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Indigenous Poets as Cartographers of Crisis and Memory: Joy Harjo's Poet Laureate Signature Project *Living Nations, Living Words*

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ABSTRACT

Joy Harjo's signature project as US poet laureate was published as an intricately designed online experience and as the eponymous printed anthology *Living Nations, Living Words*. While both versions feature the same poems, they differ in several respects. This article elucidates the argumentative gist of the project's online and printed versions and briefly discusses poems by Deborah A. Miranda, Kimberly Blaeser, Laura Tohe, and Craig Santos Perez. Harjo's project prefigures routes towards a future in which Native poets' conceptualizations and dynamic engagement with maps, historical trauma, and collective and individual memories will allow all readers to revise their understanding of the beginnings, components, and implications of histories of "America" and of "American" poetry.

Keywords

Contemporary Indigenous poetry, Native cartographies, memory and forgetting

As the 23rd Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress (2019–2022), Muscogee Creek author Joy Harjo created the online project "Living Nations, Living Words" and the eponymous printed companion anthology *Living Nations, Living Words*. The digital version, which is (at the point of writing this article) still

accessible on the Library of Congress website, features maps, visual images, introductory and explanatory texts, 47 poems, and audio files. The printed anthology contains the same poems, but it differs from the online version in several respects. Following remarks on cartography, crisis, and memory, I will elucidate the argumentative gist of the online and printed versions, including the differences between them. In closing, I will discuss four poems by Deborah A. Miranda, Kimberly Blaeser, Laura Tohe, and Craig Santos Perez. As I hope to show, Harjo curated the materials of her signature project with Indigenous principles of map-making and map use, and of remembering and forgetting in mind.[1] Rather than simply speaking up against settler-colonial mapping traditions, her project prefigures routes towards a future in which Native poets' conceptualizations and dynamic engagement with maps, historical trauma, and collective and individual memories will allow all readers to revise their understanding of the beginnings, components, and implications of histories of "America" and of "American" poetry.

Cartography – Crisis – Memory

According to Martin Brückner, Ralph Waldo Emerson diagnosed a "cartographic turn" when he argued that the "American map" served as "the nation's moral compass, directing the lives of its citizens, realigning their social orientation to each other" (Brückner 1). Emerson, of course, based his claims on the legacy of colonial mapping practices. These representations encoded an understanding of specific spaces as possessing symbolic and pragmatic meanings, ranging from ostensible ownership of land, slaves, and natural resources to infrastructure, transportation, and even the presence of diseases (3–4; see also Bernstein 5, 7). Consequently, Brückner proposes researching the "social and economic networks" (10) of maps from the mid-eighteenth through the mid-nineteenth centuries because, so far, these artifacts have been predominately read from a reductively map-immanent perspective.[2]

While Harjo might partially agree with Emerson's assessment, she selects a point of departure that challenges the notion of maps/mapping as a Western prerogative. Native mapmaking is a highly differentiated phenomenon: Maps can have multiple practical or cultural purposes (Bernstein 9, 42), and they can be tribally specific (9) or combine multiple mapping traditions, especially when employed to negotiate between

[1] Regarding my use of terms for the original inhabitants of the Americas and for their descendants, see Harjo's statements in one of her memoirs: "The collective term for indigenous nations was, and still is for some of us, 'Indian,' 'American Indian,' and colloquially sometimes 'skins.' The term 'Native American' came into prominence out of the academic realm in the late eighties. I've resisted it and prefer the term 'Native Nations' or 'Indigenous' or even just 'Native'" (*Poet Warrior* 219). I will follow Harjo's example and employ the terms Indigenous and Native interchangeably.

[2] See also Bernstein 9 et passim. For an extensive descriptive overview of the materiality, design, occasions, and themes of Native maps (including terrestrial, celestial, cosmographical, and other examples) organized according to regions of North America, see Lewis, especially the table summarizing his findings (175).

different groups (41–42). Although Harjo also includes Western historical and contemporary maps, she highlights Indigenous conceptualizations through which readers can perceive linkages between re-thinking the intellectual and emotional implications of map design alongside the poet laureate's spatially and historically contextualized selection of poems by Native writers.

One relevant conceptualization is that, instead of a topographical focus and consistently applied scales, Native maps use visual characteristics that emphasize "the significance of both context and history" (Johnson 106). Context may be indicated by stressing "*relationships* among geographical features and locations" (Johnson 107, original emphasis), while the temporal dimension of spatiality indicates "a set of connections from time immemorial" (Goeman, "(Re)Mapping" 300; see also Kelderman 44 and Lewis 180). Such Native maps show "movement, rhythms, and ecology" (Johnson 110), i.e., the consequences of human manipulations of natural environments. According to Abenaki scholar Lisa Brooks, their dynamic dimension recurs in understanding maps as "interactive guides" that "convey particular conceptualizations of Native space" (xvi). Readers consult maps in order to actively "locate themselves within the geographic and social terrain" (Brooks xvi). A comparable interaction occurs with regard to verbal texts because, analogous to maps, such invite "participatory" reading (Brooks xxv; see also xxviii). In this sense, writers are mapmakers (9, 12). According to Mishuana Goeman (daughter of enrolled Tonawanda Band of Seneca, Hawk Clan), who describes "continuous, ongoing storytelling" as the basis "for creating a strong, sovereign Native spatial discourse" (Goeman, "(Re)Mapping" 300), stories and maps need to be seen as part of past, present, and future experiences and of thinking within three-dimensional space.

Endowing maps with historical depth highlights that, when contemplating the experiences of Native nations, the term crisis cannot be reduced to the everyday usage of the word. Rather than indicating a high point in a dramatic series of events or a development on the cusp of pivoting either towards disaster or improvement, a more recent understanding of crisis as constantly teetering on the brink of change (with a strong tendency towards a bleak outcome) is more to the point (Balestrini et al.). Analogous to the distinction between weather events and the aggregated data that constitutes climate, Native Americans have lived in and with a condition of crisis caused by European colonization and its ongoing aftermath. For them, crisis does not constitute a break with their situation, but instead "*crisis* is the *norm*" (Susen 113, original emphasis). Beyond that, it is useful to consider Rob Nixon's ecocritical notion of "slow violence" (2) imposed upon the Global South by industrial nations. Such violence extends over interminable lengths of time; it occurs in places and affects people who are not prominently featured in Western media; it participates in strategies of obliterating the past, present, and future of suffering populations from the minds of the

materially fortunate. Nixon's concept features parallels to Lauren Berlant's notion of "slow death" as a process of sapping strength from individuals and groups to an extent that paralyzes their agency (see Berlant 95). In the context of this contribution, this raises the question of the role that poetry might play within such a bleak predicament.

The interdisciplinary field of memory studies offers multiple nodes of connection to poetry that engages with recollections, historiography, and socio-politically determined ways of construing so-called mainstream attitudes spread via educational and cultural institutions. These considerations within memory studies are also central to Harjo's poet laureate project, among them: understanding literary representations, first, as acts of addressing how the past and the present intersect (Erll 2); secondly, as comprising the full range from individual to collective memory (Erll 2, 5); and, thirdly, as comments on the "social (people, social relations, institutions), material (artifacts and media), and mental aspects (culturally defined ways of thinking, mentalities)" of memory (Posner paraphrased in Erll 4). The third category includes Pierre Nora's concept of the *lieux de mémoire* and Jan and Aleida Assmann's notion of *kulturelles Gedächtnis* (Erll 5). It is also worth remembering that Maurice Halbwachs, who coined the phrase *mémoire collective* about a century ago, argued that history and memory should be distinguished, as he considered history an abstraction distinct from memory's specific lived presence. Pierre Nora theorized *lieux de mémoire* as situated between history and memory (Erll 6), but more recent scholarship promotes the study of "different *modes of remembering* in culture" (7, original emphasis). All in all, memory studies has shifted its attention to dynamic processes (Erll and Rigney 3, 14).

These developments offer a useful point of departure for reading poems not as a reservoir of content that might be more pleasurable to imbibe than historiography but rather as artifacts whose meaning-making integrates aesthetic features and contextual knowledge. Harjo's and other Native writers' poetry demonstrates the necessity of considering Indigenous conceptualizations of memory by themselves or alongside Western notions. The point is not only to avoid reading Native poets through an exclusively Western lens but also to learn from and integrate Native perspectives into memory-studies approaches to literary texts.

Aleida Assmann argues that "[w]hen thinking about memory, we must start with forgetting," which may be "active" or "passive" (97) and which requires analysis of how institutions foster specific forms of keeping the past visible in the present (98). In literary scholarship and in academic curricula, processes of creating and maintaining canons and archives are pitted against forgetting. Should readers of this article boost the sales of Harjo's poetry anthology and the number of visits to the project

website, then they will actively foster awareness of how some Native poets engage in making their respective past visible in the present and in carrying it into the future.

Summarizing Diana Taylor's observations "on the power of Western archives over indigenous performance in the Americas" (A. Assmann 105), Aleida Assmann appreciates that Taylor opens Western eyes to Indigenous forms of knowledge transfer, for example, by elucidating the power of oral literatures and of "indigenous embodied practice" (Taylor qtd. in A. Assmann 105). Harjo's poetry certainly references culture-specific oral traditions; at the same time, her work fully harnesses print culture, recording technology, and digital culture for the same purpose. In fact, like numerous Native artists and scholars, Harjo argues in favor of a complementary (rather than a dichotomous) understanding of the oral and the written (see Brooks xxi–xxiii; Goeman, "(Re)Mapping" 300).[3] She joins other writers who employ "Indigenous cultures as sources of knowledge" and implicitly "reject the imposition of European (and Euroamerican) knowledge as a paradigm for reading Native texts" (Johnson 104). This does not, I argue, preclude seeing Harjo's poet laureate signature project as a work that incorporates three kinds of memory that Jan Assmann defines as cross-cultural phenomena: "individual" (or "inner" and "subjective") plus "communicative" (as in "social") and "cultural" memory (109). Not only do various poems in Harjo's signature project address fictional or autobiographical recollections, but they also poignantly grapple with the social roles and relational characteristics of how memories are negotiated in specific contexts. They, moreover, challenge and revise "cultural memory" which "is shared by a number of people" for whom it forms "a collective, that is, cultural, identity" (J. Assmann 110). Importantly, Harjo consistently highlights that Indigenous poets preceded non-Indigenous American poets, just like Native understandings of mapped spaces on land that came to be known as the United States existed first.

"Living Nations, Living Words" / *Living Nations, Living Words*

An overview of the poet laureate tradition provides useful context for understanding Harjo's project. Analogous to large-scale debates about poetry as a socially and culturally relevant art form, launching and maintaining a poet laureateship has been fraught with controversy regarding its commensurability with US national self-definition. Promoters of appointing a national poet intended to devise a position congruent with a republic rather than a monarchy, so as not to simply emulate European feudal models. While the position originated within the legislative branch of Congress and while the White House has occasionally featured the designated poet for official

[3] See also Matt Cohen and Jeffrey Glover's comments on how Western notions of a supposedly linear (and thus, ostensibly, progress-oriented) evolution from oral to written cultural self-expression dominated twentieth-century thinking (1) in terms of "teleologically organized stages of development" (2).

purposes such as inaugurations, it is the Librarian of Congress who selects a poet for a one-year term that is frequently extended to two or three years. Between 1937 and 1985, the appointee bore the title of "Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress"; in December 1985, the US Congress changed it to "Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry" (Public Law 99–194, Title VI, sec. 2). Even though the poet's duties have shifted towards an increasingly large-scale public presence and towards nationwide projects, combining the time-worn, yet controversial designation "poet laureate" with the more recent notion of a poetry consultant can also be read as acknowledging that the former expression has, after all, been a salient part of the US cultural imaginary for a long time. Put differently, the designation "poet laureate" contributes to the visibility and recognizability of the position more than the low-key title of "consultant in poetry."

Despite doubts about the cultural congruency of having a federal poet laureate in a democratic nation and apprehension regarding low-quality art compromised by political subservience (Jacobsen qtd. in McGuire 333; see also McGuire 196, 431–32), poets laureate have also been appointed at the state, county, and municipal levels since 1915.[4] Media interest in poets laureate and their activities throughout the United States has grown since the mid-1990s (Schuessler; Onishi), presumably because their predecessors had primarily served as reference librarians and poets-in-residence, whereas the poet laureate consultants have been more strongly associated with outreach programs.

The Library of Congress website introduces Joy Harjo as "the first Native American poet to serve in the position [of poet laureate]" and as "an enrolled member of the Muscogee Creek Nation" who "currently lives in her hometown of Tulsa, Oklahoma, and is the nation's first Poet Laureate from Oklahoma." Her response to the appointment is also quoted:

> What a tremendous honor it is to be named the U.S. Poet Laureate . . . I share this honor with ancestors and teachers who inspired in me a love of poetry, who taught that words are powerful and can make change when understanding appears impossible, and how time and timelessness can live together within a poem. I count among these ancestors and teachers my Muscogee Creek people, the librarians who opened so many doors for all of us, and the original poets of the indigenous tribal nations of these lands, who were joined by diverse peoples from nations all over the world to make this country and this country's poetry. ("Joy Harjo: U.S. Poet Laureate")

Harjo pours new meaning into the 500-year-plus gap of keeping Indigenous poetry mostly invisible to non-Native populations. She repeatedly asserts that her paternal

[4] For a list of previous and current state poets laureate, see Armenti and "Current US and State Poets Laureate." California was the first state to appoint a poet laureate; nine states followed in the 1920s. Three states do not have a poet laureate position at all, while in other states the position is vacant. In addition to the federal and state levels, poets laureate serve specific populations (e.g., Laura Tohe is the Navajo nation poet laureate), while others have been appointed at the county or city levels.

tribal culture has been sustained through well-established patterns of instruction by the twice-mentioned "ancestors and teachers." Widening the scope from her Muscogee Creek cultural legacy to "the indigenous tribal nations of these lands," she follows up with a comprehensive statement about Native poetry history. Although she acknowledges the significance of post-contact librarians (whether Native or not) as contributing to her own and other poets' intellectual and emotional development, she makes unmistakably clear that most Americans are non-Indigenous settlers. Their poets, like other immigrants, "joined" the original Native nations on what 'became' US soil, but they did not found American poetry per se.

"Living Nations, Living Words" includes works by 47 contemporary Indigenous poets. For the website, Harjo collaborated with the Library's Geography and Map Division and its American Folklife Center to produce "an interactive ArcGIS Story Map and a newly developed Library of Congress audio collection." The online educator guide was developed with an advisory committee, including members of the National Council for the Social Studies, the National Council of Teachers of English and the National Indian Education Association ("Living Nations, Living Words: A Guide for Educators"). Additionally, the poetry anthology was published as an analogue book by Norton. Harjo focused the third year of her poet laureateship on making her project widely known. Referring to the year 2020 and the horrific COVID-19 pandemic, she is quoted as saying:

> This has been a challenging year for the country, for our earth. Poetry has provided doorways for joy, grief and understanding in the midst of turmoil and pandemic . . . I welcome the opportunity of a third term to activate my project and visit communities to share Native poetry. The story of America begins with Native presence, thoughts and words. Poetry is made of word threads that weave and connect us. ("Joy Harjo Appointed")

Connectedness

On the Library of Congress website, Harjo introduces her project as an opportunity to learn about Native poetry and to connect with already interconnected poets who look back at a long history of variegated forms of artistic self-expression. I repeat the root word "connect" here because Harjo emphasizes the relational function of the arts and appeals to the addressees' desire to get to know something with which they are not yet familiar. By implication, you can only relate to what you know:

> As the first Native U.S. Poet Laureate, I decided that my signature project should introduce the country to the many Native poets who live in these lands. Our communities innately shared and share poetry from before the founding of the United States to the present.
>
> We understand poetry to be a living language – whether it is in our tribal languages, or in English, or another language. We use poetry to mark transformations, as in love

> letters, elegies, or epithalamium. Poetry can be useful for praise and even to help deter a storm. Or poetry is a tool to uncover the miraculous in the ordinary.
>
> We are intimately involved in our communities, which may be on our reservations or in the cities and often both. We are like everyone else. Some of us stay rooted. Others travel and even live internationally. This holds true for our individual approaches to the art of poetry. . . .
>
> Keep in mind that each of the featured poets has many poetry ancestors as well as young poets who have or will follow in their footsteps. There are connections between all of the poets in "Living Nations, Living Words" – and connecting influences between these poets and many, many other Native poets who do not appear here, and many, many American and world poets from the present and generations before.
>
> As you explore, you too will be connected. (Harjo, "Living Nations")[5]

This is Harjo's clarion call to literary historians, canon and curriculum designers, and readers of whatever ilk: Indigenous poetry metonymically represents the cultural output of Native nations since long before European settler-colonialism to the present; it has been trans- and international *avant la lettre*; and it remains vibrantly dynamic because poetry is alive, marks change, has pragmatic features, and because it appeals to us rationally and emotionally. Most of all, it connects people within mapped spaces and beyond; and this is an experience that readers who engage with poetry will share. Harjo's approach reads like a response to Brooks's question of "What happens to our view of American history when Native narratives are not just *included* but *privileged*? . . . What happens when the texts of Anglo-American history and literature are participants in Native space rather than the center of the story? What kind of map emerges?" (Brooks xxxv, original emphasis). According to Mishuana Goeman, Harjo uses poetry as a strategy of "[r]eclaiming Native cartographies" (Goeman, "The Tools" 90); a crucial element in this endeavor is to create "a map of possibilities connected to human agency and relationships" (95). This strategy, which Goeman identifies in one of Harjo's poems, is expanded in "Living Nations, Living Words" and assumes reciprocity between poems and maps.

In the introduction to the section "Explore the Story Map," Harjo delineates her understanding of mapping and maps, and of how they relate to Native poets' work. Interconnectedness recurs here, as does the emphasis on maps' variegated forms and functions. Harjo mentions map-making by means other than paper and pencil, such as drawing in the sand, weaving, basket-making, singing, and writing poetry.[6] Changes

[5] This invitation to connectedness resembles Brooks's address to her readers, hoping that her book will result in "embedding you, the reader, in the text to foster a participatory conversation between us and this world we share" (xxv).

[6] See Johnson's analysis of Harjo's poem "A Map to the Next World," which mentions a map drawn in the sand and which encourages the speaker's granddaughter to create her own, individual map (Johnson 112). Sand as a medium highlights the importance of memory during the reading process (Goeman, "The Tools" 100).

and varieties of technological channels notwithstanding, maps have accompanied humans to the present, and their historical depth is as important as their methods of spatial representation and their practical purposes, such as providing orientation in physical and metaphysical realms. Silently assuming that non-Native readers are unfamiliar with Native maps and Native poetry, Harjo points out the consequences of cultural invisibility, as in the centuries-long history of denying Native peoples' humanity, let alone their artistic achievements. Native poets have hardly been represented on the literary-historical map of American poetry, even though they, "[l]ike other living American poets . . . use the tools of knowledge and creativity to ride the waves of language" (Harjo, "Living Nations, Living Words: A Map of First Peoples Poetry"). Rather than being, as the stereotype goes, stuck in one place, in the past, and limited to a backward-glancing local culture, they use English (and, to some extent, Spanish) as a lingua franca or "crossing place." This metaphorical, language-based meeting point for Native cultures emphasizes cross-cultural mobility, which adds to connectedness "by genealogy, by land, even by instinct."

Further scrolling reveals a map of our planet strewn with small icons (resembling inverted drops) across the fifty states constituting the US.
The first set of instructions includes the following statements:

> **In this map, you can begin anywhere.**
>
> Each location marker reveals a Native Nations poet and features an image, biography, and a link to hear the poet recite and comment on an original poem.
>
> This body of work forms the foundation of a **"Living Nations, Living Words" online collection** in the Library of Congress's American Folklife Center.
>
> Each of the 47 Native Nations poets . . . selected an original poem on the theme of **place** and **displacement**, and with four touchpoints in mind: **visibility**, **persistence**, **resistance**, and **acknowledgment.**
>
> Each also chose where they wished to place themselves on this map.
>
> (Harjo, "Living Nations, Living Words: A Map of First Peoples Poetry," original emphasis)

This very brief introduction already indicates that this map on the website is not simply ornamental but that it makes visible self-chosen locations of individual poets affiliated with specific Native nations; that it complements verbal and visual with aural components; that it features the poets through audio recordings not only of their poems but also of their comments on the poems, thus providing them with artistic/performative and sociopolitical, cultural-historical, and analytical voices. We also learn that this map lays the groundwork for an archival project and that the theme of "place and displacement" links up with agency through self-directed local attachment (casting the poets as co-mapmakers), through demonstrating the persistent presence of Indigenous nations, and through demanding acknowledgment

of all of the above. The notion of being a visitor on the project's website is a poignant reminder of depictions of online activity in that perceiving and processing visual, verbal, and auditory material resembles moving through three-dimensional space. Also, each visitor is free to choose a point of departure and a path, rather than being directed.

Importantly, Harjo presents a typology underlying the poets' self-location: first, having been born and having lived much of one's life on a reservation; secondly, selecting a location that has resulted from displacement; and, thirdly, crossing various kinds of borders. The first type appears bland, but its link to horrific histories of dispossession and discrimination becomes particularly clear when considered in relation to the description of the second type which highlights the treacherousness of political terminology. As Harjo explains, so-called "relocation programs" ("Living Nations, Living Words: A Map of First Peoples Poetry") were geared towards eliminating Native cultures, killing Indigenous peoples, and usurping their land. The biting sarcasm of calling the Trail of Tears of the 1830s "[o]ne of the best-known relocation projects" speaks for itself and belies the seeming objectivity of the 1890 *Map of Indian Territory and Oklahoma* (United States Bureau of the Census) seen as a backdrop. Harjo counters this map's erasure of the suffering and deaths of 'relocated' populations with concrete examples of contemporary poets whose forebears experienced being uprooted. Thinking beyond earthly mobilities and boundaries, the poet b: william bearhart, who passed away before the project was completed, is quoted as having questioned whether place should be associated with beginnings or endings (see Harjo, "Living Nations"). His question may also be read as asking whether borders on earthly territory or, rather, between the physical and the metaphysical should continue to dominate our thinking.

In the following, I will share my findings regarding Harjo's strategy in walking website visitors through the basic premises of the map. Despite the option of starting wherever one wants by randomly clicking on a small drop-shaped icon, which makes a poet's picture and biographical description pop up and which provides a link to audio recordings of poems and commentaries, Harjo's textual commentary gently guides those who keep scrolling. She affirms the significance of certain cosmologies and cultural practices of nation-specific thinking without coming across as prescriptive. Readers who continue to scroll downward will experience the Muscogee Creek cosmological path of moving counterclockwise from East to North, West, and South, which is a structure that Harjo also uses in her first memoir, *Crazy Brave*. This sequence leads visitors through developmental stages of "becoming" (East), "testing and teaching" (North), "endings" and "leaving" (West), and "gathering together for celebration" (South) (Harjo, "Living Nations"). Harjo undermines the impression of a geographically straightforward sequence with side remarks that merge spaces and

temporalities (as in: "Then we go South, or maybe we are already there"), proposing that the viewer/reader will "see that directions are overlays with soft, shining borders when it comes to memory and relationship." The remarks on Native nations' historical experience have a similarly disruptive effect as the above examples of denying simplistic conceptualizations of place, direction, time, and movement. For instance, cultural symbols such as the "East," which are frequently associated with positively connoted terms like "becoming" and "sunrise," are undermined through Native peoples' experiences of immense suffering through colonization, appropriation, and lacking appreciation: Haudenosaunee/Iroquois and Muscogee systems of government "inspired the American democratic government even as these Nations were diminished by acts of history." In the case of the "North," the impact of settler colonialism comes across through the poem by the Montana-based writer Heather Cahoon. Her poem addresses, among other things, the destruction of Indigenous languages and the immensely difficult efforts to revive them. Harjo's remarks on the "West" reflect how her experience of living on the Hawai'ian islands introduced her to maps centered around the Pacific Ocean. Mentally shifting from *terra firma* to an oceanic point of departure forced her to study "wind patterns and water currents instead of the circle made by directions." This perspectival change (from a Muscogee Creek to a Hawai'ian outlook and process) prefigures the above-quoted remark about the "South" as destination or current location, which makes sense when Harjo expands this area to include "the Southwest, or Texas, or . . . the Southeast of the Muscogee peoples." While the Muscogee Creek were among the tribes that were forcibly removed to what eventually became Oklahoma, they are still connected to their ancestral home through, as the preceding paragraph implies, "memory and relationship." Such doubleness of locations and times replaces consistent borders with mobile layers.

Similar to the thought-provoking descriptions of the four directions in temporal and spatial terms, the closing section indicates possible shifts in mapping processes: "Now, we have a map. And you have learned you can begin anywhere. Know that this is only a thin portion of destinations, with few representations of the scope of Native Nations poets, and poetry of place. However, it is a beginning" (Harjo, "Living Nations"). Thus, we have *one* map, not *the* map. We can also reflect on the reading process and on what remains invisible. Emphasizing the contemporary relevance of the map as object, process, and experience, Harjo explains: "The mapmaking represented by this map comes at a crucial time in history, a time in which the failures to acknowledge, listen [to], and to consider *everyone* when making the map of American memory has brought us to reckoning" (original emphasis).

These closing remarks turn "Living Nations, Living Words: A Map of First Peoples" into a map-ological, meta-cartographic, multisensory, hypertextual, centuries-

embracing, and dynamic mapping *process* that becomes a point of departure rather than a definitive destination. Harjo expresses her affinity with this map by juxtaposing typical Western maps, which indicate divisive features such as "political boundaries" and verbalized topographical phenomena and place names, with her project's map which provides "a sense of place in the continuum of beauty." If we read this "continuum" as a stand-in for poetic language inspired by something that precedes and transcends our limited human-ness, then the map can neither be finite nor prescriptive. Practicing what she preaches, Harjo addresses readers: "Now I urge you to make your own maps" (Harjo, "Living Nations, Living Words"). Such individual maps could follow completely different representational goals and show myriad kinds of interconnections that interweave space and time.

Harjo's revisionist poetry-mapping project incorporates the intertwined layers of "individual" (or "inner" and "subjective"), "communicative" (as in "social"), and "cultural" memory (J. Assmann 109), and it ties particularly the latter two components to identity formation and to the problem of active-versus-passive memory and forgetting, of archive and canon. And, as indicated earlier, the circumstance that we can access Harjo's project as a digital and as an analogue anthology, on the one hand, confirms the viability and validity of Indigenous oral traditions and embodied practice, while, on the other hand, it equally demonstrates the need to increase the visibility of Indigenous poets in print and in innovative as well as sufficiently funded, institutionally backed (see J. Assmann 114), far-reaching, and long-lasting digital formats (see Balestrini forthcoming).

Shifting Borders, Mobile Mapping

Bearing out Harjo's remark on shifting borders quoted above, the 2021 printed anthology and the online version of her signature project place some poets within different geographical categories. For instance, Heather Cahoon, the above-mentioned Montana-based poet featured as an example of the "North" on the website, appears in the section entitled "East" in the printed book. In fact, the significant divergences between the digital and the print versions demonstrate how maps can, will, and even must differ from one another, depending on the vantage point and the principles that direct their production or use in a specific moment.

Sarahmay Wilkinson's book-cover design includes a map from the Library of Congress that displays (former) locations of major Indigenous nations. The word Muscogee is seen written across their original homeland in the south-east, that is, in the area they occupied before forced removal in the 1830s. Other than that, the book version does not contain any cartographic visuals. In which sense does it, then, engage in mapping?

Harjo's introduction ("Introduction" xiii–xvii) includes some of the same sentences as the introductory texts for the digital project. Other parts are markedly different. After asserting that Indigenous nations currently have and must necessarily retain the right "to define who is a tribal member," she mentions that the "more than 573 federally recognized Native nations and other legitimate state-recognized tribal entities" (xv) continue to produce an immense number of poets. As a result, the poets selected for the anthology "become representative of a much deeper and wider field of poetry" (xv).

Harjo's explanation of the anthology's structure begins with the following sentence: "The poems here are not organized around geography. We could begin anywhere on the map, for each place might be the navel place of a creation story, somewhere in the middle of the story, or a place of departure" (xv). A reader who has already explored the digital mapping project will then recognize one of Harjo's cartographic principles: Locations and variants of paths that connect them are abundant. This also applies to organizing poetry according to specific trajectories.

As explained earlier, the poets decided which geographical location on the digital map would be the entry point for readers to access their short biographical notes, poems, and commentaries, both as audio and as written verbal text. The printed anthology does not replicate the four-part structure and the counterclockwise pattern. Instead, the three sections of the book proceed from "East, or Becoming" (xv) via "the Center, or North–South" (xvi) to "Departure, or West" (xvi). These categories evoke the effect of a linear westward track. But as Harjo does not use geographical principles to define East, North, South, and West in the book, the just-quoted sequence is clearly not the westward movement of Euro-American historiography. Instead, figurative strains that circle around the project's thematic clusters determine the distribution of poets within the tripartite anthology. Rather than equating temporal linearity from beginning to middle to end with an East-to-West movement in three-dimensional space, the poet laureate replaces geographical determinism with a shared world of history, thought, emotion, and vision which centers on the main "theme of place and displacement" and the "four touchpoints" of "visibility, persistence, resistance, and acknowledgment" (Harjo, "Introduction" xiv).

In the printed anthology, "Becoming/East" includes 17 poets, "Center/North–South" features 16 poets, and "Departure/West" showcases 14 poets. Harjo's radical re-interpretation of directional markers as figurative emblems becomes clear when one takes a look at the states (according to each poet's chosen place on the digital map) in relation to how Harjo groups the poets in print. The poets in all three sections (see Figures 1 through 3) are spread throughout the US. This distribution contravenes settler-colonial ideas of stable regions and of simplistically assuming that one geographical place encompasses all facets of belonging:

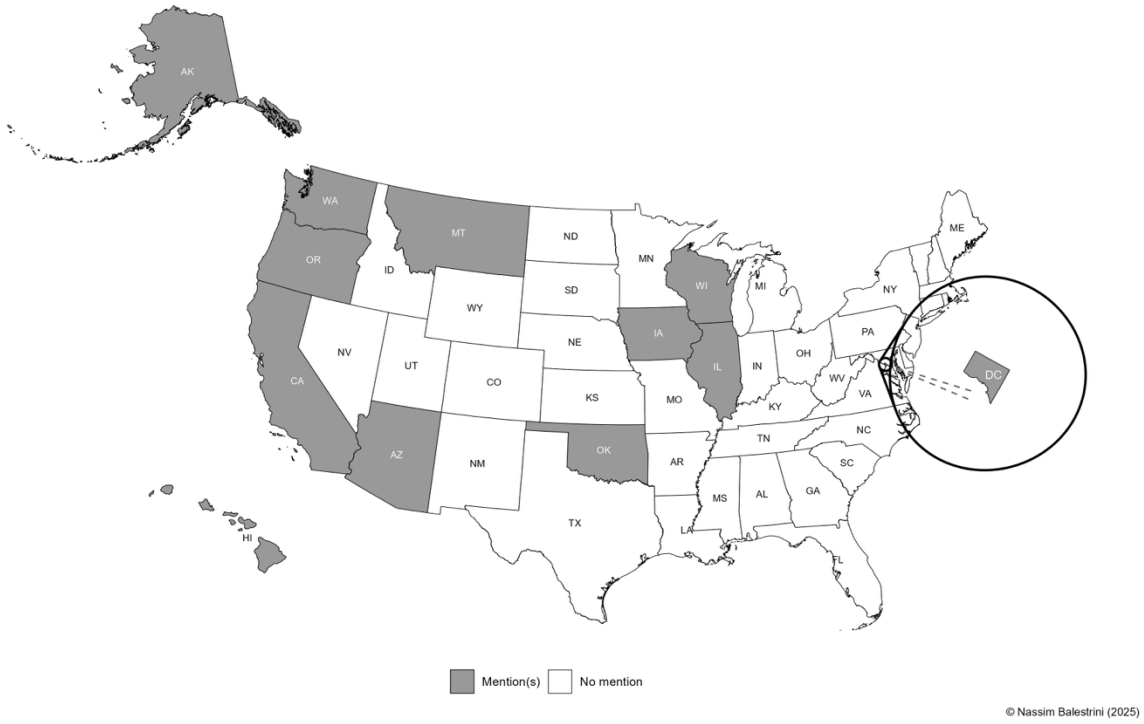

Figure 1: Printed anthology, "Becoming/East"

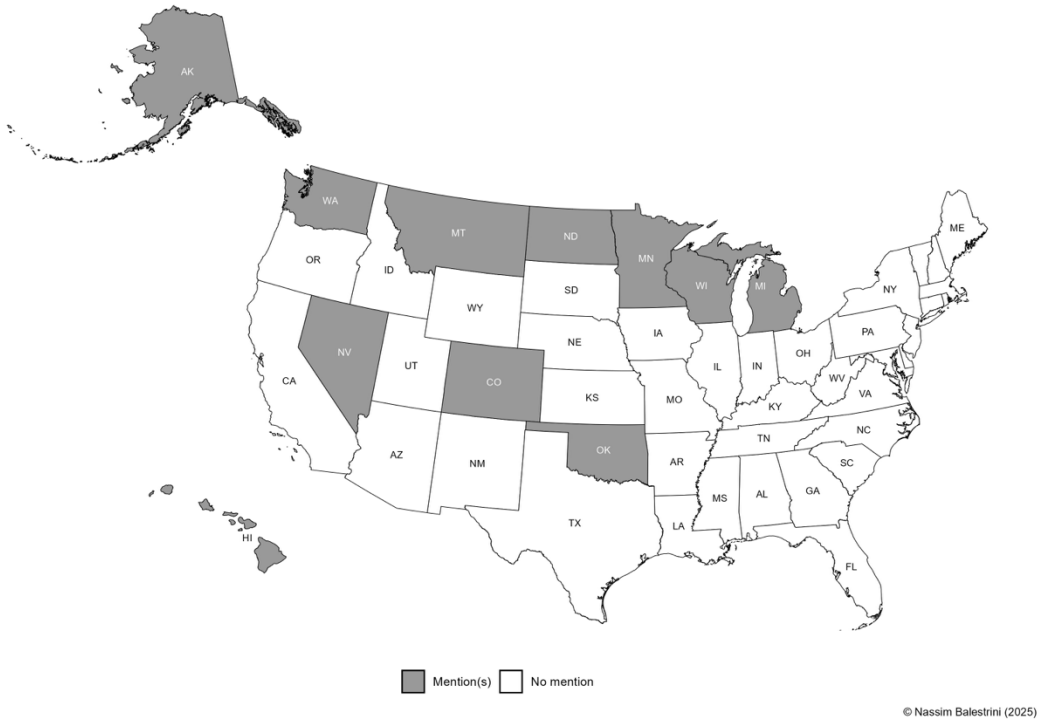

Figure 2: Printed anthology, "Center/North–South"

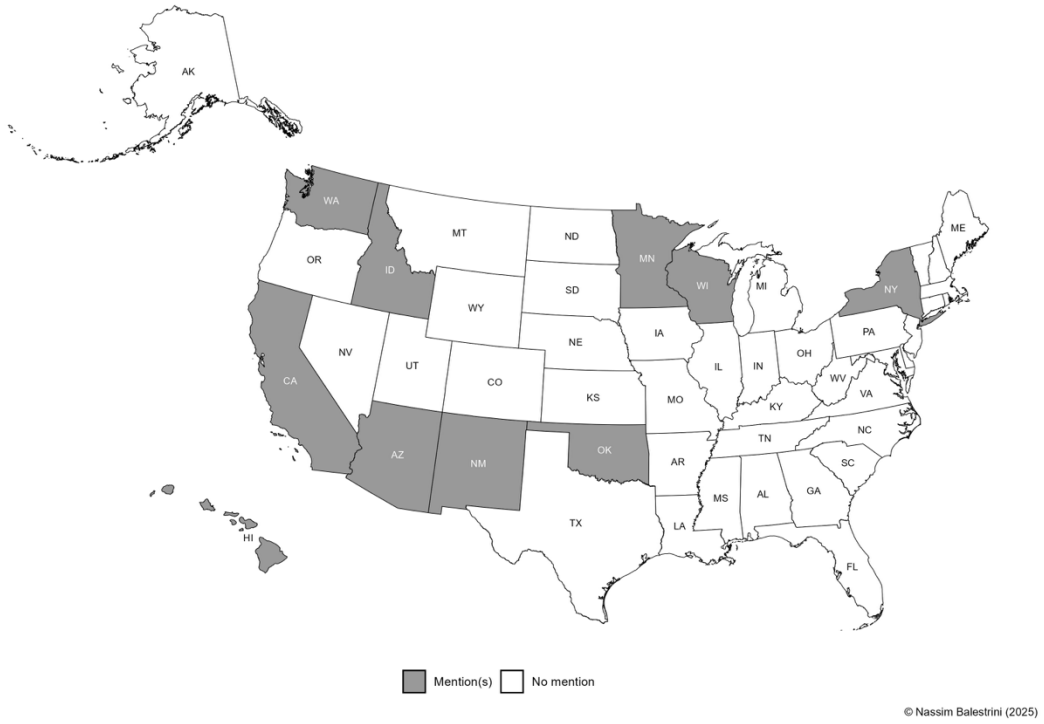

Figure 3: Printed anthology, "Departure/West"

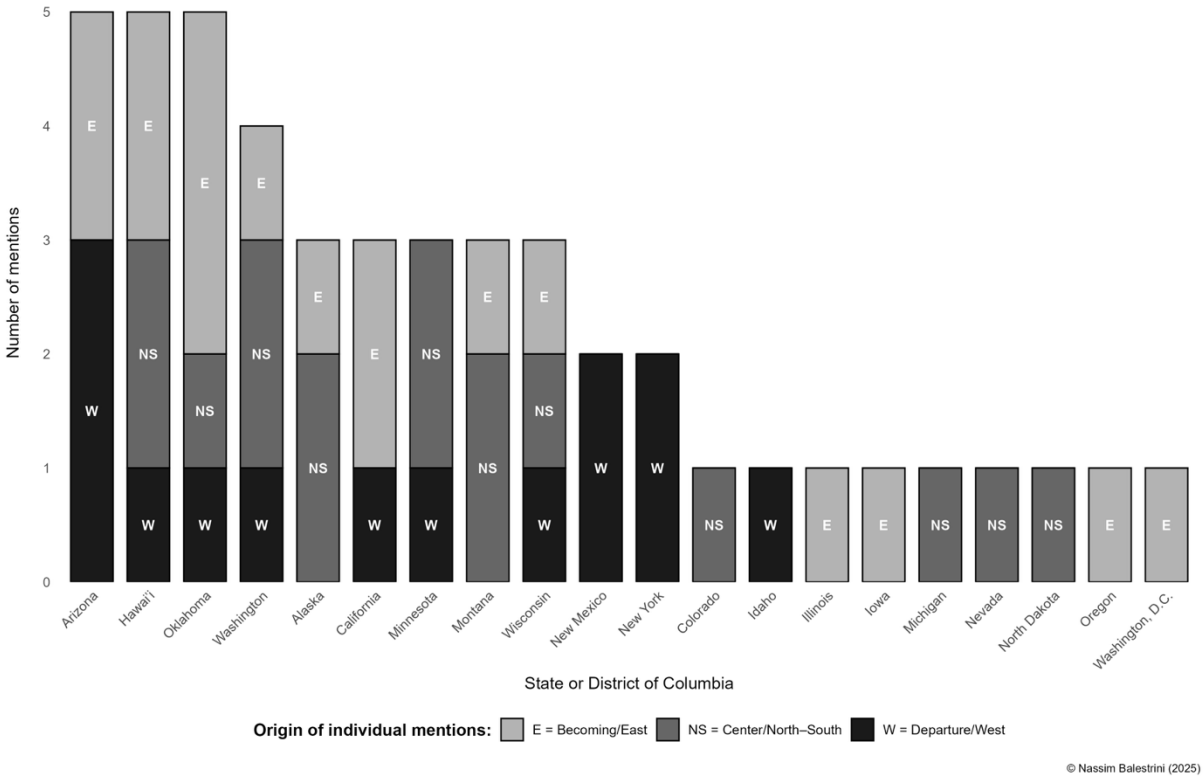

Figure 4: Printed anthology, distribution in the three sections

As Figure 4 demonstrates, some states (i.e., entities which are not the product of Indigenous tradition or culture) occur in two or even three sections. Hawai'i, one of the

non-contiguous US states, is featured in the East, North–South, and West sections, thus counteracting any notion of islands isolated from or less relevant than the so-called US mainland. Oklahoma, most of which was named "Indian Territory" from 1834 until attaining statehood in 1907, also occurs in all three sections and even thrice in the category of the East. In contrast to the settler-colonial federal terminology of territory versus state as found in the above-mentioned 1890 *Map of Indian Territory and Oklahoma*, Harjo engages in autobiographically inflected counter-mapping. As she grew up in Oklahoma and lived in Hawai'i, the prominence of these two states emphasizes her personal perspective.

When readers think about how the printed anthology's three sections relate to specific poets and poems, they cannot but cease to rely on Western cartographies' foregrounding of material locations, settler colonialism, land ownership, and political institutions. Not representing Indigenous people at all or not representing them on their own terms produces a particularly engrained and devastating form of cultural genocide (Jortner): Although "[a]cts of forgetting are a necessary and constructive part of internal social transformations[,] they are . . . violently destructive when directed at an alien culture or a persecuted minority" (A. Assmann 98). In the context of US history, categorizing Indigenous peoples as "alien cultures" would privilege a singularly derogatory perspective. The process of mapping that Harjo envisions and practices makes such destructive strategies visible and replaces them with relational, interconnected perspectives geared towards creating a new collective memory informed by Native cosmologies. She thus transfers to the mapping project what she has been doing in her poetry: "[I]nstead of focusing on Indigenous erasure and absence in Western mapping, Harjo appropriates the language of a map to speak to the consequences of forgetting and of its detriments to tribal continuity" (Goeman, "The Tools" 101).

Goeman's point confirms Jan Assmann's argument that "[t]he participation structure of cultural memory has an inherent tendency to elitism; it is never strictly egalitarian" (116). On a more hopeful note, his discussion of "the media of cultural memory" results in recognizing "a more or less pronounced tendency . . . towards a form of intra-cultural diglossia" (116), which brings mainstream and non-mainstream "traditions" (116) into conversation. To my mind, Harjo's signature poet laureate project launches such a dialogue. It is, thus, not surprising that the poet focused the third year of her laureateship on sharing her project in public events across the United States, as seen in the extensive list of engagements found on her personal website (Harjo, "Past Events").

But what will happen in the long run? How can Harjo's project become part and parcel of a widespread understanding of literary history? How could this goal be achieved? In distinguishing between the mechanics of the "**canon**" and the "**archive**"

within "cultural memory," Aleida Assmann lists the terms "select, collect," "working memory," "museum," and "monument" as "active" as opposed to the terms "accumulate," "reference," "memory," and "store house" as "passive" remembering (A. Assmann 99, original emphasis). Harjo's project involved selecting poems, many of which address current working memories. These are promoted as a small canon that is indicative of a much larger body of works. While the poems are not stored in a museum, the Library of Congress as a material place and as the provider of the project's website serves as a location of sorts that contributes to active remembering. This online location is a kind of digital monument, albeit one that is not made prominently visible in durable material form comparable to carved marble or inscribed bronze. Because Harjo's tenure as poet laureate is over, the active forms of remembering have shifted to the side of passive remembering. It is now up to others, among them scholars and teachers of American literature, to contribute to fostering active remembering of the poems and the resources provided as contextual material.

Case Studies and Closing Thoughts

The following four examples featured in the signature project address the heavy historical baggage linked to cartographies of space and time, and to conceptualizations of the United States as a settler-colonial nation that has thrust Native nations into a condition of perpetual crisis rather than opportunity. They bespeak poetry's power within dynamic processes of memory-building as a means of dealing with crisis as a condition and of indicating possible futures.

Deborah A. Miranda, who has Chumash ancestors and is an enrolled member of the Ohlone-Costanoan Esselen Nation of the Greater Monterey Bay Area, selected Carmel, California, as her location on Harjo's online map. In the book version, Harjo placed her in "Becoming/East," the first of the three sections. The four-part poem "Indigenous Physics: The Element Colonizatium" (Miranda, "Indigenous Physics" 25–30) imitates an argumentative scholarly paper. As Miranda says in her recorded commentary,

> the tone, the voice, is very didactic, it's like an insecure professor's lecture to undergrads – maybe deceptively so – or maybe it's a kind of futuristic report from an Indigenous scientist who seems to be trying to talk the talk of Western science, give that Western jargon to his audience, or her audience, around this newly discovered element of the periodic tables – 'Colonizatium.' (Miranda, "Deborah A. Miranda")

In the course of the poem, speculative statements about the chemical element's characteristics, especially its estimated half-life and toxicity, metaphorically comment on Native history. In the "periodic table of traumatic elements" (27), the pun on "periodic" strengthens the figurative link between the atomic make-up of our environment and the repetitiveness of history. This "periodic table" implicitly

includes elements which may be im/materially stable or unstable, that is, consistently remembered or vanished in the fog of forgetfulness. Like invisible radioactivity which continues to cause harm for extensive periods of time far beyond an obvious catastrophic event and like the complexity of discarding its toxic waste, traumatic experiences affect (but do not need to determine) the future well-being of generations.

Although the poem's persona employs Western scientific terms, she promotes a hitherto ignored approach to gauging the metaphorically radioactive element, arguing that "Deep Science of a pre-Colonial origin" (27) provides "Indigenous elements": "Story, Dance, and Song" (27) as well as "Dreaming" (28). While these elements cannot single-handedly inaugurate a post-colonization period, they can "*hasten the decay* of Colonizatium" (29; original emphasis), which the persona perceives as process analogous to "De-Colonization" (30). Not surprisingly, in her commentary, Miranda links her enthusiasm for Indigenous futurisms with Gerald Vizenor's concept of "survivance" (see Vizenor vii).

Locating herself in Mesa, Arizona, and featured in the section entitled "Departure/West," Diné (Navajo) poet Laura Tohe engages with the traumatic 1860s relocation of her people. Her poem "Within Dinétah the People's Spirit Remains Strong" (194–99) contextualizes this experience within a global history of what the persona calls "death marches." The four-part structure leads readers from a creation story via prophecies and experiences during early colonization to the 1860s death march and finally the return to Diné territory. Part of the poem's assertive tone (which commences with the title) resides in using the Native nation's language without providing full translations. The dedication following the title explains why: "*These words are for my people, the Diné, who endured colossal hardship and near death and continue to endure*" (194, original emphasis), as the missing punctuation at the end of the sentence emphasizes.

Tohe's use of anaphora and enumeration evokes the sweeping attempts at an all-encompassing perspective found in nineteenth-century poems such as Whitman's "Song of Myself." But her references to US-American myths like "Manifest Destiny" foreground murder and land-grabbing, and they link Native peoples' experiences with those of other oppressed groups, as shown in the allusion to Abel Meeropol's early-twentieth-century anti-lynching poem "Strange Fruit" (196). Similar to Harjo's focus on far-ranging interconnections, Tohe depicts a specific tribal history in relation to large-scale history and a worldview that rests on a premise she shares with the poet laureate.[7] This outlook inheres in the motivic phrase "In Beauty" used throughout the poem and in each of the last six lines (199); it expresses a positive attitude towards creation and aesthetic power and proposes future existence. A central concept in Diné (Navajo) philosophy is hózhó, "a state of wellness, balance, peace, and harmony,

[7] For a more detailed discussion of Harjo's use of Navajo cultural concepts, see Balestrini (forthcoming).

culminating in beauty" (Watchman 30; see also Goeman, "The Tools" 108).[8] This concept provides the basis for understanding Tohe's poem as an argument in favor of channeling human activities in order to realize the benefits of hózhó.

Placed in the section on "Center/North–South" in the printed anthology and self-located on the online map in Mahnomen on the White Earth Reservation in Minnesota, Anishinaabe poet Kimberly Blaeser's "Poem on Disappearance" addresses pre- and post-1492 (in)visibility. The speaker of the poem gives instructions as to what and how an unnamed mapmaker must "draw," repeating this imperative seven times. Although the opening stanza's depiction of "our continent" in "1491" initially includes Native principles such as mapping "trade routes, languages, seasonal migrations" (Blaeser 134), these dynamic elements linked to mobility and communication are quickly replaced by settler-colonial upheaval. In the wake of "discovery" and "displacement," the mapmaker's drawing instrument must suddenly work "quickly now as if pursued" but nevertheless must face the fact of "disappear[ance]" (134). The representation of "nothing," "emptiness"/"empty," "absence," "void," "missing, missing" (134), "missing, . . . murdered" (135) leads to the "new continent" being discerned as "nothing" (135). The semantic field centered around absence and loss refers to the deaths of Native peoples then and now, the destruction of fauna, the sterilization of women, the surging number of MMIW (murdered and missing Indian women); in sum, the disappearance of Indigenous presence resembles stone-weighted corpses "sinking into every river on the map" (135). As the poem ends with the mapmaker being confronted with "nothing" when trying to depict a post-1492 'new world,' Blaeser rewrites the *vacuum domicilium* that settler-colonists used as a justification for murdering or 'relocating' Native nations in the first place, and for robbing their land and livelihood. While the pre-1492 land used to be fully and dynamically alive, colonialism has made Indigenous peoples invisible in multiple ways, which include dominant map-making practices. As Adam Jortner points out, in the majority of maps found in college-level history textbooks commonly used in the United States, Indians are absent. When they are mentioned, they are never shown as actors but only as being "acted upon" and only "to be remembered for their surrender" although maps that show their territorial claims do exist (Jortner 80).

The fourth and final example takes readers to the organized, unincorporated US territory of Guåhan (Guam), to California, and to Hawai'i, which is the current place of residence of Craig Santos Perez, who chose this as his location on the digital map. In the printed anthology, Santos Perez is featured in the first section, "Becoming/East." This placement feeds into Harjo's point that any given map may use a specific center and that a mapmaker's/map user's vantage point influences their chosen path. Santos Perez's well-known poem "Off-Island CHamorus" (15–16)

[8] I would like to thank Dr. Christoph Straub for alerting me to Watchman's essay.

transforms autobiographical experience into a lyrical reflection on momentary crisis and on crisis as an ongoing condition, on maps and invisibility, on empty spaces in mainstream collective memory, and on the responsibilities that teachers have as individuals whose words can strongly impact students' intellectual and emotional development and self-perception. Having come as a 15-year-old from Guåhan to California, the speaker struggles with his high-school teacher's offensive and gruff injunction to "[p]rove" his place of origin "exists" (15). When he realizes that the Mariana Islands, of which Guåhan is the largest one, are not shown on the classroom map, the adolescent says that he comes "from this / invisible archipelago" (15). In the poem's retrospective reflections, the autobiographical speaker comes to the conclusion that "home is an archipelago of belonging" (16). This metaphor confirms the central strategic move of Harjo's signature project, namely, to emphasize the dynamic and complex nature of situating oneself through material locations, worldview, emotional attachments, and a sense of relationality.

Four examples cannot do justice to an anthology of 47 poets. Nevertheless, they may inspire readers of this article to delve into the entire collection and to engage with the poets' audio recordings and comments. As one individual among the majority of students and colleagues who are non-Indigenous people living in Europe, I find that we should raise awareness of projects such as "Living Nations, Living Words" and the printed anthology because they were and are being developed, as Joy Harjo puts it, "at a crucial time in history, a time in which the failures to acknowledge, listen to, and consider everyone when making the map of American memory has brought us to a reckoning" (Harjo, "Introduction" xvii). This "reckoning" serves Native and non-Native communities. Goeman's following remark on Harjo's poetry applies to the poet laureate signature project as well: "Whether space is restructured through traditional memory or through new relationships to landscapes, for many Native communities this activity is a move toward self-determination" (Goeman, "The Tools" 105). At the same time, the emphasis on relations among geographical locations and their histories facilitates "crossing rigid borders among individual communities, Native and non-Native" in order to "(re)map socialities that will materially and mentally sustain future generations" (Goeman, "The Tools" 105). This perspective overlaps with Harjo's recent reflections on her half-century experience of writing. She argues that poets "make word trails that could lead to justice" (Harjo, *Catching the Light* 31) and that "Indigenous artists must be part of the leadership in the revision of the American story" (119). A central component in creating verbal trails that promote fresh perspectives and that make previously erased perspectives visible again is that poets "are called to remember what matters" (39) and to succeed in the paradoxical feat of "[c]atching light in the dark" (3). Harjo's signature project expertly balances these requirements by acknowledging centuries of crisis and of cultural

achievements, by providing glimpses of possible paths forward, and by asserting the sought-for impact of Native Nations' poetry for Indigenous and non-Indigenous readers.

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Nassim Winnie Balestrini is full professor of American Studies and Intermediality at the University of Graz, Austria, where she also directs the Centre for Intermediality Studies. Before 2014, she taught at the Universities of Mainz, Paderborn, and Regensburg (Germany), and the University of California, Davis. She has published monographs on Vladimir Nabokov and on opera adaptations of nineteenth-century American fiction, essays on hip-hop life writing and rap poetry (e.g., in *Popular Music and Society* and in the *Oxford Handbook of Hip Hop Music Studies*), on intermediality theory and practice (e.g., a special issue on "Depicting Destitution Across Media" for the *Journal for Literary and Intermedial Crossings*), on American poetry, fiction, and drama. Her edited collections include *Adaptation and American Studies* (Winter, 2011), *Intermediality, Life Writing, and American Studies* (DeGruyter, 2018, with I. Bergmann), *Meaningful Absence Across Arts and Media* (Brill, 2019, with W. Bernhart and W. Wolf), and *Aging Studies and Ecocriticism* (Lexington, 2023, with J. Hoydis, U. Kriebernegg, and A. Kainradl). With Irina Rajewsky (University of Mainz), she serves as series editor of Brill's Studies in Intermediality. Her current research focuses on contemporary poetry, Indigenous hip hop, and climate change drama and theater.

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