6-8).

This turns out to be the reason Long Soldier must stop and begin again so often to convey this history. She presents her own perspective, marked by an awareness of the events. Constantly, though, she must draw attention to the perspective of those who are unaware. In doing so she reveals how the Settler state and culture have actively created that oblivion. Long Soldier finds herself needing to push the beginning of the poem back historically, first to the year of the execution that is memorialized by the riders, and then to the long period of starvation that led the Dakota to the uprising for which the resisters were executed, and finally back to the 'legal' agreements that formally dispossessed the Dakota. The poet front-loads these explanations at the opening of the poem, and then goes even further by discussing the rules of the poem as part of the very beginning of the poem itself.

> Here, the sentence will be respected.
> I will compose each sentence with care by minding what the rules of writing dictate.
> For example, all sentences will begin with capital letters.
> Likewise, the history of the sentence will be honored by ending each one with appropriate punctuation such as a period or question mark, thus bringing the idea to (momentary) completion.

> You may like to know, I do not consider this a "creative piece."
> In other words, I do not regard this as a poem of great imagination or a work of fiction.
> Also, historical events will not be dramatized for an interesting read.
>
> (Long Soldier 2017: ll.1-7)

The poet finds she must invoke a great deal of historical explanation in order to make the orthographic shift of the toponym effective. But even more than the careful consideration of the events which are presented in the poem, her fundamental recognition of a lyric persona and addressee that are identified as ethnically marginalized and dominant, respectively, lays bare the reason for needing to retell historical events. The settler nation has charge of the official institutions of education and writes the history of the land to its own specifications.

Many of the keys to this process of renewal stem from the visual aspects of '38.' The poem produces a kind of understatement where the things that are most urgently meaningful are there to be seen, as in the orthographic change or the concrete elements of the final lines which depict an execution by hanging.[1] As these elements are not voiced, however, they are not evident in any reading of the poem in which the language is perceived as solely discursive. These understated elements of the poem are akin to the elements of the land that are not captured or conveyed by settler place-names—the material land, but also alternative histories or Native cosmologies—that are hidden and disregarded by the colonial processes of treaty-making/breaking and place-naming.

Confronting the reader with the uncertainty of these narratives leads Long Soldier to become the investigator and alternative historian not just of the narrative or discourse of US American history but also of the land upon which that history is grounded. The orthographic shift from Minnesota to Mnisota signals a reopening and unsettling of questions about the names on the land. At the same time none of these orthographic shifts are marked or remarked upon in any way by the poet. This creates a jarring contrast given the conspicuous amount of preamble in the poem that details how the poet will write—down to the level of punctuation, promising capital letters and terminal punctuation —and why her attempt to commune with the reader about this history, this place, this grassland, will be fraught.

Settler-colonial place-naming and relating to the land

George Stewart's *Names on the Land* remains one of the most popular accounts of toponymy, or place-names and place-naming, in the United States. It was first published in 1945 by Stewart who was a professor of history at Berkeley, novelist, travel writer, journalist, biographer, pop sociologist, and ecologist. His study of onomaestics and toponyms is historical and taxonomic. It usefully categorizes names to allow us to understand what historical and political forces led people to give the names they did to the land of the 'New World.' Stewart did not travel anywhere to look out and ask whether such a name fit the land, or truly named it (though he did sometimes discuss toponymic ironies). This fact helps demonstrates how settler-colonial toponymy is hermetically discursive: Stewart's knowledge

was never of the land; it always began and ended with written reports and interviews. This blindspot of settler toponomy can still be observed today as *Names on the Land* is still in print under the New York Review of Books *Classics* impress (the edition I cite in this text) and still a source in reference books from at least as recently as 2006.

This is why I turn to Stewart now to understand the background of Long Soldier's poem. A consideration of the tone of Stewart's storytelling and his exclusive focus on certain actors is revealing of the ethnocentric, triumphalist, and 'poetically imperialist' perspective that has pervaded the discussion of toponymy. And although Stewart's discussion is quite dated, the book's persistent circulation is nonetheless telling of the official takes on the naming of both the territory and river known as Minnesota in the United States. Stewart writes:

> The region had a better right than any to be called Mississippi, but that name was pre-empted. The inhabitants might naturally have turned to some other river, but their streams were singularly inappropriate. No American state could be named Saint Peter or Saint Croix, Cannon, Rum, or Crow Wing. . . Having no suitably named river, this undaunted resident of that frontier region talked with the Indians, or more probably looked into some book, and discovered the Sioux name of the Saint Peter. It meant 'cloudy water,' since the river in flood was whitishly turbid. Travelers recorded its spelling in various forms such as Menesotor, Menisothé, Minnay Sotor, and Menesota. / The name was dignified and sonorous, and represented the tradition of Indian river-names. . . In 1852 the Territorial Legislature memorialized the President to discontinue the use of Saint Peter River, and substitute Minnesota River in official use (Stewart 2008: 258).

Of note here is the idea that a US American territory might have the 'right' to do what it pleases to the 'Siouxan' language of indigenous people, not to mention the unspoken understanding about what might and might not properly be made a place-name in the United States. Nothing about this loan word, its connotations and denotations, matters to Stewart except for the sonorous quality and aura it lends to the English toponym. This last point is a theme in Stewart's account that shows American exceptionalism vis à vis settler colonizers.

Put plainly, Stewart's account finds no validity in the Indigenous use of the place-name. The name can only be validated and put 'on the land' by the conquering/modernizing settler-state and the 'rights' to the name are transferred by conquest to be used or discarded as deemed fit by the new state. Moreover, Stewart also makes the claim that the name was 'extinct' by 1852 when the territorial legislature sought to use it to replace 'St. Peter.' Given the continuing occupation of Dakota and Lakota people in the region, albeit within reduced territories, Stewart cannot possibly mean that the word or language had gone extinct by that time. Instead, I take him to be exemplifying the 'poetics of imperialism' here. Settler colonizers assumed and demanded that English as a monolanguage was self-sufficient as the ontologically proper medium for translating all other languages. When the Indigenous place-

names were translated into English, or when foreign words entered English, they assumed their final and proper form (Cheyfitz 1996: xxiii-xxiv).

'Our imperialism historically has functioned,' Cheyfitz writes, 'by substituting for the difficult politics of translation another politics of translation that represses these difficulties' (Cheyfitz 1996: xxii). Stewart's claim that the Siouxan toponym was extinct is based on the assumption that when the river was christened 'St. Peter' by settlers, that translation simply and without complication transcended any other name and rendered it gone forever. There is a homology between this concept and the racial logic used to oppress Indigenous people in settler-states, which similarly forces them into an imaginary allochronic state of permanent anteriority.

There is, however, existing toponymic discourse that does not follow this poetics of imperialism but rather unsettles it. One example is Keith Basso, an anthropologist writing a half century after Stewart, who gained the trust and esteem of the native nation he studied with (not studied as object, but learned from) and a foil to George Stewart and the poetics of imperialism. Unlike Stewart's unabashed ethnocentrism and adherence to the ideology of Manifest Destiny, Basso's process was mutualist and respected the Cibecue Apache as the ultimate authority on their land, as seen in Basso's book *Wisdom Sits in Places* (1996), an account and outline of Cibecue Apache place-names and place-making. *Wisdom Sits in Places* is based on Basso's participant observation of a cataloguing of Cibecue place-names for Western Apache people but features general reflection on place making, and the persistence of the past as place, in a US American context. The mapping project that it accompanied is, largely, not even available outside the Cibecue community. In the book, Basso recounts his study of the Western Apache's geography of the land as an actually existing geography and as such, reveals his work to be distinct from the work of Stewart and other geographers for whom Indigenous place-names can only be valid as historical precursors to colonial place-names.

As an anthropologist Basso spent an extensive amount of time in contact with the people he learned from and studied with over the course of decades. *Wisdom Sits in Places* recounts several visits that he made to learn from elders of the Western Apache in which he listened to and spoke with them in their language. There is a great deal that contrasts this scene of contact from the process described by Stewart above: Basso works in full awareness of the continuing existence of the Western Apache language, he works to earn the trust of people in Cibecue, and agrees when they insist that many of the place-names must not be made known to, let alone translated for, settlers. Perhaps the most significant contrast, though, is that Basso's work on mapping, which included working with the Western Apache of Cibecue, did not just teach him the names of places and the history of how those names were properly given in English. Instead, by letting go of the substitute politics of the poetics of imperialism, Basso learned about the ongoing plurality of the land.

Among the Western Apache Basso encounters people of different ages and stations of life who interact with the landscape around them as everyday companions or acquaintances. These places embody the crossover of episodes from a person's life and lessons that person learned through Western Apache teachings and stories. Personal history and cultural history connect in the vista of the individual, producing a profound connection of the individual to

the history in the places themselves. Such a process necessitates a certain inversion of the perspective on space and time. As Basso lays it out, the past is a foreign country but it also resides in the present (Basso 1996: 4-5). Because material objects and areas persist within the landscape and are present in everyday life to those who know them, engaging with the names on the land is an act of communion, what he calls 'quoting the ancestors' (10-13).

This, again, highlights a stark contrast between the way that anglophone settlers relate to the names on the land and the way Basso theorizes Western Apaches do. One group places a name on the land and effectively severs it from any history it has while the other learns the name given to the place and witnesses the persistence of history all around it. Settlers act as masters of the land when they name it while Native people relate to it in a more complex way; a major function of this way of relating to the land, as Basso describes it, being stalked by stories from one's past and reminded of the lessons one learned (58-60).

This kind of submission to the will of the landscape is also illustrated in Long Soldier's poetry, most explicitly in the poem 'Steady Summer.' In that poem Long Soldier recounts the experience of a solstice visit to the plains of Lakota treaty land. She has returned to those plains for the solstice because 'the solstice / makes a mind / wide makes it / oceanic blue a field in crests,' and in this state she will be able to commune with the place. The wind blowing through the grass tells everyone to be quiet and listen: shhhhh:

> … in those
> heady grasses the mouth
> loosens confesses:
> I don't trust nobody
> but the land I said
> I don't mean
> present company
> of course
> you understand the grasses
> confident grasses polite
> command to *shhhhh*
> *shhh* listen
>
> (Long Soldier 2018: ll.29-42)

Both the reader and the persona are subject to the grasses' command to listen, showing that neither is master of the land. At the same time the land is marked as the sole trustworthy source of information and insight. Here the poem suggests that Western histories and toponomies, which don't listen to the land but rather declare mastery over it, are not to be trusted. Others who connect to culture and history intimately through the land are considered a part of that land. This is why, immediately upon stating that she 'don't trust nobody / but the land,' the persona explains that anyone who understands the grasses is exempted from that distrust.

Just as it creates a common identity among those who understand the grasses and witness the persistence of history in that place, though, this experience also leads to a reconsideration of identity, as part of a place. The encounter with the grasses, and indeed so many elements of the landscape shushing her and commanding her to listen, leads to introspection, forcing her to listen to her thoughts. She hears 'her [her daughter] / two states away' on Diné land in Arizona (ll. 62-63). Perhaps because she is feeling the pull of the faraway place where husband and daughter are living their lives in her absence, or perhaps because she feels wrong to be distracted from the place where she is, the poem ends with a question: 'who have I become' (l. 73). The poem shows how a place can be experienced and how that experience confers an identity. At the same time, it voices an act of subjective interrogation about how someone can or cannot be a part of a community if they are pulled between places. Long Soldier lays the ground for spurring the reader to consider her own relation to the land and to relate with it otherwise.

The grasses in question form a motif that runs throughout the first half of Long Soldier's collection *Whereas*, 'These Being the Concerns' (Long Soldier 2017: 5). This section begins with an epigraph 'Now/ make room in the mouth /for grassesgrassesgrasses' and concludes with '38,' a poem Long Soldier 'started … because [she] was interested in writing about grasses' (l. 71). The poem ends by explaining how the entire investigation and alternative-history originated in the poet's fascination with the execution of the settler trader Andrew Myrick. Myrick, a government trader who would not extend Dakota people credit even to keep them from starving, infamously stated that "'If they [the Dakota] are hungry, let them eat grass'" (l. 74). Myrick's dead body was found after the Dakota Uprising with his mouth stuffed full of grass. Long Soldier explains that she is 'inclined to call this act by the Dakota warriors "a poem' (l. 78). Thus the entirety of '38' 'started' with this poetic act of resistance..

I have remarked above that Long Soldier must go to great lengths to make her own perspective legible to the reader; she must likewise demonstrate the erasure and elision carried out by the settler colonial project to the reader. 'These Being the Concerns' uses images of grasses, incorporating the poem of those Dakota warriors to show that the settler colonial image of the land must be resisted and commanding the reader to listen to grasses and engage with these places otherwise. The poems repeatedly differentiate between speaker and addressee, allowing Long Soldier to describe not only her decolonial perspective but also the fact of its ongoing erasure.

In '38' this takes the form of references to the history of erased peoples, places, and events as well as to what makes it difficult to tell it: all those aspects of history are suppressed by the trickery of the poetics of imperialism.

> You may or may not have heard about the Dakota 38.
> If this is the first time you've heard of it, you might wonder, 'What is the Dakota 38?'. . .
> In any case, you might be asking, 'Why were thirty-eight Dakota men hung?' . . .

I want to tell you about the Sioux Uprising, but I don't know where to begin. (ll. 10-23)

Long Soldier also uses pronouns to differentiate two contrasting perspectives in the visual poem 'Ȟe Sápa Three.' She creates figures of the settler/Native relation in the abstract so that, in the poem's four lines she can describe the effect of the settler gaze and propose its remediation: 'This is how you see me the space in which to place me … To see this space see how you place me in you' (ll. 1-3). In this instance the lyric I is the subject in two senses: the speaker of the poem but also subject to assimilation and erasure by settler colonialism. The poem calls on readers to understand not only the alternative perspective the speaker is offering but also how settler colonialism created erased that perspective and created another place to put Native people.

In order to succeed in the labor of denaturalizing the monolingual English identity of the land, the poet needs to illustrate a complex set of perspectives – the perspective of Native peoples on elided history and erased places, the perspective of settlers on assimilated places and official history, the perspective of settlers eliding Native positions, and the perspective of Native peoples set against the settler position that supplants the former with a stereotype. Such actions of denaturalizing the settler identity of the land must delve into the topics and topicality of orthography, literation, and settler colonization.

The confrontation of the settler perspective by a decolonizing one found in Long Soldier's poems also appears in Basso's conclusions about place-making. The conclusions Keith Basso draws in *Wisdom Sits in Place* are not about a culturally-specific practice but about the general process of place-making. Even as settler place-naming lays claim to the final and unchanging identity of a place, Basso shows that this practice is aberrant rather than the norm. In making this argument, Basso's writing quotes from presocratic philosophers' ruminations on space and place, for instance, and his concluding chapter is grounded in the philosophy of French existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre. These points of reference suggest a Western bias towards constructivism in Basso's work, which has been discussed by Martin W. Ball in "People Speaking Silently to Themselves:' An Examination of Keith Basso's Philosophical Speculations on "Sense of Place" in Apache Cultures' (Ball 2002). Still, I want to underscore Basso's attention to place-making as part of an ongoing cultural process, 'a universal tool of the historical imagination' (Basso 1996: 4), rather than a romanticized detail imposed on indigenous conceptions of land.

In 'Unsettling Settler Belonging,' Amanda Murphyao and Kelly Black explain that settler place-naming 'begins from a different trajectory than that of Indigenous peoples,' because it is premised on eliminating the context, the narrative, and the present engagement with history that are part and parcel of place-making (Murphyao and Black 2015: 318). In a study of recent renaming practices in Canadian waterways they find that even contemporary efforts to use place-naming to recognize first-nation peoples, such as the renaming of the Salish Sea after the Coast Salish Peoples, often reinforce settler colonialism rather than disrupt it. They argue that such renamings may be 'performative neocolonial acts' that reinscribe all legitimate toponymic authority in the settler state (321). If so, such renamings continue the

lineage of appropriating Indigenous peoples' language in the name of imperialism. However fraught, though, Murphyao and Black recognize the potential for decolonial action in the renaming of the Salish Sea.

> While 'Salish Sea' can be understood as recognition unaccompanied by substantial treaty rights … inscribing the name 'Salish Sea' need not conceal colonialism; rather it can present an opportunity for reinterpretation … it can be opened up to reveal the ways that naming is employed in the service of Settler colonialism (321).

As both the pitfalls and the possibilities of the renaming demonstrate, what is crucial to decolonizing settler toponymy is revealing the violence and appropriation of settler naming and not simply changing or correcting a name.

Returning to the trope of grasses in 'These Being the Concerns' we see precisely such a revelation at work. Each instance of the grasses depicts the persona in active communion with the land or something wrong with the settler relation to the land. Taken as a whole, the image of the grasses signals that the settler relation to the land, epitomized in settler place-naming, is premised on an objectification and alienation that precludes any ongoing relation to it. The poem '38,' which is the poem that closes 'These Being the Concerns,' is the most explicit in the collection in calling attention to this dynamic, dramatizing it by starting and stopping numerous times to explain to the addressee that they might not have access to the ongoing process of place-making of Mni Sota Makoce and inviting them to reinterpret it.

An intervention in the 'land narrative' of the settler, to use Stephanie Fitzgerald's term for 'the palimpsestic landscape imprinted with physical, cultural, and spiritual narratives,' must challenge the narratives of imperialist poetics and show how they conceal other, vital worldviews (Fitzgerald 2015: 4). As Long Soldier's collection reminds readers, place-making is a complex process that involves a continuous integration of the acts of remembering and imagining. Framing Long Soldier's poetry, particularly '38,' as an intervention and act of decolonization will allow us to see that Long Soldier makes amendments to settler history (or historical amnesia) repeatedly and seeks to reveal what is concealed by the settler imagination. In '38' we witness the power of a contemporary poet revitalizing the Dakota word as foreign to English and uncovering the violent history of its appropriation.

Not just Mnisota but Minnesota/Mnisota

When I teach Long Soldier's '38' in my multiethnic American Literature course, I present students with an extended passage where Long Soldier explains the Dakota etymology that informs the orthographic shift later in the poem. Long Soldier writes:

> … as best as I can put the facts together, in 1851, Dakota territory was contained to a 12-mile by 150-mile long strip along the Minnesota river.

> But just seven years later, in 1858, the northern portion was ceded (taken) and the southern portion was (conveniently) allotted, which reduced Dakota land to a stark 10-mile tract.
>
> These amended and broken treaties are often referred to as The Minnesota Treaties.
> The word Minnesota comes from mni which means water; sota which means turbid.
> Synonyms for turbid include muddy, unclear, cloudy, confused and smoky.
> Everything is in the language we use.
>
> (Long Soldier 2018: ll. 38-43)

After presenting this passage, I ask students what Long Soldier's remarks on language might mean. Many students pick up on the social and communal value of words that we otherwise commonly perceive as static, and comment on how Long Soldier's revelation of Dakota etymology demonstrates the treaties to be aptly named, since they are in fact 'muddy, unclear . . . confused' and confusing. Still, many others misread the passage as one of linguistic chauvinism on the part of Long Soldier. These students consider Long Soldier to mean that everything stems from the Dakota language, revealing their tendency to conceive of another language displacing English in terms of the poetics of imperialism as the root of all proper linguistic meaning. In such cases, it seems to me that students are still trying to repress the complex politics of translation that '38' enacts by reversing the identity of the dominant and marginalized language.

We must consider that Long Soldier's poetry is written in English and that, though it incorporates and indeed turns on Dakota lexemes, it is written to be legible for a monolingual anglophone audience. Long Soldier's inclusion of Dakota words is translingual poetics, which is not merely the mixture of linguistic codes but more properly 'a set of strategies by which writers engage' with multiple linguistic codes and which does so only in relation to a particular context (Dowling 2018: 5). Translingual poetics are not deployed to deviate from norms or deride dominant institutions, they '[negotiate actual] social constraints in relation to writers' competencies and repertoires' (5). Long Soldier would not write '38,' or go to the lengths that she does to invite and graciously accommodate the reader several times, only to express linguistic chauvinism. Long Soldier's line 'Everything is in the language we use' does not identify an 'other' language, a language that is 'foreign' to English. Instead, it engages linguistic diversity, the simultaneous presence and invisibility of Dakota in the toponym Minnesota. And it engages it in a way that is context-dependent because our ability to understand the world of the text is dependent on the new meaning generated within the text.

After her lengthy explanation in the beginning, Long Soldier replaces Minnesota with Mnisota in the remainder of '38.' In each of four instances of use, the alternate literation neither makes the line harder to grasp in English nor does it hide any meaning from the English reader.

> Eventually, the US Cavalry came to Mnisota to confront the Uprising. . .

> However, as further consequence, what remained of Dakota territory in Mnisota was dissolved (stolen)…
>
> Homeless, the Dakota people of Mnisota were relocated (forced) onto reservations in South Dakota and Nebraska.
>
> Now, every year, a group called the Dakota 38 + 2 Riders conduct a memorial horse ride from Lower Brule, South Dakota, to Mankato, Mnisota.
>
> (Long Soldier 2018: ll. 57-65)

What each use does is highlight the violence of conquest by which the territory of Minnesota was taken from Dakota people and demonstrate that there is a grievance over it to this day. The deployment of military force, the dissolution of treaty land, the forced displacement of Indigenous people, and the commemoration of the fallen dead are each emphasized by Mnisota. The military conquest, land theft, and forced displacement are also tied into the etymology of Mnisota as the territory taken by turbid treaties.

In replacing the standard spelling of Minnesota with a literation in line with contemporary Dakota orthography the poem also reveals how the appropriation of Mnisota by settlers in naming the conquered territory is entwined with the emergence of Oceti Sakowin literacy in the 18th century. That emergence was conditioned by the poetics of imperialism and Christian missionary white supremacy. In her study of the colonization and decolonization of Oceti Sakowin Literature, Sarah Hernandez explains that Oceti Šakowin stories appear in print for the first time in a newspaper article translated and put in writing by missionaries in The Dakota Friend in 1834. The article is a creation story about Mnisose, the Missouri River, a relative to the Oceti Sakowin nations that has a special relationship with them (Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota nations). The translators present a misinterpretation of the story that denigrates the sacred relationship between the Dakota people and Mnisose.

In the fashion of anthropologists, they follow a two-part translation process, translating first literally and then taking great liberties to craft an intelligible text from the literal translation. In a story that gives the explanation of the relationship between the river and Dakota people they insert an aside wherein the speaker of the story divulges that the Dakota relationship to Mnisose is a fabulation. The aside suggests the people merely claim a special relationship with the river in order to feel superior to others, a truth that does not conflict with Christianity or anthropology. As Hernandez explains, this translation abuse 'denigrated Oceti Sakowin star knowledge and supplanted [their] tribal land narratives with new settler-colonial land narratives that ensured many of [their] people converted to Christianity and assimilated to the American nation' (Hernandez 2023: xv). The acts of translating Oceti Sakowin stories and literating Oceti Sakowin languages were part of a settler colonial appropriation akin to settler colonial appropriation enacted by settler place-naming.

Just as the use of the alternate literation in '38' draws attention to the conditions under which the Oceti Sakowin literary tradition entered the world of print, it highlights the distinct position of the Oceti Sakowin writer in the United States. The adoption of literacy by Oceti Sakowin people began in the mid-nineteenth century but as Linda Clemmons recounts, it increased dramatically in the wake of the 1862 Sioux Uprising. '[By] the missionaries' own numbers most Dakota rejected the [American Board of Comissioners for Foreign Missions] and Episcopalian mission schools before the war,' Clemmons explains, but in the years following the war these missionary groups established four well populated schools, one at Crow Creek reservation and Ft. Snelling and one each at the prisons at Mankato and Camp Kearney (Clemmons 2019: 96). It can therefore be seen that the development of literacy among the Dakota corresponded to their displacement, exile, and even imprisonment. Learning to read and write was meant to be part of the 'civilizing' process that would transform Natives; it was never meant to give them a voice with which to respond to their mistreatment.

Literacy can thus serve as a double bind, enabling the Native writer to speak but not speak against, when it is conditioned by colonization and missionary Christianity. This point about the subjectivity of Oceti Sakowin literacy allows us to think about the situation of the Lakota poet and the Lakota person who is dehumanized and seen as uncivilized by US Americans. We can understand Long Soldier's strategy of repeatedly drawing attention to herself and naming her uncertainty about how to communicate with the reader as the attempt to uncover and overcome this limitation. 'I want to tell you about the Sioux Uprising, but I don't know where to begin. / I may jump around and details will not unfold in chronological order. / Keep in mind, I am not a historian. / So I will recount facts as best as I can, given limited resources and understanding' (Long Soldier 2018: ll. 23-26). The choice of where to begin the account will have repercussions on its meaning; it might either frame the story within the settler narrative or the decolonial narrative of the events. However, given that the poet must incorporate the settler perspective in order to confront it, it becomes a challenge to translate the positions and information that have been repressed by the poetics of imperialism. In spite of the poet's dedication to communicating simply and directly, speaking from her position will require backtracking and contradiction. It will put the speaker in the position of looking confused, and therefore not knowledgeable, about the matter they are discussing.

The history of settler place-naming, land theft, displacement, and instruction in literacy all converge in a manner that illuminates the potential in '38' to uncover the importance of reconnecting to the history of violence that has been concealed by settler naming. In 1851 the missionary Stephen Riggs, an editor of *The Dakota Friend* and one of the translators of Dakota stories for that publication, acted as a translator of the Treaty of Traverse de Sioux and Treaty of Mendota. This 'ultimately stripped the Dakota nation of 35 million acres of land and forced Dakota people to relocate to a ten-mile-wide reservation in lower Minnesota' (Hernandez 2023: xv). The very missionaries who claimed to know and translate Dakota used their knowledge to undermine the Dakota land narrative and to trick the Dakota; the very missionaries who claimed to teach Dakota people to read abused writing to displace and starve them.

Conclusion

In 2016, the same year that '38' was published, an anthology by the Oak Lake Writers Society, since renamed the Oceti Sakowin Writers Society (OSWS), undertook to decolonize the land narrative of Mnisose by displacing the Missouri River with Mnisose/the Missouri River. They described their goal as redirecting attention away from the colonial story of unknown territory being charted and explored by the Lewis and Clark Expedition and toward tribal stories based in Oceti Sakowin cosmology. In this act of decolonization the writers draw attention to a land narrative of this place that will serve as their personal and national history as well as a formative aspect of their identity and ethics (Hernandez 2018: 79-80).

Importantly, the reclamation and decolonization enacted by these writers is not a reversion. Although OSWS writers do restore creation stories to the land they also task themselves with transforming representations that are harmful to Oceti Sakowin cultures, oral traditions, and histories (Oceti Sakowin Writers Society 2024). Defending and correcting the colonized land narratives is ongoing. The land narrative becomes 'Mnisose/the Missouri River' because the history of its colonization remains part of its history. The name on the land continues to develop and change, and will continue to do so in the future.

This process does not reproduce the imperialist poetics seen in the toponymic practice of the US, which is premised on fixed and immutable written names. Returning to my students' misreading of '38,' we can say that those students misreading the line 'Everything is in the language we use' are doing so because they misunderstand the relation between two parts of speech: 'language' and 'we use.' Habituated to thinking of language in the ideological construct of national monolingualism, they believe there can only be a relationship of identity between a 'language' and a 'we.' If 'everything is in the language we use,' and the persona of the poem is an other, the language must be other as well. Long Soldier clearly uses the first-person pronoun inclusively, however: the 'we' refers to any and everyone who might relate to Mnisota/Minnesota, and the language we use refers to the ethics, the spirit, that inspires our words. In other words, the ethical impulse of the sentence is in the verb, 'use,' not the position of the subject. Dakota must be *in use* to perceive Mnisota as it persists in the present behind its imperialist translation. What is more, this use cannot be restricted to native speakers of Dakota. To end by paraphrasing and expanding on a fitting pun by Djelal Kadir (2004: 256), the onus is on US Americans to participate in the complex politics of translation and recognize the history and cosmology that linguistic imperialism, in repressing it, has displaced.

Notes

[1] Long Soldier uses this technique masterfully, and more evidently, in the poem 'Waȟpániča' where all but two commas are replaced with the word 'comma.' As a result, the silence held by the actually occurring ',' becomes meaningful if understated.

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