Research Article

A Bridge Between Object-Oriented Ontology and Indigenous Time: Flat Temporalities in Layli Long Soldier's *Whereas*

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Abstract

Indigenous lives and histories have long been overlooked through historicization and primitivization. However, Long Soldier's approach in *Whereas* challenges the settler colonial perceptions of indigenous time, meaning the authoritative urge to leave indigeneity in only one mode of time, the past. In this article, I will demonstrate how Long Soldier's *Whereas* can be read as a disruption of the settler colonial hierarchy in modes of time through Graham Harman's object oriented ontology (OOO) and flat ontology. Through engaging with indigenous scholars such as Patty Krawec, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, and Mark Rifkin, I will propose flat temporalities as a model for indigenous time where no one mode of time is superior to the other and is singularly representative of the indigenous time. Long Soldier shows how the violent past, present struggles, and dreams of the future inform one another simultaneously through flourishing relations and kinship, bridging worlds of different times. To reach the objective of this article, I will begin by reviewing the work of Patty Krawec, Mark Rifkin, and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson to prioritize the indigenous perspective of time. Then, I will engage with Graham Harman as the aspiring backbone of the methodology of this paper, expanded through indigenous thought as to lead to flat temporalities. Finally, I will explain how through precise and delicate language, *Whereas* brings nuance to our understanding of indigenous poetry, questions the linear and hierarchical settler colonial perception, and envisions a new model of thinking about time.

Keywords: Contemporary American Literature, Indigenous Poetry, Object Oriented Ontology, Flat Ontology, Kinship.

"Our histories never unfold in isolation."

-Angela Davis in *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*

Introduction

Layli Long Soldier's *Whereas* begins with words she took down in her notes in a lecture by Arthur Sze, "No word has any special hierarchy over any other" (Soldier 2019, 1). This quote sets the tone for an intricate book of poetry published in 2019, written in response to the Congressional Resolution of Apology to Native Americans as signed by the US president of the time, Barack Obama in December of 2009. The Apology was not read out to the public. Not until five months later when it was read semi-publicly by the US Senator Sam Brownback to only five tribal leaders, missing more than 560 other federally recognized tribes representatives in attendance to receive the apology. The fate of the Apology is a curious one with the document then becoming part of a larger and unrelated legislation called the 2010 Defense Appropriation Act. The two distinctive parts of the book, "Part I: These Being the Con-

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cerns" and "Part II: Whereas", find common ground in their mutual inclination to foster multiplicity, in understanding indigenous lives, writing, history, and time. The said themes come to fruition as the second part begins where Long Soldier writes about her dual citizenship as a citizen of the United States and the Oglala Lakota Nation, "in this dual citizenship, I must work, I must eat, I must art, I must mother, I must friend, I must listen, I must observe, constantly I must live" (2019, 7). In the same manner, this article is built on ideas of multiplicity that are cultivated through Indigenous studies with thinkers such as Patty Krawec, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, and Mark Rifkin, combined with ideas in speculative realism namely Graham Harman's Object Oriented Ontology (OOO) and his elaborations on flat ontology. The questions posed by this article demand us to embody a new perspective in thinking about time in the plains and grasslands of *Whereas* where the hierarchical and imposing figures of time are flattened into a realm of equal and simultaneous temporalities.

In her *Becoming Kin: An Indigenous Call to Unforgetting the Past and Reimagining Our Future*, Patty Krawec underscores the importance of recognizing what has traveled from the past to the present, albeit with a different façade. She explains if we are to fight colonialism—in particular settler colonialism—we must understand that it is not a discrete historical event but a process, an ongoing structure (Krawec 2022, 16). As she explains, "Settler colonialism came to stay in the Americas in the sixteenth century, but it neither started there, nor has it stopped. It cut its teeth on the Crusades, where the rape and violence enacted on Jews and Muslims were the price of Christian freedom. A violence that persists and finds expression in the burnings of mosques and synagogues, shootings, and travel bans" (Krawec 2022, 16). To Krawec, settler colonialism is practiced through exclusion, disruption in relations, and categorization. This paper extends this disruption to time.

This is done by expanding on time as a Harmanian object and its application in indigenous writing. The methodological route taken here is committed to indigenous studies but takes inspiration from Graham Harman's OOO and flat ontology through emphasizing relations as an object oriented ontological approach of sustaining indigenous time. Putting the theorization to work, I will look at Long Soldier's treatment of time as practiced through themes of family, nature, and history. As to prioritize a comprehensive reading of the work, I will then engage in ways OOO does not support indigenous writing and how in fact given the history of dehumanization of indigenous lives, object oriented ontology and flat ontology should be practiced carefully, consciously and responsibly. In bringing OOO and indigenous studies together, this paper argues for a model of indigenous time, namely flat temporalities, that topples the hierarchies enforced onto a singular mode of time as to explain the indigenous experience and therefore robbing indigenous lives and writing of authentic representation in time.

Literature Review

Indigenous writers have long argued for the reworking of our understanding of time and history through making relatives and fostering relationships between different modes of time, specifically between past and the present, "[we need to] see something different, see something that allows us to become relatives again" (Krawec 2022, 17). Krawec's use of the word "again" delicately nudges to a past where indigeneity was rooted in sustaining relations. Relationships occupy a central position in Krawec's writing. Through them, histories are transformed and kept. She writes, "Rather than cutting off our roots because we are ashamed or afraid of what we will find, we can learn our history. We can reimagine the relationships we have inherited, and we can take up our responsibilities to each other" (Krawec 2022, 19). Krawec prioritizes continuity, responsibility and relationality that allows resistance in face of settler colonial logics that depend on erasure and rapture. Furthermore, Krawec highlights the importance of making the past a relative of the present through recollection and memory (2022, 17). Oblivion, to her, is not just an amnesia that one suffers from through passage of time, but a colonial condition, brought around through limiting or eradicating relationality to community and the land (Krawec 2022, 16). She continues to call for remembering what we have forgotten including "how to articulate the knowledge that is held in unspoken ways" (Krawec 2022, 18), embedded in our relationships and our land. To retrieve that knowledge, she turns to Historian Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz's term 'unforgetting', "Unforgetting is the process of reclaiming that knowledge—of moving these truths that our society holds silently out to where we can articulate them and examine them" (Krawec 2022, 18). To Krawec, Unforgetting then becomes an approach that acts as an active and political tool. While settler colonialism's dominance over temporal frameworks keeps the indigenous knowledge behind the gates of the past, unforgetting insists on presence, relevance and persistence. Further extending the relationality of such practice and going against its exclusionary counterpart, settler colonialism, Krawec rightfully suggests that unfor-

getting can resonate with Black experience as well; that our biases are interconnected and our examination is necessary not just for our own sake but for our greater communities too, “That connection is one of the things I am working to unforget” (2022, 18). Through emphasizing on the web of relationality, moving across circumstances bound to time, Krawec finds ways to relationalize modes of time. Her work is built on bridging the gap between the present and the past as to validate the current struggles inherited and fights the settler colonial inclination to cause a segregation that exiles the past and disvalidates present struggles tainted by history.

While Krawec focuses on welding the present and the past, another scholar of indigenous studies, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson concentrates on finding relations between the present and the future. In *As We Have Always Done,* Simpson writes extensively about the radical resistance in indigenous communities. In talking about the indigenous nations in Ontario, she writes about the insistence that the Canadian state has shown throughout the years in acquiring the legal rights of indigenous lands to extract resources:

> The results are always the same: the fictitious creation of the Canadian mythology that if Indigenous nations existed, they did so in politically primitive forms in the distant past; that if Canada has any colonial baggage, it is also firmly in the past; and that while some unfortunate things might have happened, again in the past, it is time to put that aside and start a new relationship where we are now (Simpson 2017, 42).

Simpson, weary of how the past could be weaponized against the future of indigeneity, relies more heavily on the present-day experiences from which she believes an indigenous future emerges. She uses her personal life to politicize the issue of the dominant temporalities in indigenous studies, contrasting settler colonial arguments that believe there has been an end to the violence (Simpson 2017, 118). To her, this is a hoax played on indigenous bodies time after time: that whatever happened is in the past, “But that’s the trick of colonialism and white supremacy. The greatest violent acts were not carried out on unknown, nameless, and faceless Indigenous peoples. They were carried out on our children and siblings and parents and grandparents, and on us” (Simpson 2017, 118). What is most salient about Simpson’s views is the way that she finds different temporalities to connect, a pillar that we will depend on in arguing for flat temporalities. Simpson brings our attention to how the past blends into the present, “This didn’t happen in the past, it’s happening as I speak, to our families in real time, in real life” (2017, 118). She refuses the past that does not come to haunt her people, and in that manner, she is challenging the singular settler colonial chronology of time that seeks a sealed history with complete closure and no aftermath. This is, in a lot of ways reminiscent of what Krawec argued: the blending of times by making relatives, bringing in sights of flat ontology in the periphery views. Simpson believes in the fluidity of time and its non hierarchical nature to indigenous thought and writes: “Indigenous thought doesn’t dissect time into past, present, and future” (2017, 213). She highlights the importance of fighting settler colonialism to achieve indigenous freedom by moving from the present towards the future; once again, a merging of times (Simpson 2017, 7). This is all while acknowledging the influence of the past, “The future is here in the form of the practices of the present, in which the past is also here influencing” (Simpson 2017, 213). Her approach supports simultaneous and continuous merging of temporalities as a way of representing indigenous experience.

The intersections and tensions between the indigenous scholars’ writings inspire a creative and capacious understanding of indigenous time, an understanding of time that rejects prescriptive singularity. This is a strategy to prevent temporal violence and to begin the labor of imagining and sustaining beyond settler’s time, including the indigenous future. As Nick Estes in the foreword of *Becoming Kin* writes, “We were first colonized when they took away our collective sense of a future” (2022, xiv). A just embodiment of indigenous time is one that is simultaneously mindful of its past, present, and its future. This temporal need is something that Mark Rifkin touches upon in *Beyond Settler’s Time*, “Native peoples occupy a double bind within dominant settler reckonings of time. Either they are consigned to the past, or they are inserted into a present defined on non-native terms. From this perspective, Native people(s) do not so much exist within the flow of time as erupt from it as an anomaly, one usually understood as emanating from a bygone era” (2017, 7). As Rifkin argues, the double bind limits indigenous existence in time; the indigenous are either deemed as historical relics, through the prioritization of a past that dictates, or are encouraged to be assimilated into the present of settler colonialism, so as not to disturb the linear progression of history. Furthermore, being assimilated would also favor the present times as defining mode of time for indigenous lives, ignoring centuries of violence in the past. Rifkin addresses the many ways

that settler colonial time does not accommodate or account for indigenous temporal complexities and instead calls for a different approach.

Rifkin then begins by the same idea that Part II of *Whereas* begins, with collectivity and multiplicity in treatment, "Rather than approaching time as an abstract, homogeneous measure of universal movement along a singular axis, we can think of it as plural, less as a temporality than temporalities" (2017, 2). According to Rifkin, there is no one singular way of time passing, and instead, there are various "temporal formations" that go by their own paces and consistencies, and transformations (2017, 2). This is because temporalities do not just respond to one relationship—unlike settler colonial time—but they emerge out of "the multifaceted and shifting sets of relationships that constitute those formations and out of the interactions among those formations" (Rifkin 2017, 2). An example of that can be the reverberating land-based relationships and its generational echoes (Rifkin 2017, viii). This is particularly important when one goes back to the crucial role of relative making with which we started this discussion.

Similarly, in writing about Ohlone/Costanoan-Esselen Nation, Deborah Miranda emphasizes the consequences of land dispossession and how it can relate to temporal experience, "The loss of land is a kind soul-wound that the Ohlone/Costanoan-Esselen Nation still feels; a wound which we negotiate every day of our lives" (2013, 202). Miranda implies that such loss and its consequences become a generational wound that surpasses settler colonial time and finds its way into the "every day" life of indigenous peoples in present and future. Rifkin recognizes this loss to be pressed upon generations of members of a nation, resulting in a disruption in the "collective temporal dynamics" that could potentially live on as forms of "bodily affects" or "wounds" (2017, 31). In this sense, land dispossessions and the altering relationship of people with the land have both spatial and temporal effects. Therefore, a reorientation of indigenous time is in order which brings past, present and future together, one that is void of a colonial pressure to linger to the past and instead it is interested in bending linearity and the collaboration of modes of time. In the next section I will delve into how such an approach, what I will refer to from now on as flat temporalities, can represent indigenous time with the help of the scholarly work done by Patty Krawec, Leanne Betasomasake Simpson and Mark Rifkin, and accompanied by Graham Harman's speculative realism.

Approach and Methodology

Object oriented ontology lives in the realm of speculative realism and does not share histories with indigenous studies. This section is meant to emphasize their common grounds and contextualize Graham Harman's work under OOO and flat ontology so that it would be relatable to indigenous thought. Additionally, I will present a Harman-esque model for indigenous time, flat temporalities. Although flat ontology is often associated with Manuel DeLanda, flat temporalities borrows from Harmanian traits with indigenous approaches at its center. These approaches are unforgetting the past, merging and blending of times, refusal to dissect and differ modes of time and emphasizing relationships including land-based ones. At the heart of all these approaches remains the same objective: a fight against settler's time. Importantly, all these approaches exhibit ties to OOO, "All objects must be given equal attention, whether they be human, nonhuman, natural, cultural, real or fictional" (Harman 2018, 9). Within this short sentence lies a simple ontological orientation that poses a fundamental threat to settler colonial hierarchies. Dispersing equal parts of attention to all *objects* is what unsettles the hierarchies set in settler colonial ideology. In the context of his work, Harman destabilizes the assumptive supremacy given to the subject that upsets the anthropocentric logics, ones that correspondingly fuel the possessiveness and dominance practiced in settler colonialism. Harman does not limit this equation to human or non-human and extends it to "natural, cultural, real and fictional objects" as well (2018, 9). The non-human objects become a point of tension for us in this paper, as we come to treat time as an object in flat temporalities. Harman then continues with his second principle, "Objects are not identical with their properties, but have a tense relationship with those properties, and this very tension is responsible for all of the change that occurs in the world" (2018, 9). Bringing in themes of relationality and kinship, he emphasized the importance of the objects in themselves and in relation to one another. Such theorization of objects foregrounds the significance of relationships within this speculative realist theory and paves the way for a bridging between relationality in OOO and making relatives as suggested by indigenous scholars like Krawec. To Krawec, to rework how we think of the past is to be willing to understand our histories in relation to one another; to refuse temporal closures that assume that violence has been exiled to the past. She insists that if we are to have a better and more ethical perception of the past, we need to acquire a new perspective that makes us relatives (Krawec 2022, 17). As mentioned before, another way that Krawec fos-

ters relations is through unforgetting, a practical and political tool in flat temporalities where the object of present and the object of the past become relatives. Flat temporalities relies on indigenous relationships because they surpass the obstacles of time and engage with different temporalities simultaneously.

In light of Harman's second principle, where objects become irreducible to their properties and are constantly engaging with one another, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's previously mentioned argument comes to play. She argues that indigenous time is not to be dissected (2017, 213). Having previously suggested the ways indigenous time rebels linearity, she claims the past is within reach and affects indigenous lives presently despite its usual contenders, colonialism and white supremacy (Simpson 2017, 118). Her approach examines how settler colonial time with its clean cut and surgical approach of time eliminates indigenous experience and rid itself of any responsibility as to make up for the violence. Instead she believes in merging and blending of times that allow temporal experiences to remain authentic to the indigenous. Building on Krawec's perspective that made the past a relative of the present, Simpson makes the present a relative of the future which aligns with Harman's understanding of time.. In describing the project of her book, she writes,

> I began to start my own talks with a narrative of what our land used to look like as a quick glimpse, albeit a generalized one, of what was lost—not as a mourning of loss but as a way of living in an Nishnaabeg present that collapses both the past and the future and as a way of positioning myself in relation to my Ancestors and my relations. I want to do the same here in this book (2017, 2).

Simpson promotes the relations between times and asserts that it is through those relations that she is able to appreciate her land, Nishnaabeg. Despite the changes that have left their mark, Simpson argues for a persistence and endurance of land which accompanies it towards the future. Harman suggests a seemingly paradoxical view of time by arguing that, "time entails both endurance and change" (2018, 158). Harman views time as "the experience of constant flickering change amidst a more slowly shifting background of enduring [objects]" (2018, 158) attesting to the importance of multiplicity of relations between temporalities, one that endures as past and one that changes as in future.

In addition to that, land-based relationships as Rifkin suggests become a temporal problem. Long histories of displacement, exile and dispossession do not remain in the past. As they are relative to the present, they continue to reappear and are inherited as generational wounds (Rifkin 2017, 31). Joy Harjo in the introduction to *When the Light of the World Was Subdued* writes about how indigeneity becomes one with land-based relationships, "We emerge from the earth of our mother, and our bodies will be returned to earth. We are the land. We cannot own it, no matter any proclamation by paper state. We are literally the land, a planet" (2020, 26). Harjo refuses to separate indigenous bodies from indigenous land, highlighting the critical temporal consequences of displacement that endure and change lives forever..

While approaches of these scholars differ, similarities can be detected, too. Their strive for temporal leniency is what inspires flat temporalities: the study of time without prioritizing a mode over another and an attempt to simultaneously remain in the struggle of the past, understand the gravity of the present, and engage with the future. Flat ontology and object oriented ontology aspire to envision a realm that is relative, while indigenous thought also supports kinship and relationality. Flat temporalities is born out of their meaningful common ground however, it is important to note the history of object oriented ontology remains rightfully speculative. Flat temporalities does not wish to belittle the experiences of the past by equating them to the present or does not wish to limit the possibilities of the future because of the restrictions of the present, instead it hopes to have a more equitable relationship to all modes of time and the people who experience it. Layli Long Soldier's collection becomes the perfect canvas that puts this understanding of indigenous time on display, where indigenous time finds itself in new light in every poem.

Discussion

Before I begin to look closely at Long Soldier's poems, it is necessary to attend to the conditions under which this apology, that inspires Long Soldier's collection, was delivered; particularly when one notices the contrast between its method of delivery and the backbone of this work: multiplicity and collectivity. The lack of representatives or tribal leaders is suggestive of an exclusive political circle in which a limited number of people get to experience the symbolic relief of an acknowledgment. Reconciliation cannot happen in isolation. It demands a gathering, a coming together, a sharing of space, a collectivity. An apology is never singular or alone. Though

signed by President Obama, it was never read aloud or made public in a meaningful way. This muted and silent articulation signals exclusionary logic. Silence withholds recognition, one that was due. The history of this apology is stained by absence, delay, and exclusion, characteristics that Long Soldier beautifully criticizes in *Whereas*. In addition, absence, delay and exclusion have long interfered with indigenous time. Indigenous absence in the present becomes difficult by constant pushes for assimilation, the constant pitiful pondering of the past delays the progress of indigenous writing, and finally the exclusion of indigenous thought from the temporal discourse exiles realities of today. This is why it is so crucial that indigenous time is thought in multiplicity and in collectivity. Layli Long Soldier appreciates and understands this need.

The book begins with a poem called "He Sàpa", the Lakota word for Black Hills in South Dakota also known as a sacred place for the Oglala Sioux tribe and Lakota people. In this poem, Long Soldier writes about the settler colonial word for Black Hills and the history behind it. While in Lakota Pahà Sàpa is the literal translation of black hills, the mountains that are tied to the creation story of the tribe go by He Sàpa. The different histories behind He Sàpa and Pahà Sàpa becomes a point of tension for the poet which according to Daniel Justice is a common reaction in indigenous literature, "words—especially those in non-Indigenous languages—bear a particularly burdensome representational weight, usually encrusted with hard, jagged layers of colonialist misunderstanding" (2018, 6). If unforgetting is to retrieve and reconstruct versions of the past, to learn and implement in the present, Long Soldier explores language in time and invites the readers to think back and unforget the multiplicity of histories which are about the same mountains. Long Soldier emphasizes the shared relation of people and the land through approaching the mountains as their towering build comes into the horizon, "See it as you come, you approach. To remember it, this is like gravel" (2019, 6). The speaker is corrective and sharp as they call out the settler colonial word, Pahà Sàpa,"He Sàpa is not a black hill, not Pahà Sàpa, by any name you call it" (Long Soldier 2019, 6). In addition to their attempt to inform the reader of the accurate language, the speaker restores a relation by undoing a form of displacement or dispossession that mistranslates He Sàpa. Finally, "To remember it, this is like gravel" (Long Soldier 2019, 6) points to one of the cornerstones of practicing flat temporalities, bringing the past into the present by relying on memory as a foundation. As the speaker suggests, like gravel, there is no smooth interpretation of time and memory. Like gravel consisting of many stones, it takes multiplicity to understand indigeneity. It is through the accumulation of relations, differing interpretations of histories and how they live on, one is able to experience indigenous time. Long Soldier's "He Sàpa" consists of five subpoems that each speak to different themes. However, the fifth part of "He Sàpa" most engages with Krawec's unforgetting and displays the struggle of retrieving knowledge that is not immediately accessible to the speaker, but must be uncovered through listening and acceptance:

> I kneel in the hairline light of kitchen and home
>
> Where I asked, *are you looking at how I've become two*?
>
> This one combs and places a clip just above her temple, sweeping back the curtain of why and how come. I kiss her head I say, *maybe you already know.*
>
> Born in us, two of everything.
>
> …
>
> But I'm dragging myself , the other me, every strand up to the surface. I remember

Very little. So I plunge my ear into the hollow of a black horn, listen to it speak (Long Soldier 2019, 10).

Taking up Krawec's framework, Long Soldier describes unforgetting the past as a challenging and continuous struggle and through which the speaker drags herself to the surface (2019, 10); reflecting of the difficulties Krawec previously alluded to in articulating the knowledge "held in unspoken ways" (2022, 18). The speaker performs unforgetting by exploring her identity, a recurrent theme in Layli Long Soldier's work. The poem emphasizes multiplicity as the speaker recognizes that she has "two of everything". Unforgetting therefore is engaging with multiple versions of the self each shaped by different histories, showing how multiple temporalities can be at work simultaneously. Kneeling in a domestic space, combing hair, and sweeping back the curtains, the speaker creates an intimate and private setting in which questions about the past might already contain their answers. Bridging the past and the present through attempts to recall the past and constant acknowledgment of what is already known and is therefore present is the exact temporal play that does

not favor one mode over the other. It harbors the idea of making relations across time despite temporal differences. The speaker does not dissect or essentialize time and instead vouches for validating different parts of her. Listening in "So I plunge my ear into the hollow of a black horn listen to it speak" (Long Soldier 2019, 10), is the very act of unforgetting. The speaker positions herself as receptive to the past, allowing it to infuse the present moment. Ultimately, Long Soldier explores a model of flat temporalities where the past is not isolated and is in fact a present and contributive part of the current, making different temporalities and their consequences relatives.

Following other approaches to flat temporalities, the image of grasses on the cover of the book—besides representing the landscape of many of Long Soldier's poems—offers us an opportunity to think about land-based relationships and their temporal complexities in indigenous time. Through land-based relationships, as Rifkin suggests, the history lives on and its scars are inherited into the present and the future. The non-linearity of indigenous time as a consequence of complex land-based relations gives way to the practice of flat temporalities where the past, present and the future are merged, rather than separated. In the poem "Look", Long Soldier writes about a field and the experience of pulling out the grass:

grass

body

whole

wholly moves (2019, 11).

Long Soldier illuminates collectivity in the natural world and treats grass as a unified moving and living body: a collective body connected and reliant, that moves as a whole (2019, 11). This imagery models a form of relative-making of shared living, a symbiotic environment where life is not isolated. It is instead generated through relationships, between strands, the land and travels across time. Even though each strand is distinct, it is through the collectivity of these strands that the grass finds its life and its body. This relational framework becomes clearer as the poem continues:

grass wires

little bulbs

silver

green

drop

lets I

sentence

to life (Long Soldier 2019, 12).

Each wire or strand of the grass as they are rooted in the same land is sentenced to life, suggesting that otherwise, without the land, they are lifeless and their relationships unsustainable. The ground or the land acts as a life-giver that generates history and relationships and goes beyond setting and landscape. If Rifkin's understanding of land-based relationship suggests that displacement and dispossession causes temporal difficulty and calls for a more nuanced understand of indigenous time, then one can only imagine how the speaker would react to pulling the grass out of the ground:

Dry mound

in cupped palm

what have I

done

what

now

to do

*why*thisimpulse

to

shake the dead

light

why do

I so want the light

to

blink look

alive more (Long Soldier 2019, 13)

Through pulling the grass, the speaker severs the web of relations that have grown. What was once a whole that moved together is reduced to a dry mound that is cupped in the speaker's palm, still and lifeless.

The speaker questions the impulse behind pulling the grass out and investigates the settler colonial habit of displacement. In doing so, Long Soldier criticizes the disruption of collectivities and the politics of displacement. She also highlights the importance of land-based relationships that encapsulate history, breathe livelihood in presence and ensure a future. When these relations are not disturbed, the past, present and future can inform one another, since a living body of grass is simultaneously shaped by what has been, what is, and what will continue to be. Foregrounding land-based relationships and relative making, Long Soldier suggests that it is through flat temporalities, where we sustain and remain relatives, that the past, present and future can coexist making it possible to have a just understanding of indigenous time.

The poem "Steady Summer" also explores land-based relationships and their inheritance across generations, emphasizing the importance of bridging time. In the poem, the speaker listens to the sound of wind as it sings through tall grass and she contemplates her distance from her daughter:

In my thoughts I hear her

Two states away ask for more

Mac n cheese this is good Dad

My favorite   their forks click

In blue gardens flowered borders

Scrubbed secondhand plates (Long Soldier 2019, 31).

The speaker's anxiety of being physically distant from her child is repeatedly interrupted by the sound of the grass, "grass songs a grass chorus moves *shhhhh*" that halts the speaker's thoughts (Long Soldier 2019, 31). This "shhhh" could also be interpreted as a directive given by the land: be quiet and listen. The sonic presence of the grass or the shush grounds the speaker and invites her to redirect the temporary absence of her daughter toward a relational presence rooted in their shared history, rooted in land. The sound of the grass becomes a calming and stabilizing force that halt her imaginings of what the speaker's child is experiencing without her and makes the speaker feel connected and present instead:

in June light

here I'm certain

that certain

kinds of talk

only = pain excusing

myself I paddle

deep in high

grass waves I'm safer

outdoors than in / in those

heady grasses the mouth

loosens confesses:

I don't trust nobody

But the land I said (Long Soldier 2019, 32).

Once again, grass here is not mere background. The grass becomes a relative, a confidante and soother, as the speaker laments this separation and attempts to navigate the distance between her and her child. In the poem, the speaker questions herself and imagines what it would have been like if she was reunited with her family, she is comforted by the shhhh, demanding it to listen, slow down, take in the sight of the moving grass. The grass becomes a kin, what the speaker desires, carrying with itself continuity, memory and presence:

I don't mean

present company

of course

you understand the grasses

hear me too always

present the grasses

confident grasses polite

command to *shhhhh*

Shhh listen (Long Soldier 2019, 32-33).

Spatiality places an emphasis on both grass and by extension the land itself but also as previously discussed by Rifkin and Simpson, relations. Rifkin and Simpson believed that the relationship to the land is a vital part of imagining the future. The grasses here are treated not only as hearing objects and friends of the speaker, but as an agent voice that the speaker lis-

tens to and follows throughout the poem. The sound of shhhh requires the speaker's attentiveness and humility and reminds the readers of the performance of unforgetting the speaker in "He Sàpa" through listening. Towards the end of the poem, "Steady Summer" changes form. It is continued in a shape that stands distinctively from the rest of the poem: breaking stanzas and the shhh sound takes more space, becoming louder. Each stanza reads as a description of imagining that involves the speaker's family, "Auntie steps onto the porch" (Long Soldier 2019, 32) and "mac n cheese this is good Dad" (Long Soldier 2019, 33). Quickly after, the poem ends:

Shhhh

This grass*shhhh*

Shhhh
who have I become (Long Soldier 2019, 33).

Long Soldier concludes the personal sequence of stanzas by tying it to the speaker's identity and the grass. The absence of punctuation in her last line heightens a sense of ambiguity, leaving her readers' speculations on her relations with the land unresolved. Her question or rather statement, invites readers to think over the complications of land-based relationships and identity formation. The poem ends with a plausible suggestion that one's individuality does not happen in isolation and it is continuously shaped by multiple processes and networks of relations, including the relation with the land. Finally, this unresolved ending pushes towards a portrayal of flat temporalities where relationship to the land and family is not sequential. These relations are closely knit together and often interrupt one another. Long Soldier blends the absence of the present with the presence of the past. At the same time, her imagining of the daughter suggests a future. This sense of simultaneity that this poem aspires, relations to the land and family, suggest a model of flat temporalities that demonstrate the speaker's grappling with indigenous time.

A major theme, as already discussed in this paper, is family and domestic life, which is explored through the sense of belonging and the need for community. In the forth Whereas statement, Long Soldier begins with a reflection of childhood and the past, "Whereas I did not desire in childhood to be a part of this but desired most of all to be a part. A piece combined with the other to make up a whole. Some but not all of something" (2019, 64). Long Soldier writes about the desire to commune, to come together, but more importantly the desire to contribute and to "make up a whole", to be "a piece" (2019, 64). This desire is deepened through language, "In Lakota it's hanké, a piece or part of anything" (Long Soldier 2019, 64). The speaker of the poem who is a Lakota mulls over on the "comfort of being together", despite its difficulties, "even during South Dakota winters" (Long Soldier 2019, 64). This sense of collectivity and togetherness goes beyond human relations in the next couple of lines, where in preparation to go out in the sub-zero winters of South Dakota, the speaker is told, "always consider the snow your friend" (Long Soldier 2019, 64). This reflects a land-based relationship in which the land becomes an ally. Emphasizing togetherness and collectivity, Long Soldier brings life to what Krawec and Simpson in indigenous scholarship and Harman in OOO previously talked about: the fostering of relations. In the next line, "Think badly of it, the snow will burn you", reinforces the demand for reciprocity and respect in such relations. The speaker then continues by connecting this relationship to indigeneity, "I walk out remembering that for a millennia we have called ourselves Lakota meaning friend or ally. This relationship to the other. Some but not all, still our piece to everything;" (Long Soldier 2019, 64). The speaker "remembers" or, in light of Krawec's work, unforgets the history behind the name of the tribe, how being a Lakota is tied to relationality beyond the human. While many of the tribes in the US are named after geographical features or a formations of "the people", Lakota and Nakoda people stand out as both tribes' names translate into allies or friends. At the risk of essentialism, Long Soldier thinks of friendliness and showing allyship to the world around her, human or non-human, a Lakota characteristic; a trait that feeds into relationships and is deepened through respect. Long Soldier stretches our understanding of making relatives through highlighting land-based relationships and invites us to unforget the history behind our names by coming together and showing allyship. She reflects the need for collectivity when she describes her aunt's house as "a place to gather" and where young people come to participate in workshops in traditional arts. In doing so, they foster a version of flat temporalities, where both past and the present come together. The aunt teaches traditional arts and in learning from her, the children bring the past into the present and future. Through this portrayal, Long Soldier demonstrates how flat temporalities work in practice: through unforgetting and cultivating land-based relationships, she writes about preserving the past and carrying it forward.

Despite Long Soldier's strive to bring traditions and the past into the conversation of the now, she

also does acknowledge the bridges burned; relations that could never be reparatively brought back in time or move forward. Long Soldier in her 18th Whereas statement responds to a fourteen year old girl who had organized a petition to have the US government "formally apologize" and "pay reparations to the Native American people" who she visited with her youth group in South Dakota (2019, 84). To the girl, their living circumstances were "shocking" (Long Soldier 2019, 84):

> Dear Girl, I went to the Indian Health Services to fix a tooth, a complicated pain. Indian health care is guaranteed by treaty but at the clinic limited funds don't allow treatment beyond filling. The solution offered: Pull it. Under pliers masks and clinical lights, a tooth that could've been saved was placed in my palm to hold after sequestration. 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 (2019, 84).

Long Soldier's use of the word "sequestration" pokes to the apology that inspires this collection. Unbeknownst to the girl, a formal apology had already taken place privately. Later this apology became part of a larger piece of legislation called the 2010 Defense Appropriation Act that was "followed by budget sequestration" leading to lack of resources for indigenous reservations (Long Soldier 2019, 84). In a sense, Long Soldier continues to foster the multiplicity of temporalities by putting her personal past in conversation to the present and how such violations live on. At the same she acknowledges the severed relations, similar to "Look" where the grass turns lifeless being pulled out of the ground. She exposes how indigenous time holds a violent past that bleeds into the past and into the future, as there is no reparative approach to take on, "the root, gone" and the possibility of growing out of that past is impossible (Long Soldier 2019, 84). While Layli Long Soldier's collection reflects the complexities of the indigenous time, it is noteworthy to expand on the ways object oriented ontology would not be extended to every part of indigenous studies or indigenous time. It is important to acknowledge that object oriented ontology, which strives to envision a flat world, where hierarchies of the subject and object are dismantled, could neglect the historical indigenous endeavor to be recognized as proper subjects. Flattening out these obstacles and hierarchies could possibly be misinterpreted as ignoring centuries of violence and discrimination. In this poem, Long Soldier acknowledges such discrepancies. She makes the past a relative of the present, however, she grieves this relativity, attesting to the painful remnants of indigenous time, "My tooth will not grow back. The root, gone" (Long Soldier 2019, 84).

Conclusion

Layli Long Soldier's *Whereas* begins with a non-hierarchical postcolonial project, that no word is above one another. Her poetry exemplifies the complexity of indigenous time and its ability to hold multiple temporalities at work at the same time. With no cost to the past, she engages with the present when she writes about her personal life. She engages with the future when she writes about the memories of the land. She writes about her current relationships borrowing from the past. In thinking of memory, she is committed to unforget connections that are essential to understanding who she is as an indigenous artist. Through this paper, I have argued that Long Soldier's *Whereas* models a form of indigenous time that aligns and complicates object oriented ontology and flat ontology by proposing flat temporalities. Flat temporalities becomes a framework that is fueled by relations without erasing histories or our responsibilities to them. Having had the pleasure of working on memory studies, I have come to be fascinated with the ways we understand and historicize time. Particularly, the way we understand the past. The past, conceptually, has changed. The past used to take longer. The past has become passé; it holds no value in the post-capitalist world of today. You are encouraged to leave it, to let it go. Long Soldier would like to reclaim it. In doing so, she demonstrates how she practices indigenous time as well. Her acts of unforgetting, relative making and fostering land-based relations are not simply to return to the past but to shape continuous and simultaneous relations that escape the binding of settler colonial time. This paper also considered the limitations of OOO in treating indigenous time. Flat ontology offers a gateway to sustain relations across multiple temporalities at the same time, but it fails to acknowledge that in practice not every relation becomes equal as they are shaped by ongoing colonial histories. Such a framework requires a careful and accountable use that guarantees that relationality does not fall into the pit of ignorance. This paper was a practice to see time through relationships, multiplicity and collectivity, and how in doing so one could open doors in understanding indigenous time and pursuing a just temporal treatment. The flattening of temporalities offers kinship and as a consequence brings nuance to indigenous poetry and writing.

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