

“Tradish-ish”: Call Me By ~~Your~~ My Name: The Language of Calls for Native Artists

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Abstract

“Tradish-ish: Call Me by Your My Name” examines the recent language used in open calls for Indigenous works of public art. It explores which terms are "trending" to refer to these artists, who is behind these calls, and what this means for Indigenous artists.

Keywords

Native American, art, Indigenous, public art, American Indian

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Introduction

This abridged version of “Tradish-ish: Call Me By ~~You~~ My Name” explores the verbiage used—almost exclusively in the colonizer’s tongue (English)—in open calls for so-called Native American and/or Indigenous artists.¹ These calls were published in the past six years, to ensure recent data, and open to those located in the occupied lands of the “United States.” As an Aniyunwiya (citizen of the Cherokee Nation) artist myself, I have noticed a recent increase in these calls. Some may see this as a positive, but the language used in these calls is not evolving progressively. Instead, much of the language appears stagnant and confusing. Adrienne Keene says we “live in an active settler colonial society ... colonialism isn’t in the past; it’s current and ongoing” (29). What exactly are the curators looking for with these calls?

“Tradish-ish” comes from the term “tradish,” a common phrase amongst pan-Native communities to refer to any practice with roots in what is deemed “traditional.” Although many “traditional” art forms are still being practiced today, these are just a *part* of the whole of what is being produced amongst Native artists. Many practices have understandably evolved significantly since contact (settler contact is used as a reference point for this analysis).

The (western) desire to highlight what is often deemed Native “traditional” art is a kind of erasure. Should Native artists not be expected to evolve as our post-contact world continues? The call for “traditional” work can also reinforce our past traumas while promoting assimilation. Clearly, the idea of what is “tradish” and, in turn, “Native,” has been colonized even within Native communities.

Rather than force Native artists into an oft-colonizer’s dictation of what “traditional” is, many of us are creating our own approaches to our art. It may not be everyone’s definition of traditional, but it is Indigenously “tradish-ish.” I have been a full-time working artist for decades, with installations, 2-D and 3-D works, mixed-media projects, and performances taking place at galleries and more traditional spaces around the globe. I began my career as a poet many years ago, and to date most of my non-literary art includes text in some capacity. I consider all mediums of art, including the multi/inter/anti-disciplinary approach I take, an extension of sorts of the pan-Indigenous oral storytelling tradition, with the capacity for enhanced culture bearing, sharing, and preservation. Although I personally use the terms Indigenous and Native interchangeably—and NDN in certain contexts—this is not meant to suggest that it is “correct” or permanent. It is, simply, the terms that feel most comfortable for me, as an individual Aniyunwiya artist, in this moment.

Types of Calls

My project considers *many* types of art and art projects, beginning with open calls for Natives in public art. Open calls refer to requests for proposals from any artist that fits the organizer’s eligibility guidelines. Unfortunately, it is impossible to solely analyze this niche because there are not enough artists that have responded to calls to make for a comprehensive outcome. Due to complexity, I have omitted literary arts. Even “just” considering visual arts, there are different

¹ The full article is available upon request at [Forecast Change Lab](#), including expanded consideration of the terms being used in the analysis that follows.

types of open calls which require a tangible output of art. The calls examined in my project include those for tribally enrolled and non-enrolled artists, and even some that do not strictly require applicants to be Native. Of the 23 calls, only 9 required “enrollment,” and 3 either prioritized enrollment or asked applicants to self-identify as Indigenous/Native, or another preferred term.

Data Examined

This project explores the use of language (English) in art calls to discover which terms and phrases are the most common and how they are changing and to assess how funding (if any) is explained. The calls analyzed in this article include (in alphabetical order):

- ahha (non-Native led)
- APANO (Asian-led non-profit)
- Arizona State University (ASU) (non-Native led)
- Arts Council of Kentucky (non-Native)
- The Center for Native American Youth at the Aspen Institution (Native-led)
- City of Minneapolis (non-Native led)
- Eighth Generation (Native-owned)
- Forge Project (Native-led)
- Greater Cincinnati Native American Coalition (Native-led)
- Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) (Native-led)
- Minnesota Historical Society (MNHS) (non-Native led)
- NACF LIFT (Native-led)
- New Mexico Arts Public Support of the Arts (non-Native led)
- NDN Collective (Native-led)
- Peninsula College (non-Native led)
- Ramsdell Regional Center for the Arts (Ramsdell) (non-Native led)
- School for Advanced Research (SAR) (non-Native led)
- SHIFT (Native-led)
- Southwestern Association for Indian Arts (SAIA) (Native-led)
- Travois First Friday (Native led)
- Ucross (non-Native led)
- UNC-Wilmington (non-Native led)
- University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point (UW) (non-Native led)

- Walker Art Center (non-Native led)
- yəhaw (Native-led).

As Joshua Whitehead writes in his poetry collection *Full-Metal Indigiqueer*, “i evolve with my name: / injunsavageindiannativeaboriginalindigenoufirstnationwhitehead” (89). It’s clear to see the evolution (or lack thereof) of terms/names from the verbiage in these calls.

There were occasional mentions of “First Nations” in the calls I examined, including in the 2019 Native-led Travois First Friday (identified in the text that follows as ‘Travois’; five uses), Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA; four uses), Peninsula College (three uses), and Native-led Forge Project (two uses). Each organization welcomes applicants from the occupied, stolen lands commonly called “Canada” today (as well as the “United States”), and the term “First Nations” is used exclusively for Native Nations and people of these lands.

Curiously, the non-Native led Ramsdell Regional Center for the Arts (Ramsdell) uses the term “First Americans” thrice—including in its call title, “FIRST AMERICANS.” The also non-Native led ahha call references *First American Art*, a magazine, once in its call when referring to a researcher’s biography. The magazine’s current editor-in-chief is a fellow Cherokee Nation citizen, America Meredith, who said the magazine created a distinction policy to clarify who their contributors are. “As a writer and editor, I try to be as accurate as possible with wording,” Meredith told the *Cherokee Phoenix* (Bark & Hunter 3). Meredith and her staff appear committed to claiming, shaping, and purposefully using language. However, Ramsdell and ahha are non-Native led organizations, making the *majority* of funders/organizers non-Native.

The Native-led Travois call is the only call that uses the term “American Indigenous” (four uses), but this seems to be an attempt to coin a replacement phrase that has not caught on within other circles (Native or not). Twice, Travois references “American Indigenous/Native American,” which unfortunately places the “American” in front of the “Indigenous.”

In addition to language, I also address the inherently western system in which the majority of calls require submission through email or platforms like Submittable. Open calls are a competition, which requires judgement. Who is judging which Native artist “deserves” to be supported? How do competition and judgement play a role in authentically “tradish” Native cultures? How does the language inform such a colonized system?

The heart of my project comes down to this: What is the purpose of an open call for Native artists, how is it evident through language, and how it is lacking Indigeneity? It is time we take a closer lens to what this language entails. My hope is that “Tradish-ish” will encourage cultural exchange, spark discourse on what it means to be a Native artist today, and provide a framework for creating these calls through an Indigenous approach. What I noticed is that most of the calls are not led by Native teams and, as such, inherently reflect a non-Indigenous approach. Examples include almost always using solely English terminology, relying on exclusively online platforms and methods of gathering proposals (many reservations do not have adequate WiFi), and being very time-based and -centric, which is a western approach to time with hard deadlines and little to no accommodation for a more cyclical method of curating proposals. As an Aniyunwiya artist who was raised in the Cherokee diaspora and who has a very colonial-settler

formal education, I have the knowledge, skills, experience, and capacity to operate and succeed in such a realm—but the same cannot be said of many other Native artists, particularly those on the rez and/or elders.

“Indian”

“How I loathe the term ‘Indian’ ... ‘Indian’ is a term used to sell things ... ‘Indian’ is a figment of the white man’s imagination,” said Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, Ojibway, in 1990 (Wright, *Author’s Note*). I was surprised to find the term “Indian” to refer to Natives amongst some of these calls (though they were sometimes in reference to legal documents). Native-led Travois has a majority of Native jurors, which could make the use of “Indian” one of reclamation.

The call with the second most uses of “Indian” is ahha (non-Native led), with six mentions in a 2020 call titled “Re/Convening: Native Arts of Oklahoma.” Like Travois, some mentions of the word “Indian” refer to legal documents. Therefore, such references cannot be inferred as a bias of language on the organization’s part. It is worth noting that some organizations choose to continue to refer to Native peoples via a term long rejected: simply “Indians.”

Natives were first referred to as “Indians” by boatsman Christopher Columbus. The Legal Studies program at University of Massachusetts Amherst notes, “Whether from confusion or romanticism, ‘Indian’ is a word of illusion, not a description of reality” (d’Errico). Wright claims, “The word *Indian* merely commemorates Columbus’ mistake” (*Author’s Note*). While as Natives we may refer to ourselves as Indian, or the more recent and adapted “NDN,” it is not a term many of us appreciate being called by non-Natives.

The Southwestern Association for Indian Arts (SAIA) call for the famed Santa Fe Indian Market in 2022 is both unsurprisingly Native-led and proudly “Indian.” This call uses the term “Indian” without its “American” qualifier five times. However, each of these instances is in self-reference to the name of the organization and/or event. The renowned Santa Fe Indian Market is 100 years old, established in 1922, when verbiage such as “Indian” was widely accepted. What is of interest is that the *only* other related term throughout this call is some variant of Tribe/Tribal, which is used 16 times—more so than any other organization in this analysis.

The Native-led Forge Project Fellowship call for 2022 is a bit unique, as it toes the line between a residency and fellowship, requiring no output from the recipients. This opportunity is specifically for “Indigenous artists, scholars, organizers, cultural workers, researchers, and educators.” However, I chose to include the Forge Project because of its emphasis on Native artists and the fact that it is one of the newest organizations supporting these artists. The call refers to “Indians” three times but has a qualifier in each instance (Mohican twice and Luiseño once). As such, I do not consider Forge Project as adopting an outdated term. Additionally, their choice to add “Indian” to their self-identification underscores a pan-Native interest in self-identifying through reclamation.

Similar to the Santa Fe Indian Market, the School for Advanced Research (SAR) annual Native American Artist Fellowship 2022 call mentions “Indian” twice, but as part of a department’s title. Although SAR is not an inherently Native-led organization, the organizers behind the SAR

are Native. SAR has been operating since 1978, and that lengthy history allows for some permissiveness when it comes to language.

Two non-Native-led organizations use the word “Indian” once: the Minnesota Historical Society (MNHS) and University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point (UW). The MNHS’s 2021 Native American artist-in-residence program uses the word when referencing a place, the Mille Lacs Indian Museum, so it cannot be inferred that it is a preferred term by the organizers. Likewise, the UW 2022 public art Native American Memorial Project uses the term when referencing the Federal Indian Art & Craft Act. Both organizations prefer the use of other, more modern terms.

“Native American”

The term “Native American” came into favor in the 1960s and was another (failed) attempt to right a wrong. Much like colonization at large, this shift kept the “American” and removed the “Indian.” As d’Errico points out: “‘America’ is derived from Amerigo Vespucci, a 16th century Italian navigator who was once said to be the ‘discoverer’ of the continent. How can the people who were already here be named with his name?” “Native American” gained great traction in liberal political movements through the 1970s, which ensured its solid embedment and turn into text. Beatrice Szymkowiak reminds us, “One of the first actions of Western colonizers was to rename everything: land, landscape, people, fauna, and flora, and to impose their language over Native languages” (32). Craig Santos Perez is quoted in the introduction to an article in *The Writer’s Chronicle* by Szymkowiak in 2022, “The introduction of print culture displaced the centrality of oral culture, which was of course the vessel of indigenous [sic] custom, memory, history, story, and more” (Szymkowiak 32). Szymkowiak summarizes, “Print is a very physical manifestation of colonization” (32).

I was surprised to find that “Native American” was not included in many of the open calls analyzed—but when it was used, it was often the clear, favored choice. Ucross uses the term 16 times in a short call for their 2022 Fellowship for Native American Visual Artists. The MNHS (non-Native led) uses the term “Native American” 11 times in their open call for the Native American artist-in-residence. The call details that most attendees of their public programs are “non-native,” choosing to both dismiss the “American” facet of their preferred “Native American” while also stripping the term of its proper noun with the lowercase “n.” Meanwhile, the Ramsdell 2021 open call for art uses the term “Native American” nine times—in a call titled “FIRST AMERICANS.” The non-Native led organization lists the names of the co-chairs yet stresses that the “idea [for the call] was brought to Ramsdell by a local Native American artist” along with others—while failing to name or include the alleged “Native American artist.” The lack of wording of this call (crediting the artist who brought the idea) is problematic.

The Arts Council of Kentucky mentions “Native American” seven times in the 2020 traveling exhibit titled “Native Reflections: Visual Art by Native Americans of Kentucky.” Also a non-Native led organization, is it interesting that they forego the “American” in the title of the call. This call requires participants to be citizens of their Tribes, so “Native Inspired Art” should not even be a factor. The (Native-owned) Eighth Generation company slogan, “Inspired Natives, Not Native Inspired” could be a helpful reminder for this organization.²

² See Eighth Generation citation in Works Cited.

The Center for Native American Youth at the Aspen Institute (Native-led) uses “Native American” four times in their 2017 cover art competition and the term “Native” thrice. The fluidity of their language suggests that they are amenable to shifting language and embraces an active participation in that movement. ahha also uses the term four times, though seems to prefer just “Native,” as it is used six times. ahha is prone to using a diverse sampling of language to refer to Native peoples. The non-Native led Native American Memorial Project at UW Stevens Point also uses “Native American” four times (as well as just “Native” and some variation of “Tribe”).

The Peninsula College 2022 Call for Native American and First Nations Artists, New Mexico Arts Public Support of the Arts 2020 US Native and Indigenous Artists Purchase Initiative, and City of Minneapolis 2021 Water Works Public Art Project all use “Native American” thrice. None of these organizations are Native-led. The calls from Peninsula College and City of Minneapolis do not appear to have a preference for other terms, but the New Mexico Arts Public Support of the Arts project clearly prefers just “Native,” as it is used 10 times in the call. There are three organizations that use “Native American” in their calls just once, including Travois First Friday, Greater Cincinnati Native American Coalition, and IAIA. All are Native-led. Travois much prefers to dismiss “American” and uses “Native” alone 26 times, and IAIA appears to prefer the term “Native” as well. Greater Cincinnati Native American Coalition opts for “Indigenous” in some form most often, at three times total.

It appears that the evolving language of what outsiders call us undergoes a change every 50 years or so. Around 2000, “American” began to be dropped from “Native American” at an increasing pace. We are still operating in the colonizer’s tongue (English), but rejecting “American” was, at least anecdotally speaking, a Native-supported and even Native-led revolution rather than a change imposed upon us.

“Indigenous”

“Indigenous” (with a capital “I”) started to replace “Native” and “Native American” in the 2010s. Similar to every other shift in language, the embrace of “Indigenous” did not/is not happen(ing) easily or quickly because it begs the complex question “What does it mean to be Indigenous?” According to Keene,

To be an Indigenous person means to have ties to a physical place and a people. It is a complex identity to hold, one that doesn’t fit easily into the categories of race, citizenship, and heritage set up by the American system. There are millions of Native people in the United States, and as a result, there are millions of ways to identify as a Native person. (64)

In my analysis of open calls, the term “Indigenous” appears frequently and is often married to a qualifier. The Native-led Forge Project prefers the term “Indigenous” and uses it 15 times in its 2022 fellowship call. Sometimes it is used by itself as an identifier, other times it is coupled with “Indigenous artist” or “Indigenous individual.” Likewise, the Walker Art Center (non-Native led) uses “Indigenous” 15 times, and, like Forge, it is the preferred verbiage.

NDN Collective uses the term “Indigenous” six times in their 2022 Radical Imagination grant for “artists/culture bearers of all traditions, mediums and genres.” The application goes on to explain,

We use Indigenous peoples with an “s” to recognize the diversity of individuals and groups that identify with the term, which has been distilled to a singular noun throughout history in an attempt to group our people together rather than recognize our differences and diversity.

This Native-led organization does not use “NDN” externally, but rather exclusively to refer to itself, the award, and future recipients.

The UNC-Wilmington 2021 call “Honoring Indigenous Peoples” for public art exclusively uses the term “Indigenous” to refer to Natives. This non-Native open call is immediately problematic with their request for “Indigenous-centered artwork [underline my own].” The term “Indigenous-centric” leaves a wide entryway for culturally appropriative works by non-Natives. This call does not require applicants to be Native but rather has a “preference given to members of a state or federally recognized tribe.”

Two open calls use “Indigenous” 11 times, including the City of Minneapolis 2021 Water Works Public Art Project and the yəhaw 2021 Telling Our Own Stories and Being A Good Ancestor. yəhaw uses “Afro-Indigenous” and “Indigenous” *not* paired with “Afro” 11 times, as well as “Indigenous creatives,” “Indigenous artists,” “Indigenous folks,” “Indigenous responses,” “Indigenous voices,” “Indigenous ancestry,” “Indigenous community,” “Indigenous ties,” and, once, “Indigenous peoples”—choosing not to capitalize Peoples. The City of Minneapolis (non-Native led) 2021 Water Works Public Art Project routinely refers to “Indigenous people” without a qualifier and also does not make a proper noun out of the complete phrase.

The Native-led Travois First Friday 2019 open call mentions “Indigenous” nine times. This call refers to both “North American Indigenous” and simply “Indigenous” people, the former appearing in the full call’s title of “Featuring North American Indigenous/Native Visual Art.” Indigenous art, Indigenous ancestry, and Indigenous community is also included as eligible for submission. This is a step towards breaking down arbitrary, colonial borders, but also opens up an onslaught of questions.

One call refers to “Indigenous” four times, the ahha 2020 “Re/Convening: Native Arts of Oklahoma.” The 2022 APANO (an Asian-led non-profit) “Call for artists to help honor the history of the orchards of 82nd!” uses “Indigenous” three times, as do four other calls. The call details “Indigenous stewardship” twice and clarifies prioritization for eligible applicants who are “Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.” The “COVID-19 Archive,” a collaborative project led by the non-Native Arizona State University (ASU) School of Historical, Philosophical and Religious Studies, uses “Indigenous” three times in its 2020 “Open Call to Native American Artists for Submissions of Traditionally Crafted Masks.” The call requires applicants to be “Indigenous artists.” “Indigenous artists” are the only people listed in the description, while the title of the call refers strictly to “Native American” artists, which can be confusing and/or indicative of the intertwining and evolution of such terms.

The other three open calls that use “Indigenous” thrice include the New Mexico Arts Public Support of the Arts 2020 US Native and Indigenous Artists Purchase Initiative, the Greater Cincinnati Native American Coalition 2021 Call for Indigenous Artists, and Ucross’ 2022 Fellowship for Native American Visual Artists. The non-Native led New Mexico Arts Public Support of the Arts prefers the term “Native,” but does clarify “Native or Indigenous artists.” The Native-led Greater Cincinnati Native American Coalition exclusively uses the word “Indigenous,” eschewing all other options including “Native American” or just “Native” in its call. It refers to “Indigenous artists” twice and mentions “Indigenous Peoples Day.” The non-Native led Ucross call includes “Indigenous communities,” “Indigenous peoples,” and “Indigenous people,” choosing not to capitalize any of the qualifiers.

The SAR 2022 open call for “Native Artist Fellowships” uses “Indigenous” once in reference to a particular named fellowship. SAR is non-Native led but the Native fellowships *are* organized by Natives, making it an unusual choice not to capitalize Indigenous. A 1999 article titled “What We Want To Be Called” by Michael Yellow Bird, citizen of the Sahnish (Arikara) and Hidatsa First Nations, opens with this: “‘American Indian’ and ‘Native American’ are the most common racial and ethnic labels used to identify the general population of Indigenous Peoples in the United States ... neither term has been without controversy, and no clear consensus exists on which label is most preferable” (1). It is no surprise that we—as an occupied “country”—struggle to name ourselves (in some instances) and those who were here pre-contact (in others). If we are to move towards recognizing the unique histories, cultures, and, in Yellow Bird’s term, ethnicities of Natives, we can do so by taking the time and work to *name* Tribes and Nations. Some open calls do use the term “tribe/Tribe” or some variant, but we still have a long way to go.

“Traditional”

What is traditional? What does it mean to be traditional? How does one become “traditional enough?” Is there a hierarchy of who is most traditional? According to the Oxford English Dictionary, which I selected purposefully, “tradition” is a “belief, custom, or way of doing something that has existed for a long time among a particular group of people.” What is a long time? Is longer somehow better? How far back do we go?

I see “tradition” akin to vintage or “old school.” These definitions change as we change, as new generations emerge, explore, and create their own identities. When it comes to what is “traditional” Native American art, there is no consensus—not amongst funders, Tribes, or Nations themselves.

When it came to the calls I analyzed, I was surprised “traditional” did not appear more often. Non-Native led MNHS used it the most, at five times. Their 2021 residency guidelines called for Native artists “working within traditional art forms” in order to, in part, “advance their understanding of the traditional form of art.” The call goes on to clarify that “all forms of traditional art” are welcome. They prioritize those working in “regional traditional media” by which, I believe, they mean “mediums.” One of the requirements is to “Participate in and assist in evaluating two public programs, thereby exposing the MNHS museum audience to traditional Native American art forms.” The non-Native COVID-19 archive “Open Call to Native American Artists for Submissions of Traditionally Crafted Masks” uses the word “traditional” or some

variant thrice. However, considering the call is specifically for “traditionally crafted masks,” this makes sense. The Native-led Center for Native American Youth at the Aspen Institute cover art competition uses “traditional” twice. This occurs when clarifying what type of art qualifies, and “traditional” is just one option. Likewise, NDN Collective used an iteration of traditional, “tradition,” twice. Both times are in the descriptor of who the award is for.

Seven of the calls use “traditional” just once, including NACF LIFT, SHIFT, Peninsula College, Walker Art Center, ahha, IAIA, and UNC-Wilmington. They include a mix of Native-led and non-Native led calls. Of the first five, all used “traditional” as part of a list of clarifying types of art/artists accepted. IAIA does not refer to tradition in terms of type of art or artist, but rather that a “traditional” darkroom is available for photographers. UNC-Wilmington uses the term in their land acknowledgement, with the site being on the “traditional” territory of the Siouan People.

SAIA, the Native-led organization that hosts the Santa Fe Indian Market (the self-proclaimed “largest and most prestigious Native American art market in the world”) seems to have a preference for “traditional” arts. This is not to say that the market does not include a rich myriad of “contemporary” art and artists. It does. However, from at least one Native artist’s perspective, the Native organizers of the largest market in the world seem to be seeking out works that will sell (high) and appeal to non-Native buyers. When I was there in 2017, I found pockets of Native artists selling their goods in tucked-away parking lots, desperate to have a chance to make a living at this “prestigious” event. Their prices were well below what I saw in the “official” market.



Sunrise opening setup of the Santa Fe Indian Market 2017, when I was in the city as a Women's International Study Center writer in residence (personal photo). Image features part of the food vendor area.



One of many Native artists showing her work at the Santa Fe Indian Market 2017 (personal photo).



One of the many shop windows within the confines of the Santa Fe Indian Market, 2017. These necklaces were priced between \$5,000—\$12,000. For comparison, I purchased a turquoise and sterling silver squash blossom necklace from a Navajo maker in Santa Fe in 2022 for \$2,000. Prices are typically much higher during such markets and, of course, in shops (where commission rates can vary widely and can oftentimes benefit, at least in part, non-Native business owners capitalizing on the idea of “authentic Indian jewelry”).

What is traditional is not static. It is dynamic. It is changing *right now* and, increasingly, we—Natives—are the ones behind it, for the first time in 500 years.

The word that I use intimately, “NDN,” did not appear in my analysis except within NDN Collective and was only used to refer to itself, its call, and its (future) recipients. NDN is, of course, an alternative spelling of “Indian” and a form of reclamation (similar in ways to the “N” word being embraced with an alternative spelling that ends in “a”). Why the lack of NDN-ness? I think I know why. I use this term internally, within Native groups, discourse, and communities. It is a way of honoring our many elders who proudly still claim “Indian.” It is a partial reclamation, a partial re-making. It makes it clear we are not *that* kind of Indian.

Increasingly, younger Native creatives are birthing their own vernacular. I am witnessing younger generations re-writing themselves and their lineages, actively de-colonizing in countless ways, including in the language they shape, even when it is in the colonizer’s tongue. It takes courage and patience to exist as a Native person, as a Native artist. Billy-Ray Belcourt explains his own youthful attempt at erasure in his memoir: “I made waste of our history. What’s more, I made myself exist less...as such, I internalized the ugliness of colonialism” (28). We, as a Native people, are done with such self-erasure. However, I exist in a space of mid-age, having lived through earlier attempts at assimilation in childhood while also not being of the younger generation who has been gifted the power and relative security to demand to be seen, to be heard, to be disruptors. As such, I consider myself to be occupying a space of witness and, ultimately, support for these younger NDNs.

The Colonization of Calls

Each of the calls analyzed was posted online. They required myriad submission materials and processes, from emailing proposals to the selection committee to using common platforms like Submittable. Instructions are wholly dependent on being “tech savvy” and having access to technology. It is not uncommon on many reservations or tribal lands to have little to no internet access. According to a 2018 report by National Public Radio (NPR), “Native Americans on tribal land are the least connected to high-speed internet” (Wang), compared to any other demographic per capita.

There are solutions to this disparity, such as organizers reaching out directly to Tribal leaders and advertising on reservations. This takes incredible legwork, time, and money. However, even this is not the only problem. What these calls ask for, and how they ask, is designed to ensure applicants selected have a certain kind of education—mainly a white, colonized one derived from western education systems. These calls, from Native and non-Native organizations alike, are demanding that Native artists operate in a colonized approach to submitting and sharing their art.

In 2021, I served on a selection committee to fund performance artists. I was tasked with “judging” a talented musician. His talent and experience were clear in his video submission. However, he struggled with writing. But what does that matter to his talent and the value of his work? I was the only one who awarded him the highest possible score. I do not mean to shame my fellow committee members—after all, we are all products of colonization. Still, I rallied for

this musician. After some discussion, all but one of the other committee members raised their score for him, and he ultimately was funded.

My experience is not unique. We are in a constant process of decolonization while simultaneously being forced to work within oppressive systems designed to keep us at bay. Technology is a tool that allows access to information and opportunities like never before, and we often forget who we are leaving out.

Conclusion

“What are you?”

This refrain has begun to shift to “What should I call you?” and, in rare moments of awareness, “What do you prefer to be called?” or “Who claims you?” Perhaps we can call this progress. Whitehead suggests, “what means self(:indian, aboriginal, indigenous, native) [questionmark]” (94).³ However, there is no collective Native answer to these questions. Prior to settler contact, every Native language had a term for fellow Tribes. These terms got muddled when contact occurred.

Natives did not have a concept of other humans beyond the confines of what is nowadays often named “North and Central America,” a vast region known as “Turtle Island” by many today. Albeit still in the colonizer’s tongue, “Turtle Island” is called as such because many Native creation stories feature the turtle, often with the reptile carrying the world (land) on its back. Gary Snyder’s collection *Turtle Island* won the 1975 Pulitzer Prize for poetry and notes in the introduction:

Turtle Island—the old/new name for the continent, based on many creation myths of the people who have been living here for millennia, and reapplied by some of them to “North America” in recent years ... a great turtle or serpent-of-eternity. A name: that we may see ourselves more accurately. (Snyder, 1974, Introduction)

Many Tribes and Nations consider “North America” and sometimes “Central America” Turtle Island, while the Ojibwe call the entire world Turtle Island. Before contact, there were no terms for those beyond Turtle Island. How can we have a name for *all of us*, all inhabitants of Turtle Island, when such a name never existed? We just *were*. We just are. Traditionally, we referred to our unique tribes but, of course, it would be too cumbersome to list all the 560+ tribes on forms such as census documents. There simply must be a term to encompass the original inhabitants of this land that is not rooted in settler-colonialism, that does not prioritize one Tribe over another, yet that ideally does not depend on English to do so. This can seem impossible when navigating colonial systems that desperately want to put everyone in a box. Is it impossible? That question has not yet been answered. The world we live in is our Turtle Island inverted, upended.

Contrary to popular belief, turtles can right themselves if they get flipped over—but it takes time, work, and vulnerability. We are moving, correcting *all the time*, no matter the risks posed—or, perhaps, because we have no other choice. Does it matter if such a word is born? I do not know the answer to this, but it is paramount that *we* are the creators. We may be operating much of our lives with the colonizer’s tongue and language, but sometimes it takes an inside job to dismantle

³ This line (spelling, kerning, spacing, grammar, etc.) is correct as it reads in Whitehead’s collection.

a reckless, greed-driven empire. Wright says, “we are left with the problem of what to call [our] peoples” (ix). I say it is not a problem, it is a responsibility.

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