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We May Find Ourselves in Art: The Artistic Purpose of Defiant Indigenous Women

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May we find ourselves in art:

The artistic purpose of defiant indigenous women.

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous people have used cultural practices for centuries in order to resist the systematic forms of oppression that silenced or attempted to erase their cultures after the colonization of these lands. These oppressions even though they exist under democratic forms of government, fail to give recognition to the sovereignty of a culture with thousands of years of sacred wisdom. Women, in order to fight for their cultural heritage use art as a means of resisting oppressive and discriminatory actions towards them and to regain the agency and identity of the indigenous woman that had been colonized by a western-male gaze. Artists such as Wendy Red Star from Crow Country and Cecilia Vicuña from Chile have used their work specifically to challenge oppression, reclaim their female identity and re-write their culture's history. I will finally argue that Native American and Mapuche women use art as a tool of cultural and political resistance against the oppression of indigenous cultures in their respective contemporary political climates. Therefore, it catalyzes social change, by decolonizing their female bodies, reclaiming their indigenous identity and fighting for indigenous sovereignty over their lands.

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“The fact that we are here and that I speak these words is an attempt to break that silence and bridge some of those differences between us, for it is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken.”- Audre Lorde

INTRODUCTION

Art as a tool of resistance has been feared by governments and institutions due to the capacity to make people feel what they are unable to comprehend. For as long as civilization exists, art has been a medium of expression throughout different cultures. From the caves of Lascaux in France that date to contemporary art, it has helped to define cultures, write histories, represent people and used as propaganda. Art is also a threat to political system because of the power it has to promote civil disobedience, change consciousness and help people rebel against institutions and systems of oppression that silence and destroy their cultural expression. Indigenous societies have suffered from these political structures that prevent their cultural growth. Colonization created a system of oppression that either tried to erase indigenous cultures or confine them to the form of most minimum expression.

In the United States, indigenous societies are about 5.2 million people; these include various tribes such as Crow Nation, the Navajo, the Iroquois, the Cherokee among others. In Chile, indigenous peoples make up about 9% of the population, with 1.5 million individuals. Of course, these are minorities that add to a low percentage of the population, but their people were the ones that were in that land first, before colonization, modernity, and contemporary times. These cultures are rich with knowledge about the world, and nature that surrounds them. Being indigenous is defined by one's cultural attachment to a land and place (Bacigalupo). The protection of their lands and cultures are essential for their survival but also the fluidity with

which they perform their indigenous identity. One obstacle is the regulatory practices such as the commercial appropriation of Native American symbols such as the eagle, the feathers and the teepees, used for marketing and economic gains, has created a duality between what it means to be native to a land, and what others expect the native person to be.

In Chile, indigenous people lived mostly in silence, assimilating to western-imposed standards during the years that followed the liberation of Chile from an authoritarian government¹. The political structures of a far-right dictatorship under Augusto Pinochet created systems that silenced indigenous people. One example is the elimination of a law passed under the government of Salvador Allende which recognized the word 'indigenous' and the Mapuche as an indigenous culture. During the authoritarian regime, Mapuche land was taken by the government for 'economic development.' Efforts to reclaim these lands have been portrayed in the media as 'terrorism' and when violence erupts as 'ethnic cleansing.' Police violence has also falsely condemned Mapuche people to jail, due to laws that permit anonymity of witnesses in court and the possibility to hold an individual without bail before trial. Therefore, assimilation is forced and the systems of exploitation excused and overlooked.

Even though these communities have been silenced and oppressed, they still use systems of expression that allow them to preserve their indigenous identities and rebel against the oppression of their people. These forms of expression are both cultural and political. Cultural practices, for example, art, have been used for mobilization and making visible the horrors these indigenous people have experienced. For instance: the theft of land, physical displacement, and disease infections. From silencing to invisibility to a lack of representation in government, they

¹ The fall of General Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship occurred in 1989. In 1990 Patricio Aylwin was elected president.

have been able to fight it through the expression of their own indigenous identity through artistic practices that preserve the history and re-write the reality of cultures that exist in the in-between of being. Indigenous women most importantly have suffered from this underrepresentation; their indigenous roles were taken from them by imposed new social practices that forced them to leave their cultural roles to work in western companies for the maintenance of their survival. Forced to stay at home to care for the household and their families, the cultural roles they played of Chiefs, warriors, healers, and story-tellers were lost. Controlling the roles of daily life within the communities of oppressed minorities stems from an inherent fear of that which is being oppressed, silencing comes from a place of threat where the women are the ones capable of breaking this disruption imposed by patriarchal practices through the production and performance of their culture in radical ways. One is the use of art as cultural production.

Consequently, their artistic abilities were reduced to the art of "craft," that, in fact, is not craft but it is art itself. From the 20th to 21st century, women have transformed oppression into expression. Due to the invisibility imposed upon them by patriarchal values ever present in society and governmental institutions, they have been able to resist assimilation precariously and silently using their memories via personal experience or as told by elders. "Women artists have a collective power which holds dangers for men, yet, paradoxically, life itself depends on these creative powers." (Berlo) Through the use of art, they have shed light upon issues that most people who are not indigenous are mostly unaware of; to decolonize their bodies from a western, patriarchal gaze and re-write their history in their own artistic terms rather than through sacrificial wars or violent political forms of expression. In this thesis, I will argue that Native American and Mapuche women use art as a tool of political and cultural resistance against the oppression of indigenous cultures, found in history and actuality, present in their respective

contemporary political climates. Through an analysis of two individual women, Wendy Red Star and Cecilia Vicuña, they demonstrate that art can serve as a catalyst of social change, by allowing the artists to decolonize their female bodies, culturally and physically, of themselves and the land they guard, to reclaim their indigenous identity and fight for indigenous sovereignty of their lands. Even though both artists have lived and worked in different political contexts, their artworks serve the same purpose of resistance, visibility, and defiant indigeneity.

To illustrate my argument, I will analyze specific works of art from Crow artist Wendy Red Star, and Chilean indigenous artist Cecilia Vicuña. I will utilize the artworks themselves and examine the artistic elements and properties of their works to understand the levels of meaning each element add to the cultural resistance to assimilation. I will use interviews given by the artists who discuss their artworks as resistance to years of silence and invisibility. I will use the concept of *defiant indigeneity*, the act of performing one's indigenous culture as survival and resistance, understanding the artworks as radical and self-emancipatory, where the art is the politics and the politics is the art. Then, I will use feminist thought and political theories of art and performativity to show how these artists are resisting oppression and re-writing their histories through the practices of the liberated, radical, defiant indigenous women artists.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to understand the significance of the role the Indigenous woman plays in the art world and how the production of their art relates towards a cultural and political practice of resistance, it is necessary to lay out certain theories present in the creation of art itself. Therefore, I will explore the politics of art and how they relate to systems of resistance, feminist theory in order to understand the implications of Women producing art, Indigenous Identity and

performativity as a way of understanding art as resistance and finally an exploration on de-colonial love and how differential consciousness is used to bridge inequality towards equity and tolerance.

Politics of art

Since pre-colonial times, cultural practices such as art have been used to preserve history. Even though in contemporary times some art is considered to exist for art's sake, in reality, many works of art have a political connotation attached to them even if it is subtly hidden from the public's eye. Therefore, art has an inherent political value that serves as an expression of concerns and conflicts in societies. It functions as a mechanism from which artists can express that which is being oppressed, whether it is a person, a culture, an identity or social class, among others. It creates a dialogue between reality and history, between subject and object, between society and culture. Therefore, it brings to light the separation of a perceived history and the existence of a situation, to bridge the gap that separates the two. This deconstruction of barriers occurs due to a dialogue created when a spectator exists in relation to an artwork (Hantelmann).

The female body, as an artistic representation, has been a patriarchal construction alien to the actual identity of women; it has been subject to the patriarchal and male gaze predominant in western art history which led to the objectification and over-sexualization of women in the production of art (Martínez Cano). When talking about great artists, men have mostly been prized with their artistic genius, demeaning women to a position of object in which their identities are expressed through the perception of the male artist². Therefore, their agency is only recognized through the activity of the male artist as a creator, leaving women in a position of

² For more information read Silvia Martínez Cano's article "Las Mujeres Desde el Marco. La Doble vision de Las Mujeres y La Cultura Visual."

vulnerability where the representation of their identity is not their own. According to Judith Butler, this vulnerability created through the inaccurate portrayal of women gave rise to feminist art, in which women seek to bridge the gap of their reality and inaccuracies of representation (Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay, *Vulnerability in Resistance*). Feminist art, therefore, aims for the equal and accurate representation of the female figure, without it existing as sexualized, objectified nor made to appear inferior. It also calls women to be the creators of their representation, promoting the involvement of female artists in the creative world. In this manner, women decolonize the male gaze that has shadowed their identity through centuries and reclaim their agency as individuals with a history of their own. Butler and most feminist theorists argue that passivity has been attributed to femininity and that agency has been attributed to masculinity. To reclaim agency is to be involved in an action that is previously considered male-centric. The aim is to deconstruct mind/body associations to passivity and agency to create a place for women to have an agency of their own. She claims that the inability of men to project their vulnerability and to leave the term 'vulnerable' to anything which is not male, gives the women a place to perform their vulnerability as a form of resistance (Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay). In her own words:

“In thinking vulnerability and resistance together, we hope to develop a different conception of embodiment and sociality within fields of contemporary power, one that engages object worlds, including both built and destroyed environments, as well as social forms of interdependency and individual or collective agency. The strategies of resistance on which we propose to focus involve a rethinking of human acts and infrastructural mobilizations, including barricades, hunger strikes, the improvised character of informal groups at the checkpoint, modes of deliberate exposure, *and forms of art and artistic intervention* in public space that involve

“laying bare” and opposing forms of power.” (Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay, Vulnerability in Resistance 6)

Nelly Richards explores the function of art as a tool for preserving history through the maintenance and recollection of collective memory that in turn adds to art's purpose as a bridge between past and the present through the act of reconciliation through art. She claims that “the figure of memory has been most strongly dramatized by the unresolved tension between recollection and forgetting” (N. Richards) making art a central element for the preservation and a 're-remembering' of forgotten truths. In Chile, people remember the horrors of the military coup even though it has been erased from history due to the censorship of art and literary production during Pinochet's dictatorship; works that were not favorable for the government were destroyed, unpublished, and the artists regularly prosecuted. The memories of the experiences during the military dictatorship act as a propeller for the production of contemporary art that aims to re-address the political and cultural silences produced in the years of the dictatorship. The reproduction of lost memories deconstructs the perceived notions of a corrupted truth and calls for another version of the given truth. Art, therefore, becomes a form of cultural critique.

According to Ana Del Sarto, "Cultural Critique construes its locus from aesthetic materiality, to 'critically transform the real' ... while Cultural Studies construes it from social materiality, in order critically to produce social reality." (236) Revisiting and remembering the past, therefore, is a way of "... returning one meaning ("its" unique and true meaning) to a national-historical corpus disintegrated by breaks with tradition." (N. Richards) In times of oppression, as in Chile, this leads to what Richards calls an alphabet of survival, that is the creation of a new form of expression necessitated and based on survival. One issue these works face, according to bell hooks, is that “the dismissal of overtly political work is most likely to

occur when that work is "created by individuals from marginalized groups particularly people of color or folks from poor backgrounds" (*Art on my mind: Visual Politics* 138).

Third World Feminist Theory

Feminism exists as a definition in the way that it means to seek equality between genders, understood as male and female. But according to Luce Irigaray, this equality is a mere illusion (Irigaray and Marion). She argues that there are two genealogies in the world, that of the male and the female. Due to patriarchal views of society, the knowing subject in humanity has always been male with a predominating agency over the female subject which creates a notion that if women do not want to be considered second to men they have to seek equality to the male figure. But, in reality, the female subject exists horizontally to that of men. When women seek equality, they immerse themselves in a self-destructive path that positions them in the place of 'the other,' making it impossible to achieve equality as an ultimate goal. Its self-determination undermines their female power and identity. What needs to exist is 'an/other' woman, irreducible to what qualifies as men. "Sexes or genders are two, without being first or second" (Irigaray and Guynn 10). Furthermore, "these two subjects share the common goal of preserving the human species and developing its culture while granting respect to their differences," (Irigaray and Guynn 12) their differences being their relation to language, bodies, work, nature and cultural practices.

On the other hand, there has been a divide in the representation of women in feminist theory. There is not only a disconnect between the male and female subjects but also in the female subjects themselves. Each woman will have a different background and culture that underlies their individual experiences in the world. Native feminists argue that in 'first world feminism,' there has been a lack of representation of indigenous women because they do not conform to what western standards consider to be a woman. According to Andrea Smith, the

concept of feminism in indigenous societies of the world do not exist (Smith). In indigenous cultures, women exist in equal importance to men in matters of cultural, political and societal standards. Each of their cultural roles is of equal importance in their society. This balance between sexes is what creates harmony in their cultures and what helps preserve their existence. Therefore, there is a divide in the acceptance of the term 'feminism' as a form of resistance and liberation in indigenous societies.

Through this lens, feminism is considered a practice that preserves notions of western female standards and also exacerbates inequality within indigenous societies through the division of male and female identities due to imposed and assimilated western patriarchal societal customs that have created a division of gender that did not exist in indigenous culture before colonization. This is what Jaimes Guerrero calls 'masculine hegemony,' the patriarchal colonial practice that subordinates women through racism and sexism by the imposition of masculine authority and female dependency and subjectivity. Converting matrilineal indigenous communities into masculine colonial settler culture (Waters xiv).

Anne Waters argues that "Both feminism and Indigenous Women are engaged in a struggle for decolonization" (xv) being that of the female body or that of their native land. Indigenous women are subject to oppression due to the fact that they are discriminated by being indigenous and being a woman. This double discrimination pushes the indigenous woman to fight for female liberation, but in many indigenous societies, the gender division between men and women appeared with colonization; therefore, some indigenous women fight for the collective liberation of their people and their land instead of only the liberation of the indigenous women. They are indigenous before being women, and rooted in their indigenous culture the role of the women has always been that of preserving their culture's history. As recorded by Annette

Jaimés, Lorelei DeCora, a native American woman says "We are American Indian women, in that order. We are oppressed first and foremost, as American Indians (...) not as women. The survival of every one of us- man, woman, and child- as Indians depends on it" (Smith 117). In regards to oppression, indigenous women artists are subject to what calls Claudia Jones calls 'triple oppression' because they not only struggle for their indigenous and female background but also as a minority in the art world; indigenous women subjected to underrepresentation in the creative sphere and history. Therefore, the figure of the indigenous woman artist is central to the survival of the collective and the liberation of women.

Indigenous Identity & Performativity

In order to understand the implications of the underlying issues regarding indigenous female artists, it is crucial to lay out what is meant by 'indigenous' and what it means to adopt that specific concept as an identity. Bonita Lawrence states that to identify as Indian "is to identify with land and community in a way that brings about unique responsibilities to all relations" (Waters x). This suggests that being indigenous means to be connected to a specific land and the culture that developed within the particular land given. Cultural practices, therefore, are of particular importance in the indigenous community to protect the nature of the land and preserve the history of an identity of such indigenous communities. Thus, there is a unique collective cultural identity that emphasizes the interconnectedness to the land through social practices.

Stephanie Nohelani Teves states in her book 'Defiant Indigeneity' that the Native has always existed and that it will not go away (Teves). She rearticulates Teresa Taiwa's argument that the native has always existed before and after colonialism due to its 'true' connection to the land. She argues that the native has been subjected to colonialist practices that influence the

disappearance and exacerbate the assimilation of indigenous people into the predominant culture, but the ability of indigenous people to resist and retain their indigenous identity is what creates indigeneity. In essence, indigeneity exists due to the capability of indigenous people to develop a fluid identity that accommodates to oppressing practices through cultural innovation and preservation.

Teves argues that indigeneity is a performative process. The survival of indigenous people is attributed to the fact that they have been able to perform their indigeneity, therefore preserving their history and culture through societal practices. This is why the concept of indigeneity is always in the process of becoming because it is ever changing due to societal pressures. It is through performance that the commitment to being indigenous exists. Defiant indigeneity, therefore, as defined by the author, is the constant performance of culture as a form of survival and resistance. “Defiant indigeneity” emerges from the space between performance’s emancipatory will and its capacity to reproduce conditions of domination. As a theory, it attempts to account for the world-making and reifying capacities of performance that affirms the ongoing existence and defiance of Indigenous people” (Teves 11).

In her famous works on performativity, Judith Butler argues that through the repetition of certain actions that exist within societal conventions, performativity creates a reality of being. Through performance, there is an assertion of identity that is previously repressed or unrecognized. Certain performances exist outside societal conventions that challenge the norm of the common hegemonic discourse of society. Performing culture, therefore, through the repetition of certain cultural acts, functions to reassert a cultures place in society. In the case of indigenous people, performing one’s culture is crucial for the preservation of one’s indigenous identity, and vice versa. It also functions to reclaim sovereignty over their sacred land. In the

case of art, as a cultural practice, the performativity of the indigenous identity of the artist becomes a tool of resistance through the deconstruction of imposed stereotypes and systems of oppression; ever involved in the concept of defiant indigeneity. Even though cultural appropriation of native cultures has occurred, the power of indigenous art and indigenous artists lies in their ability to shed light on the ‘authenticity’ of the culture they are representing. Indigenous art has deep layers of meaning that add onto the layers of meaning of feminist art. As Janet Berlo argues, myth and folklore have always been characteristic of indigenous women’s art. “They provide insight into women’s roles that transcend the mundane and domestic, realms to which women have too often been relegated in the scholarly discourse on Native Americans” (Berlo 3).

Tessie Naranjo, a Native American artist from Mexico, describes her artwork as female. She argues that she knows who she is as a woman and where she has to be as an indigenous woman. Therefore, she reasserts her role as a female artist that creates female work, from the female cultural perspective of her female society. This statement relates to a sense of place and belonging to a culture and its representation through art that values these two levels of art meaning. She claims the artists' ability to reproduce art as a relation to the female's power of reproduction and fertility, reasserting the female role in society and preserving her cultural history simultaneously. “This simultaneous claiming of the feminine and of tribal responsibility signals a sensibility that runs counter both to implied requisite freedoms of the modern artist as well as to societal resistances championed by Western feminist ideology” (Mithlo 2).

On another note, Indigenous women perform not only their culture but also their gender. Mapuche women perform their identity through the fluidity in which they can change and accommodate to preconceived notions by non-Mapuche populations of what means to be a

Mapuche woman. Anne Marie Bacigalupo states that Mapuche women act accordingly to the people they interact with in their daily life. Within their society, Machi's, indigenous female healers, are respected and act in accordance with their cultural role. When they go into the city, they perform as if they were ignorant women who do not have any knowledge. When sought out by non-indigenous people who seek to participate in healing ceremonies performed by the Machi, they have to act in accordance with what the non-indigenous person expects from the Machi. In the Mapuche's eyes, the ability to perform different identities according to context and their surroundings is what defines Mapuche identity. Indigenous performances must trouble what constitutes "the native." As Bacigalupo states "Resistance always involves interaction with and participation in that which is being resisted" (Bacigalupo 43). The constant performance of a specific stereotypical view of the native is the form of resistance itself.

De-colonial Love

Colonization has had an extensive impact in society that still affects how people in the world interact with one another. The many layers of its implications are visible in the way racism, classism, and other oppressive ideologies are still present within society. Carolyn Ureña argues that the project of decolonization is still ongoing. Until colonial practices of oppression and separatism still exist, there will not be a successful reconciliation and healing needed to live in a world that values embodied beings as of equal importance in post-modern society. To achieve effective decolonization there needs to be a collective acceptance of difference, what Chela Sandoval calls a theory of 'differential consciousness', which instead of being fixed in binaries it calls to a change of consciousness depending on the context and changeability of systems of oppression and political climates. Sandoval argues for differential consciousness

which aims to break down the constructed binaries³ of the world and calls for a collective understanding of differences where the ability for this to occur lies in the capacity of the practitioners (those fighting for decolonization through love, specifically women) to adapt to a changing environment (Moya). These differences are to be understood through the juxtaposition of various theories, acknowledging that embodied existence and reality exist within difference, acknowledging that in order to create a tolerant world in which an effective equality exists through the practice of acceptance in an ever-changing dynamic world, manifest tolerance through acts of love. De-colonial love then becomes a practice from below that operates within those considered to be ‘others’ in order to deconstruct oppressive systems of society that perpetuate colonial practices. This de-colonial love “seeks to empower marginalized communities to challenge the terms upon which their humanity has been insufficiently recognized by the dominant world view” (Ureña 87).

Therefore, love is to be understood as a set of practices that transcends physical differences. “Reinvented as a “political technology,” love becomes “a body of knowledges, arts, practices, and procedures for re-forming the self and the world” (Sandoval 4) furthermore it promotes healing through a change in perspectives of what means to be ‘other.’ The healing power of love serves as a form of reconciliation that goes beyond political institutions and economic repatriation. It delves between the political and the personal to reconcile the dualities of being. "The colonial wound highlights the pain and suffering of those oppressed by the legacy of coloniality, while also emphasizing the valuable knowledge these subjects produce by virtue and in spite of their very woundedness” (Ureña 88). The importance of decolonization and de-colonial love, therefore, lie in the very own notion that in order to heal from a place of empathy,

³ i.e.: female/male, good/bad, love/hate.

there needs to be a shift in the way people interact with the other through the engagement of tolerance and understanding. Wendy Red Star and Cecilia Vicuña explicitly participate in decolonial love through their art by decolonizing their history through the self-representation of their people, land, identities and their connectedness to nature. Therefore, it functions as a collective effort that appeals to emotion as well as reality, that mobilizes love as a form of resistance in order to emancipate oneself.

Using this set of selected theories and authors, I will analyze the artworks of specific artists from native America and Chile. Relying on the previously noted theories and definitions my thesis will explain the interconnectedness of politics and art through the lens of love and tolerance. Through the performance of indigenous identity, indigenous female artists, participate in the reproduction and preservation of their culture. They aim to deconstruct the silence produced from the remains of colonialist practices in order to create a self-representative history, decolonizing their bodies, cultures, and identities through cultural practices that utilize love of culture as an active form of defiant indigeneity, and therefore political and cultural resistance.

METHODS AND LIMITATIONS

In order to explore my argument, I will compare and analyze the works of art produced by two artists from different cultural backgrounds. The first Case Study is that of Wendy Red Star, Crow woman and artist. The second Case Study involves the analysis of Cecilia Vicuña, Chilean woman and artist. To understand the different context on which both artists produce their artworks, I will briefly explain the political context and background each region has in relation to the identity of the indigenous woman. Also, I will explore how each political climate has influenced the production of art in each area. Consequently, I will analyze various works of art by each artist in light of the theories stated above, relying on interviews and primary sources

of information such as the artworks themselves in order to show each artists point of view and their intent behind the artworks.

On the other hand, the lack of representation of indigenous woman, as well as in the United States as in Chile has created a gap in the scholarship available due to the small number of scholarly articles, books, and theories which deal with indigenous female artists and their importance on the global art scene. In regards to Crow Women, literature about their roles in society and the production of art in their tribe is lacking. Articles about indigenous women are available through research but specifics about the Crow women are hard to find. Articles about indigenous women are available through research, but specifics about the Crow women are hard to find, thus creating a lack of information on their production of art and how they used cultural practices in the past to voice political issues. This sheds light to the shadow that looms over the identity of indigenous women and their invisibility. On the other hand, Mapuche women have been kept out of the art world; this is true due to the lack of representation of Mapuche female artists in the Chilean art scene and the world as a whole. Therefore, their representation is only produced and explored by artists with indigenous backgrounds that use Mapuche and indigenous cultural practices, through appropriation, to reclaim this lost indigenous identity and Mapuche culture; their representation becomes subject to half-indigenous or non-indigenous artists that take on the task of voicing this lost identity through cultural appropriation.

Through the analysis of the two Artists, this thesis aims to explore the extent and relevance the indigenous female artist, Crow and Mapuche specifically, has in the art world and how each of their artworks serves as a resistance to political and cultural practices that oppress and silence the Indigenous women as an identity. Therefore, through the portrayal of their indigeneity in art, the female indigenous artists reclaim their status as women, Indian and artists. They also resist

oppression through the production of art as defiant indigeneity, making theirs again the colonized land and bodies through artworks that participate in de-colonial love through the process of differential consciousness, through the creation of art that is rooted in nature, history, lineage and collective experiences of the indigenous woman under different systems of oppression.

CASE STUDIES AND ANALYSIS

Case Study I- Native American artist

Political Context

The visibility of Indigenous Cultures in the United States has been threatened since colonial times due to the systems of oppression and negative stereotypes that have been imposed upon their cultures without any form of consent on their part. Even though indigenous people make up 573 federally recognized indigenous tribes, they still are unrecognized by the majority of non-native Americans. The image of the Indigenous person is ever present in marketing, art, commercial products, that portray the Indigenous American in a certain way but they fail to recognize the erased history of the Indigenous Cultures. These images fuel certain stereotypes and obscure the identity and agency of the tribes as a whole. The photos appear in many types of products while people are oblivious about the fact and the real life of indigenous people in the United States.

In a study conducted by the organization *Reclaiming Native Truth*, it was found that more Native American People are fighting to reclaim the representation of their identity and their histories. “Invisibility in contemporary life creates a void that is filled with stereotypes and misperceptions” (Reclaiming Native Truth 18). By controlling the narratives of their own representation, they decolonize the stereotypes that have been imposed upon them by opening a new narrative that will eventually work as a way to change the perception of Native Americans

into a more positive view, that increases tolerance and respect towards Native Cultures. Artists, Writers, Chef's, professors, all are working towards a new more inclusive perspective that will create visibility and resist assimilation to a culture that oppresses and silences ancient cultures and traditions. "History opens hearts and minds Presenting accurate history opens a conversation about current reality" (Reclaiming Native Truth 13).

When it comes to the reality of women, they are the ones that have suffered from more invisibility. When colonization occurred, the societal roles of indigenous women were erased along with the importance of the role of the female indigenous person. Women were often not only discriminated by non-native people, but they started to be subject to discrimination within their own cultures due to the assimilation of their communities to western culture, most specifically they were deemed as going against indigenous culture when they voiced concerns regarding women or when they called themselves feminists (Smith). In one case, from 1970 to 1976 between 25 to 50 percent of indigenous women were subject to sterilization without their consent (Blakemore). This marginalization and control of the reproductive capacity of the female body is an attempt to not only erase history but to prevent future generations to exist. These horrific acts are intended to stop the sustainability of a culture and its importance. By silencing women, they silence the whole culture itself.

Even though there have been efforts to silence native women, there are more native women in academia than ever before (Mihsuah). Indigenous Women are also becoming artists that showcase and take agency of their own representation. While there are many different efforts, artists such as Madeleine Sayet have been able to reclaim and portray the Indigenous Culture in a better light. She has become a Playwright that takes classics such as Shakespeare and Mozart and uses her own perspective to include the indigenous perspective in the art-world.

But the issue of self-representation becomes difficult in the sense that indigenous women differ on how they should be represented. When they relate to feminist theories, they are not native enough and break with tradition. When they are not feminists, they are not being inclusive and fighting for equality. Sayet reclaims her identity through the representation of indigenous people in theater. During casting, she preserves indigenous roles solely to indigenous artists and opposes the portrayal of red-face indigenous people onstage to stop objectification in this way she protects her perspective, agency, and identity. The essence of female native activism is being a woman that has a “solid tribal background, cultural awareness and confidence in her identity” (Mihsuah 137) thus, the fight to topple negative stereotypes and to fight assimilation is born from the confidence of women aware of their culture and silence.

Wendy Red Star

Wendy Red Star is a Crow woman raised in the Apsaalooke (Crow) reservation of Montana. She studied art with a focus on sculpture at the University of Montana and received her Master's degree in Fine Arts from the University of California, Los Angeles. In her work, Red Star draws from her cultural lineage and heritage to portray and embody her indigenous identity. She also uses her indigeneity to "explore the intersections of Native American Ideologies and Colonialist structures, both historically and in contemporary society” (Red Star). Merging research and personal experience, she creates works in a range of media including photography, sculpture, film and performance, to create unsettling work that will challenge the stereotypes of indigenous identity which have been objectified, sexualized and reduced to expectations of what the Indian should be like; thus, uniting Native American women’s voices and reclaiming their history through artistic creation. She participated in the Standing Rock occupation that took place

from 2016 to 2017 in which many protested the contamination of the land by the Dakota access pipeline.

Analysis of work

In Wendy, Red Star's most famous work, exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, "Four Seasons" is an exploration of indigenous life. Through the use of self-portrait, she aims to take back her own Native American Identity and define it for herself and as she says, in her own terms. In this way, stereotypical objects are used to represent the non-western gaze of indigenous people and contrast it with what being indigenous actually is. "I see my work as a vessel giving viewers the opportunity to experience another version of history—another version of the truth" (Red Star 40). She claims that even though this is her most praised work, it was not appreciated by her professors at UCLA, where it was produced, considered not professional enough. But the use of colors and an indigenous Crow outfit makes the work inviting and intriguing shedding light in the reality of Crow Identity.

She uses Indian motifs such as deer, feathers, and coyotes alongside herself. All these motifs are made out of plastic and are not as realistic as the main subject, herself. The use of fake imagery comments on the mass production of Indian motifs that reduce indigenous identity to that of certain specific objects that have become symbols and representative of an identity, reducing indigeneity to symbols, mixing and merging native American cultures as one particular, homogenous group. On the other hand, she states "the intent is to comment on the ways that Native people are portrayed—put on display—in museums and expositions" (Red Star 40). Indigenous people are represented as these ancient figures, with specific characteristics that Red Star claims are far from her experience as a Native American, but that exists in the minds of Non-native American people within the US and the rest of the world. By reclaiming her gaze,

she puts in to question the reality of what being indigenous is and how her identity is perceived by those who are confined to certain stereotypes. “What interests me is the ways that both realities—my actual Crow identity informed by experience alongside my imagined Indian identity informed by stereotypes—clash, mingle, and merge to create new realities” (Red Star 40).



Figure 1. Red Star, Wendy. *Four Seasons*. Met Museum, New York. 2006

In another of her controversial works, “White Squaw”, she re-utilizes self-portraiture as the self-representation of an identity. The word *squaw* means ‘American Indian Woman’⁴ but in essence, it has become an offensive word used by and through oppressive practices to dehumanize and categorize American Indian Women through ‘othering.’ The series of images in

⁴ Definition taken from the Merriam Webster Dictionary

which Red Star portray herself as an overly sexualized native American woman, dressed as Pocahontas, use common images of the Native Woman as represented through the western media to deconstruct these specific stereotypes of identity. Using a direct gaze, she objectifies herself as not only what people expect an American Indian Woman to look like but also as propaganda, campaigning for a takeover of this offensive term that has been an issue for native women over centuries. When talking about the piece she states:

“Beyond problematic mainstream representations, there is an epidemic of murdered and missing Native women on reservations today. My tribe, and the majority of tribes in fact, are matrilineal, which is ironic because women need more visibility. We need a voice. I’m campaigning to take back “squaw” as a word to unite and empower. I made the *White Squaw* (2013) series after encountering a set of books so wholly offensive that I knew they needed to be owned—taken over—in order to be disempowered. I used parody to render *White Squaw* ridiculous. I want to own “squaw” for Native women. If we take it back, the hurt and the oppression of the word will be ours to transform into something more positive.” (Red Star 42)

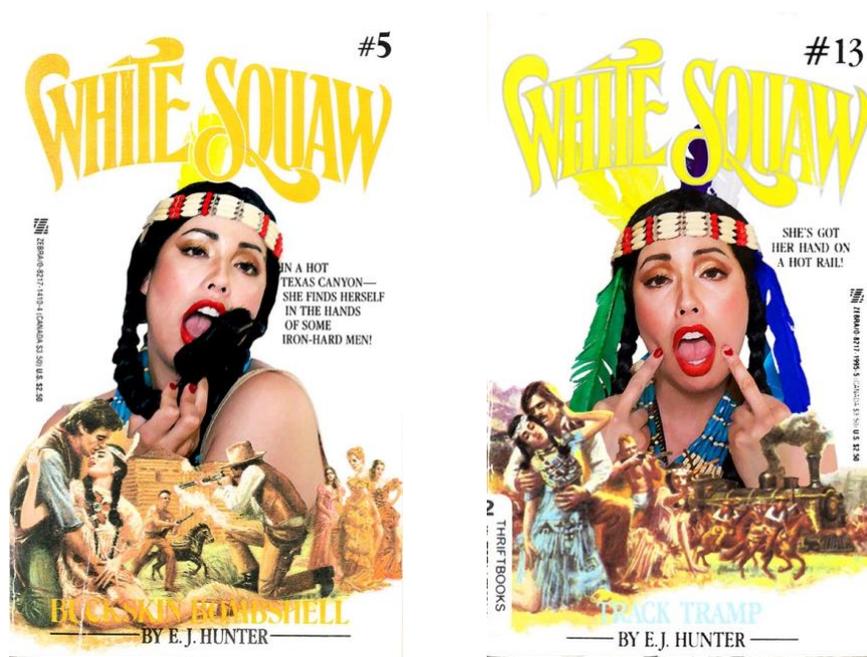


Figure 2. Red Star, Wendy. “Bust #5” and “Bust #13”. *White Squaw*. 2014.

In the work of “Medicine Crow and the 1880 Crow peace delegation” series, the artist uses archival images of Crow medicine man and the Crow delegates juxtaposed with red ink to rewrite and offer a comprehensive explanation of these pictures, its symbols, the wardrobe and the men themselves. In this way, she is creating a new narrative, by providing new and relevant information about these archival pictures that are still being used in everyday objects such as a logo in the cartons of Honest Tea for publicity. The use of these images up until Red Star appropriated them had been reduced to Western use. The pictures and the archives do not even show the story of the Crow Chiefs and their names neither. One of the men in the photographs was called Medicine Man; he was a chief as all of the men in the series were. Their identities were erased and reduced to objects of an alien representation of the Indian figure, for political and economic purposes. These identities were lost with the inaccurate use of the historical photographs of these indigenous men and woman, members of the Crow culture.

The delegation of 1880 for peace was a negotiation of the Crow Chiefs and politicians in Washington Dc. These men had to travel all the way from the reservation in order to appeal and claim their rights as native people. But, what the people do not know, is that the men travelled and stayed in Washington D.C for several days in the winter (Red Star). This tactic was used by politicians to get the native people to sign off on treaties that did not benefit them. The trick was to make them home sick. On the other hand, since Western Culture has appropriated the images for purposes other than economic ones, the real meaning of the pictures was lost. The red ink used in the pictures by the artist offers an insight to the horrors native American people have suffered due to colonization. The use of the color red has many connotations which involves that of the blood of the American Indians that has been spilled throughout the years. In some of the

pictures, the artist writes each of the Chiefs name coming out of their mouth as if they were speaking it, like in a comic trapped in a speech bubble.

Through stating their names, they reassert their identity as individuals, not as a stereotyped collective representation of Native American Indians. As Red star states, their expressions and their whole wardrobe are indicators of an attitude of resistance, in one of her annotations she emphasizing the gaze of one of the Chiefs by stating that he “can kick your ass with these eyes” (Medicine Crow and the Delegation of 1880). The decolonization of an identity occurs through the takeback of these images through a reinterpretation of history to reclaim a population and breakdown stereotypical narratives in the western world. “My aim is to reclaim my own history by humanizing the chiefs, giving viewers the opportunity to learn intimate details of the lives behind the stoic expressions” (Red Star 43).



Figure 3. Red Star, Wendy. “Two Belly” and “Old Crow”. *Medicine Crow and the Delegation of 1880*. 2014. Brooklyn Museum, New York.

Case study 2- Chilean Indigenous Artist

Political Context

To face "triple discrimination" is the continuous reality of Indigenous women in Chile. According to Patricia Richards, this means that Indigenous women are discriminated for being women, indigenous and of low social status. This reality has been present since the Chilean government became an independent state after being colonized by Spain in 1547, but it has continued to have resonance into the 21st century due to the fact that Indigenous women have often been oppressed and overlooked not just in governmental policies but also through cultural practices and societal constructs. The triple discrimination, therefore, has become a form of silencing and repression that have made indigenous people, specifically women invisible.

This invisibility occurs for many reasons. One of the main factors that have attributed to this phenomenon is the fact that ancestral land has been stripped away from Indigenous people due to Anti-terrorist practices that were instigated by the military dictatorship of Pinochet in Chile. Before this, democratically elected Leftist President Salvador Allende had passed a law of indigenous redistribution and had vowed to include and recognize Mapuche people as well as other indigenous people in Chile as sovereign individuals of their land, planning to give back land that had previously been taken under governmental control because of the promotion of 'one Chilean identity' (Stewart 26). Any efforts of redistribution and indigenous recognition were toppled when Pinochet came into power in 1973. This led to militarized efforts to control and discriminate any people that were not considered to follow to construct of the Chilean identity promoted by Pinochet's government. Many Mapuche, as well as other indigenous people, were killed, prosecuted and incarcerated. Those who suffered greatly were the women, stripped from

their land, homes and their culture by not being able to practice their own identity due to fear of being prosecuted by the military.

The denial of existence of a female indigenous identity due to fear became a reality that led many people to stop identifying as part of the Chilean indigenous community altogether. But, even though this fear was present “when oppression was the greatest, the Mapuche movement was the strongest: with militant revival of our language, our traditions, our traditional organizations” (Reuque Paillef 115). This was the response of a Mapuche woman to the systematic oppression of indigenous peoples in Chile during the dictatorship. Indigenous activists took to the street to protest their own identity, but society and Chilean culture as a whole still diminish indigenous women as stated before, to triple discrimination. According to Richards, this occurred because in Mapuche society gender does not exist. It was with the introduction of western nationalist values that gender discrimination became more prevalent among the Mapuche culture and with the outside world as well.

There is also a division between Chilean women and Indigenous women. According to Anne Marielle Bacigalupo, indigenous women are constantly playing a role in society in order to conform to the stereotypes that are attributed to them (Bacigalupo). This constant performativity affects the reality of many indigenous women; in urban societies, they are left to the domestic workforce even though in their own culture Mapuche women often play the most important role of Mapuche society, that of the ‘Machi’, a healer (Bacigalupo). But even the Machi has to conform to the stereotypes by performing her identity in the presence of Chilean Women (I refer to Chilean women as those women not from indigenous societies). The perpetuated "assimilation" to Chilean culture has silenced an indigenous community that is starting to speak

up through the re-appropriation of their identity through cultural and political practices such as art as it will be demonstrated with the example of artist Cecilia Vicuña.

Cecilia Vicuña

Cecilia Vicuña is both a visual artist and a poet. Born in Chile to a family of women artist, she was always exposed to art. Her work began in 1966, in the middle of an era where revolution was in the heart of the youth and radical expression through art was a norm. Her first art productions were of the 'precarious' that focus on the impermanence of being and as a way of "hearing an ancient silent waiting to be heard" (Vicuña, *An Invented Indigeneity*). This silence reflects in her own life. Her indigenous identity was unknown to her until she did a DNA test that proved that she was 50% indigenous, while her grandmother claimed there were no indigenous ancestors in her family. In this manner, she calls the precarious works "transformative acts that bridge the gap between art and life, the ancestral and the avant-garde" (Vicuña, *An Invented Indigeneity*) She has been in exile since the early 1970s after the coup, led by the military and Pinochet. Through the use of diverse art mediums, her works use weaving as a metaphor that holds together the impermanence of being, a collective identity and the precariousness of revolution through an art that focus of decay and constant change. Most famously known for her performances, she interweaves her poetry, visual art, and performances to create a work that "dwells in the not yet, the future potential of the unformed, where sound, weaving and language interact to create new meanings" ("Cecilia Vicuña").

Analysis of work

In 2006, Vicuña produced a work called "Quipu menstrual". This work consisted of giant threads of red unwoven cotton collocated by the artist in the *Glaciar El Plomo*, the main source of fresh and clean water near Santiago de Chile. According to the artist, this work was produced

for president Michelle Bachelet to remember the past, “the union of water and blood” (Vicuña 78) This call to remember is a key element of her work. “Vicuña’s work, at its very essence, is “a way of remembering”- as if exile and recall joined to unravel an “autobiography in debris,” as one personal story within a larger narrative” (Tejada). This specific work calls to remember the blood that was shed during the dictatorship of Pinochet, claiming that participatory democracy vanished in Chile at this time. Therefore, discriminating silencing and stripping away ancestral land for governmental purposes. One of this ancestral land was the glacier in which Vicuña placed the quipu, being a source of water, life, and nature itself. This allegory therefore, to water as a sacred element, and blood as well appeals to the fact that land and identity are interconnected. To preserve the land is to preserve and change a history that not only harmed the environment but to change a government that repressed and exploited indigenous people.

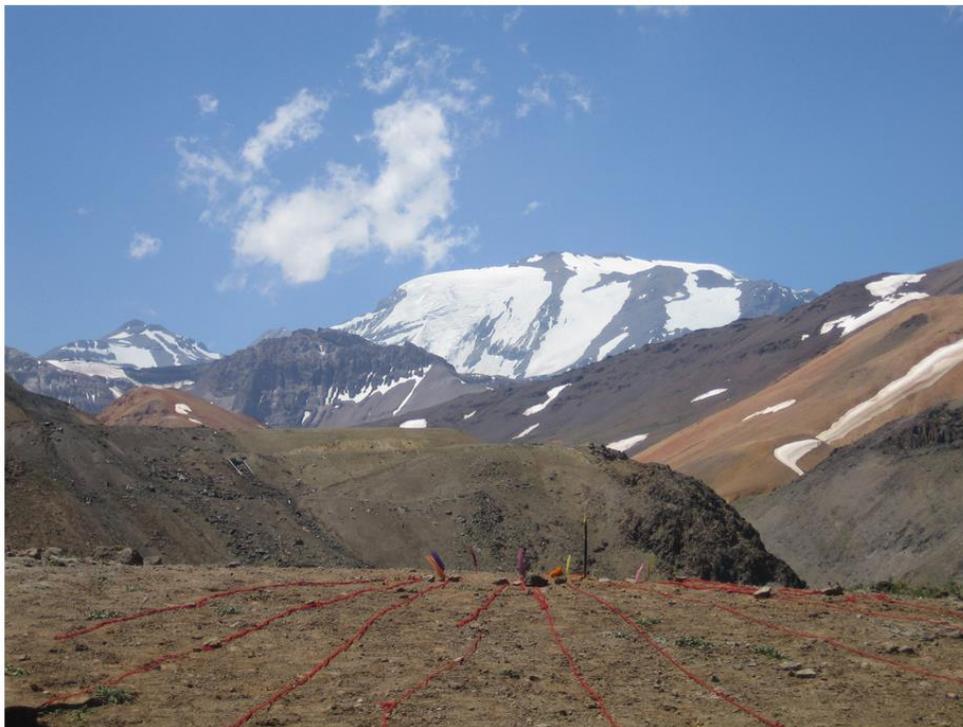


Figure 4. Vicuña, Cecilia. *El Quipu Menstrual*. Glaciar el Plomo, 2006

The call to remember was ignored, the glaciers still destroyed and therefore Vicuña organized a performance. At the doors of the presidential palace, multiple women gathered to be woven by Vicuña in a giant red quipu. This weaving makes its way back to the essence of the first work of art, to remember the connectedness of nature and humanity. “I placed a red thread, the wound of the land and the people, at the palace door” (Vicuña 78). In a talk given by the artist at the Brooklyn Museum she states that the “Quipu Menstrual” referred also to the menstrual blood of the women. She compares the fluidity of water and blood to state that they both are sources of life. We all have blood within us to survive, menstrual blood is a direct reference to the creation of life and fertility, water therefore is serves also a purpose in the creation of life and nature. She claims that to despise the menstrual fluid of the women is to despise the collective identity and nature of human beings as a whole. Therefore, in this piece she not only remembers and protests against the brutality of the military dictatorship and the destruction of nature but she also takes a feminist stance against patriarchal institutions that diminish the women through the repression of their reproductive and sexual rights. Therefore, she creates and interweaves the nature of humanity and a political reality through visual and performative art.



Figure 5. Vicuña, Cecilia. *El Quipu Menstrual*. La Moneda, 2006

On the other hand, there is the element of the quipu. The quipu as she claims is an ancient record-keeping device that was used in the Andean region by their indigenous inhabitants. The oldest quipu was traced back to 4600 BCE. These devices were knotted thread woven together to create a language and record history and also economic aspects of everyday life. The Quipus were banned with colonization and the practice and record keeping of the Quipu was lost. Her Quipus are a 're-membering' of this lost practice. This was the elimination of the specific history of indigenous inhabitants in South America. In a talk given at Cooper Union, she stated that her quipus were composed of unspun wool, due to the fact that this made them more fragile and subject to destruction with the passing of time. By using the quipu in "Quipu Menstrual" she is calling to remember all the previous generations of indigenous people that were affected by the violence of the dictatorship. Also, to remember the violence against nature. It is a metaphor to preserve a history that has been erased and re-claim an identity and cultural practice that was accompanied by an imaginary quipu, that connected the ancient world into one, therefore appealing towards a collective identity and a collective fight and revolution towards the preservation of nature and the power of the female body.

One important component in Vicuña's works is the power of words. Her performances, and poetry specifically fixate on how a word can have many different meanings. Also, when giving a performance, Vicuña aims to transport the spectator to another place with the use of English, Spanish and an array of indigenous languages interchangeably. She does so to appeal to the sound of the words for it to give them meaning, not just to understand the word because it is part of your daily vocabulary. This is because she aims to appeal to an array of emotions, telling history through facts and also feelings. "The art is in the seeing (or the hearing), in seeing the hearing and vice versa, in letting them speak of the ancient future they carry within" ("Poetry").

It is the power of uncertainty of the meaning attached to the word that gives it an individual meaning to each spectator. It is the unknown which creates that which needs to be known and felt for it to be understood.

One of her earliest works focus specifically on the different meanings and connotations of words. These are the “Palabrarmas”. They came to be as an exploration of the different meanings a word can have throughout different life experiences. Meanings work as opening doors, where one leads to another in this never-ending exploration of ‘what is’. The works began in 1966 and continued to be produced in exile in London through the dictatorship of Pinochet. Due to the opposition to weapons and advocacy for peaceful manifestation Vicuña turned to the power of words because in her eyes words serve as the main weapon towards creating change. She describes the neologism of Palabrarmas as “to work words as one works the land is to work more; to think of what the work does is to arm yourself with the vision of words. And more: words are weapons, perhaps the only acceptable weapons” (*Palabrarmas*). The word “Palabrarmas” itself is the combination of the words *Palabra*, which in Spanish means ‘word’ and *Armas*, which in Spanish means weapons.

To accompany the collection of words vicuña explores she created visual artworks to evoke meaning and feeling through the merging of words and visual expression. The works aim to create a collective consciousness towards change by explicitly exploring words in times of political turmoil and how they resonate to the audience. It is in a sense the creation of a collective ritual which “is an act of learning. Together we go into a phase transition, an invisible metamorphosis, a different state of consciousness in order to see” (Vicuña 106). In one of her Palabrarmas she explores the meaning of the word *Corazón*, in Spanish it means heart. She

breaks up the word to create different words within the same one such as *Con razón*, which means 'with truth'. By adding the letter 'n', the whole meaning of the word *Corazón* changes.

co_nrazón

Figure 6. Vicuña, Cecilia. *Palabrarmas*. 1984



Figure 7. Vicuña, Cecilia. *Palabrarmas*. 2018

DISCUSSION

Wendy Red Star and Cecilia Vicuña use art, at its very essence, to stake claims and remember a society that has been oppressed and made invisible by social constructions and practices of culture and government institutions as well. Therefore, the oppression and invisibility not only comes from the fact that indigenous populations are underrepresented in government, 'othered' and culturally appropriated but also the oppression occurs in everyday life. There is an ever-present vulnerability they face towards the world, the precariousness of daily indigenous life that struggles for the reclaiming of their land, cultural sovereignty and moreover equal respect in society (Vicuña).

Both artists use performativity to place their art in the greater historical and political context in the world. They both use their individual identity to call upon a collective identity that comes together through recollection of the past by "bringing memory back to a site (...) to confront missed encounters, lack of recognition, oblivion, and loss" (Hirsch 90). Red Star does so through research. Throughout her work, she thoroughly researches the history of her own culture, what it meant to be indigenous in a time before colonization, before cultural appropriation. She plays with memory and wit to impact the spectator and trigger collective thinking; it calls the viewer to remember a forgotten history that according to Nohelani Teves is obscured and made silent by governmental efforts that wish to control minority populations for economic and political gain. By performing her own identity, she involves herself and is participating in the process of defiant indigeneity, reclaiming and performing that identity that has been reduced to certain stereotypes that prevail in western society. Through the use of her own narrative, she takes back her voice and her people's history creating and providing a new account of the story that has been overlooked. In other of her works, the use of her own identity

as a Crow woman creates a sense of agency and sovereignty that also calls to remember the oppression of women, specifically indigenous women that have been stereotyped to look or to act in specific types of ways.

By placing herself as a subject, her self-portraits are reclaiming an identity that has suffered discrimination. She takes back what makes her vulnerable and uses her own vulnerability, that which has degraded her and othered her in order to claim back and reassert her identity as a Crow woman. Therefore, she uses her own vulnerability, that which has been acted upon (Butler), as a form of embodied mobilization towards resistance. The resistance of the stereotyped discourse that has been formed around what being indigenous actually means. “Vulnerability, understood as a deliberate exposure to power, is part of the very meaning of political resistance as an embodied enactment” (Butler 22).

On another note, Vicuña’s work also embodies vulnerability but also mobilizes it through the creation of her giant quipus, performances, and poetry through the act of weaving together multiple mediums of representation to show the correlation that each cultural practice has upon the indigenous identity and especially on the female indigenous woman. Through the mobilization of vulnerability, she plays with the finitude of life and claims that her art exists in the "not yet" and "not quite" the duality present in existence, and the balance between life and death. This is a direct comparison to vulnerability, living in this life through constant change, where to mend history there needs to be a recalling of the past but also a view of the future. In her performances, she weaves together people, interconnecting them in giant quipus to show how human life has always been interconnected even though there is separation through discrimination and a systematic obliteration of specific populations and cultural practices. Through the use of different languages in her performances, she calls to the collective identity of

the world claiming that it is not about understanding every word, but it is about the feeling that is evoked and felt by just being present in the performance. The performance aims to bring together through appropriating shamanistic rituals, chants, and voices to reclaim her own lost indigeneity that had an impact in who she is an artist. Her lost indigeneity is a clear example of the silencing that occurs to minority populations.

For minority populations, there is generally a need to assimilate to the 'bigger' culture. For a country to 'develop' there is a call to assimilate in western practices, leaving aside and wiping out thousands of years of cultural practices that were connected to humanity, equality of gender, tolerance, and nature. Through the performance of her poetry, to the collective performances of the quipus, to the production of the quipus themselves, she participates in the recollecting of memory, remembering the lost and the wounded. Through performing her own invented indigeneity as she calls it, she is involved in defiant indigeneity as well through the reclaiming and appropriation of lost social and cultural practices of an oppressed people that are often unseen and overlooked. "To gather as people and involve in collective performativity, is a way of mobilizing vulnerability, to resist assimilation and the loss of identity of indigenous people. one of the important features of public assembly that we recently see confirms that political resistance relies fundamentally on the mobilization of vulnerability, which means that vulnerability can be a way of being exposed and agentic at the same time" (Butler 24).

Even though both artists have different backgrounds and upbringings, even though they both started the production of their art at different times in history, even though they both have lived different types of oppression and 'otherness' their art still resonate with each other. They both use art as a means to reclaim a lost identity that has been subject to assimilation or has been eliminated from discourse. Wendy Red Star has been subject to western expectations in her

works of art, while attending college, by not producing art that was 'Indian' enough. In that manner, she took her indigenous identity to deconstruct the social stereotypes that had degraded and shaped the identity and dignity of the Crow women, through this re-appropriation of their own identity, she is resisting and acting against social constructs and a society that has treated indigenous women specifically as 'other.'

On the other hand, the art of Cecilia Vicuña, through performance and impermanence, calls to remember the forgotten and calls to bring forward that which is yet to come. She fights not only the direct stereotypes that women face, the discrimination due to their fertile natures, or as she states the bodily fluids that have the power to create and are essential to nature, but her art also comments on the impermanence of time and existence and the collective identity we have of being human. This humanness needs to be represented to perform the required resistance towards change and action.

Individuality, therefore, cannot be the sole agent of cultural resistance. To reclaim a lost identity and history, the role of a collective identity is of extreme importance. In the case of indigenous women, it is the collect female indigenous identity, present in indigenous feminism, which calls together all indigenous women to resist and voice their oppression. Even though these women suffer under different types of government, in Chile a broken democracy, and in the United States an active successful democracy, there is a resonance in their identities, in how their culture has been taken from them and colonized not only in the period of colonization but in well into the 21st century as well. Colonized not only through acts that have stripped them away from land but also through colonization from a stereotyped gaze that diminishes and makes this culture not visible, through silencing the silencing and elimination of their history.

In regards to de-colonial love, the two artists express the love for their culture through the creation of works that portray a reality that has been silenced. It reinterprets identity not only as an individual identity but also as a collective identity that has roots in a love that is used to create barriers to break down oppressive systems. In her work, Wendy Red Star alludes to her lineage, and the influence previous generations have in the production of her art. Revisiting the history of a generation's past is an act of de-colonial love in a way that it deconstructs stereotypes and gives agency to the figure of the Native American Indian. Cecilia Vicuña, on the other hand, is involved in de-colonial love through the relationship her work has to previous generations but also to the sacred bond of the indigenous woman and her nature, to the nature of the land which holds the indigenous culture of Chile. Through using the environment as a crucial element in her art, Vicuña reclaims the sovereignty of the indigenous people in Chile. She also transcends the sense of place and identity by alluding to the natural cycles of the women, therefore blending two elements of representation towards one goal, to reclaim the Indigenous Identity of the native woman through the production of art connected to the nature of both land and female body.

Vicuña claims that revolutionary times are making their way back into the present. She stresses that the practices which she involved herself in when she was a young woman, of marching, creating political paintings, revolutionary poems, are all making their way back. Consciousness is coming back to those issues that were silenced for so long, in her case her artworks produced during Pinochet's dictatorship are only being shown 40 years later. To make her point when interviewed at the Brooklyn Museum, she claimed that the '60s were back because the artistic practices used at the time to fight discontent are being used now as well. This claim marries her work with that of Red Star. Even though from different generations, their works have a political connotation and resistant resonance which lead the way toward a more

accurate representation and decolonization of the female indigenous women as an agent (the artist) and as a subject (in a work of art).

Due to the lack of information around Crow women's role in society, specifically around the production of cultural artistic practices, and the lack of Mapuche female artists this brings up an issue around the gap in the cultural history of indigenous people that as a culture have been stripped from their ancestral land as a product of colonization. There is a need to expand the scholarship and the study of indigenous cultural practice to reclaim the importance of indigenous art as a form of social expression. There needs to be also a further in-depth study of the life of indigenous women both in North America and Latin America to further understand their collective identity and history and how they interact with society, the roles they play and how to think about the future implications of being an indigenous woman in the 21st century.

CONCLUSION

Everyday experiences of women, specifically their individual microhistories play a role and shed light to the international conditions of the world (Enloe). But, due to censorship and silencing many stories are unheard, and reality stays the same. The importance lies in the transformation and representation of everyday real-life experiences. Hannah Arendt stresses this very clearly:

“Compared with the reality which comes from being seen and heard, even the greatest forces of intimate life— the passions of the heart, the thoughts of the mind, the delights of the senses— lead an uncertain shadowy kind of existence unless and until they are transformed, deprivatized and deindividualized, as it were, into a shape to fit them for public appearance.” (Arendt 50)

Through the use of art, both women appeal to emotion and humanness, factors that are missing in attempts to promote inclusivity and equality. But as I would like to argue, equality is not the goal, the goal is tolerance. Through performing their own defiant indigeneity both artists

reclaim their identities and their bodies. An identity that is inherently unique and different. An identity that has been silenced. Emotions therefore serve as a way to promote social change. Feelings of anger, specifically help advance a discourse that finally gives voice to a missing history. Therefore, the production of art does serve as a catalyst for social change and decolonization of indigenous women through the re-appropriation and performance of their own indigeneity, through their own voice, breaking silences and appealing to collective emotions that call forward the expression of their vulnerability to a resistance to cultural assimilation.

Much is still needed to be done. Standing Rock Occupation is a demonstration of how important it is for the silence to end and the native voices to be heard. Artists, activists, students all gathered to protest the sanctity of a land that is being contaminated for economic gains. The contamination not only affects the environment but it also affects the livelihood of the people living in its surrounding. This contamination is a metaphor of the contamination Indigenous People have suffered due to their roots and native origins. The contamination occurs in the land, their culture, their hearts and will further affect future generations. That is why defiant, radical indigenous women artists are voicing the horrific acts that threaten their identity and existence, using art as an act of love through which peaceful resistance and awareness can occur.

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