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## Red Pens, White Paper: Wider Implications of Coulthard's Call to Sovereignty

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## Red Pens, White Paper: Wider Implications of Coulthard's Call to Sovereignty

### Abstract

Transcript of a roundtable conversation focused on Glen Coulthard's book *Red Skins, White Masks*.

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## **Red Pens, White Paper: Wider Implications of Coulthard's Call to Sovereignty**

BRIAN BURKHART, DAVID J. CARLSON, BILLY J. STRATTON, THEODORE C. VAN ALST, CAROL EDELMAN WARRIOR

The following began as a plenary roundtable at the Native American Literature Symposium at the Isleta Resort and Casino in Albuquerque, NM, on Thursday March 17, 2016. Participating were Theo (Ted) Van Alst (Uof Montana), Carol Edelman Warrior (Cornell University), Brian Burkhart (California State University, Northridge), Billy Stratton (Uof Denver) and David J. Carlson (California State University, San Bernardino). The material printed here consists of revised versions of the remarks made by the panelists at NALS, reflecting ongoing conversation that continued, over email, after the conference ended.

**VAN ALST:** It's such an honor to be here, and to be assembled with these amazing scholars. I'd like to thank them all for being part of this panel.

The publication of Glen Sean Coulthard's *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* on New Year's Day in 2014 (arriving little more than a year after the recognized beginning of the Idle No More movement) gave many scholars a longer than usual pause at the addition of another book that might fall into the growing canon/canyon of Native sovereignty approaches. However, the text itself provides a number of moments that question the legitimacy of settler states' sovereignty, and we naturally apply that question of legitimacy and legitimation to Native literary production—who or what decides that “Native American Literature” is a genre, a subheading, a college course, an exceedingly small shelf or two in most bookstores?

This ultimately liberating text makes me see through the fallacy of colonial structures, and rage at the fact of their existence, while the colonial state's recognition of my animosity only brings a smile to the face of the settler society that realizes far better than I that my undying enmity is necessary for its survival, my baleful recognition of them and theirs cementing their malignant place in the order of things. But that dance is the easiest one.

So then, how to extricate, expand, elude, or elide? Coulthard's work makes plain the ephemeral nature of the colonial superstructure, and calls us to, in effect, change the base. How

do we do this via artistic production, for many of us then, via writing, and particularly for those of us who write in English?

Coulthard says, “At the heart of Hegel’s master/slave dialectic is the idea that both parties engaged in the struggle for recognition are dependent on the other’s acknowledgement for their freedom and self-worth. Moreover, Hegel asserts that this dependency is even more crucial for the master in the relationship, for unlike the slave he or she is unable to achieve independence and objective self-certainty through the object of his or her own labor.” (39)

The fact aside that without us, without this hemisphere, there is no modernity, only a backwater province of the Ottoman Empire, who *are* these arbiters of genre/label/consumption, and do we *recognize* their position when we write “Native Lit” and in “Native Studies” that we publish with “Native Pes” for distribution onto “Native Shelves” in “Native Sections” of libraries and the few remaining bookstores? Do we dispossess ourselves of artistic/literary sovereignty in acquiescing to the requirements of the publishing world? (*Might it be useful to ask, “What if white people wrote books and no one read them?” What would they do? Do we do what they do? Should we / could we do what they do?*)

Coulthard continues: “Fanon’s position challenges colonized peoples to transcend the fantasy that the settler-state apparatus—as a structure of domination *predicated* on our ongoing dispossession—is somehow capable of producing liberatory effects.” (23) One of those disingenuous liberatory effects is the belief that Indigenous empowerment via literary production is somehow a stage, a phase even—that leads to what? we ask. Grown up big boy/big girl status as Literature That Can Stand On Its Own Two Feet? Or that the Indigenous cultural worker can or should make the leap into a non-Native world and find fame and fortune? Coulthard addresses these questions in part, saying: “Indigenous peoples tend to view their resurgent practices of cultural self-recognition and empowerment as *permanent* features of our decolonial political projects, not transitional ones.” (23)

Here then, we move to apply constructions of “Nativity” to literature, arguably one of our permanent features of decolonialism in the current realm. To be sure, Fanon’s discussion of “culture” encompasses much more than merely literature, but importantly for its producers, Coulthard tells us, “one of Fanon’s lingering concerns is that the cultural forms and traditions exuberantly reclaimed and affirmed by the colonized no longer reflect the dynamic systems that existed prior to the encounter: rather, ‘this culture, once living and open to the future, [has

become] closed, fixed in the colonial status.” (147) Do we do this? Are we beholden to ready semiotic devices, to “corn pollen and feathers,” to relentless mentions of NDNess, of Native things, of cloddy authorial reminders that this is a story written by an Indian? Are there certain calcifying tropes that absolutely must be retained in the service of authenticity, of clear Indigenous literary demarcation? Coulthard answers, albeit from a more generalized position, saying: “The problem here is that the cultural practices that the colonized passionately cling to as a source of pride and empowerment can easily become a cluster of antiquated attachments that divert attention away from the present and future needs of the Indigenous population.” We turn then to a brief look at the function of this colonial recognition.

The discussion of Hegelian dialectics in this passage from the first chapter, “The Politics of Recognition in Colonial Contexts” is particularly germane to our colonial literary conversation:

“Thus, rather than leading to a condition of reciprocity the dialectic either breaks down with the explicit *non*recognition of the equal status of the colonized population, or with the strategic “domestication” of the terms of recognition leaving the foundation of the colonial relationship undisturbed.” (40)

And while literary domestication is our contemporary concern, I think (aptly enough) it is worth noting that “domestication” in all sorts of interpretations has underpinned almost every single colonial project concerning the Indigenous nations of this hemisphere from the moment of contact to, say, any meeting likely taking place right now between a Native student union and a college administrator somewhere in this country.

To begin to close our discussion then, Coulthard tells us that by Chapter 4 of “Red Skins” the futility of “Hegelian or liberal politics of recognition” applied to colonial situations will be evident in its absence from Fanon’s discourse, though of whom he says while not rejecting outright either of those approaches, he did in fact work to focus our attention on “the host of *self-affirmative* cultural practices that colonized peoples often critically engage in to *empower themselves*, as opposed to relying too heavily on the subjectifying apparatus of the state or other dominant institutions of power to do this for them (23).” And here, for literary, theoretical, and critical production, we name the museums, the Pes, the media, and the academy, among others, and I’m hopeful that the role of those institutions will be continuously questioned, starting this morning. Related to such, I have some questions:

Have we been domesticated, has our written production been domesticated?

Despite our efforts, are our colonial foundations “relatively undisturbed?”

What might an absence of colonization have done to and for Native literary production? Would Native literature have absorbed English?

What impact would Native writers have on global literature?

What might true sovereignty do for Native literary production?

How does Native literature offer insights into "reevaluating, reconstructing, and redeploying Indigenous cultural forms" and presenting "radical alternatives" to colonial domination? (48-49).

Finally, what are the book’s implications for U.S. tribal sovereignty, for policy, for literary theory, for nation formation?

Does Native literature offer models of Indigenous praxis and present "radical alternatives" to colonial domination? If so, how?

I would like to end my segment with what I see as the beginning of our conversation, that of Coulthard’s main argument, which is:

“the liberal recognition-based approach to Indigenous self-determination in Canada that began to consolidate itself after the demise of the 1969 White Paper (note\*abolishment of The Indian Act) has not only failed, but now serves to reproduce the very forms of colonial power which our original demands for recognition sought to transcend. This argument will undoubtedly be controversial to many Indigenous scholars and Aboriginal organization leaders insofar as it suggest that much of our efforts over the last four decades to attain settler-state recognition of our rights to land and self-government have in fact encouraged the opposite—the continued dispossession of our homelands and the ongoing usurpation of our self-determining authority.” (23-24)

Where is our self-determining authority in our literary and artistic production, and what does it mean? Who defines it, and how?

I look forward to everyone’s answers to these and other questions.

**CARLSON:** The particular topic that I wanted to throw into the mix for discussion is Coulthard’s engagement with Karl Marx. The Marxist concept that matters most to Coulthard in *Red Skins, White Masks* is that of primitive accumulation. In Marx’s usage, primitive

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accumulation refers to the historical processes of violent dispossession whereby the “commons” possessed by non-capitalist producers are transformed and privatized in ways that facilitate the emergence of capitalist society. For Coulthard, the full utility of the concept in understanding and critiquing settler-colonial society can only be realized through its dialectical re-interpretation. Marx’s insights must be revised in light of indigenous experience and critique. Doing so leads to abandoning certain problematic aspects of Marx’s theory. These would include: (1) the idea that primitive accumulation took place and ended in the historical past; (2) the idea that primitive accumulation is part of an inevitable evolution towards communism *through* industrial capitalism; and (3) the idea that primitive accumulation only takes place through overtly coercive means. Indigenizing “primitive accumulation” suggests, instead, that the co-optation of the commons (in the form of land, in particular) is an ongoing, and often more insidious process, one that should not be accepted as a historical inevitability. For Coulthard, this insight stands at the heart of the theory and practice of the Idle No More movement, among other examples of recent activism.

In picking up and re-purposing a key Marxist concept, it seems to me that *Red Skin, White Masks* productively re-starts a conversation about the relationship between indigenous epistemologies and the Marxist and Post-Marxist left, one that has been rather dormant for the last twenty or thirty years. The fact that Coulthard does so in a work that is so clearly critical of the dangers involved in superficial or overly conciliatory engagements with discourses emerging from settler-colonial societies is equally striking. As I read it, *Red Skin, White Masks* picks up a debate that largely dead-ended with Ward Churchill’s 1983 collection *Marxism and Native Americans* and tries to breathe new life into it. It does so by suggesting that a truly dialectical relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous “theory” can yield both new critical concepts and new forms of political praxis. Personally, I think this insight derives from the fact that (many) indigenous epistemologies are extremely dialectical, in ways, quite frankly, that western theories often only aspire to be (despite their pretensions). In my own work on Gerald Vizenor, I’ve regularly tried to suggest that what Vizenor calls “natural reason” is, in many respects, a form of dialectics that is arguably consistent with Marx’s methods of inquiry. Frank Black Elk’s contribution to Churchill’s volume, “Marxism and Lakota Tradition” makes a similar argument in picking up on the centrality of the concept of “relation” in both systems of thought.

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The first suggestion I'd like to throw out here, then, is that Coulthard's book reminds readers of how far many of us in the field of Native Studies are from truly taking tribal epistemologies seriously as philosophical systems and sources of critical activity. While his explicit focus is on the concept of “primitive accumulation,” the deeper connection he points out between Marxist and indigenous thought is at the level of *method*. If we build on that insight, I think *Red Skin, White Masks* further suggests that western theory can itself be dialectically transformed when brought into contact with indigenous experiences and knowledge. We need to dispense with Bering Strait models of theoretical transmission, in other words. This was a point made thirty years ago by some of the contributors to Churchill's book, and it is an insight that is relevant to *all* forms of theory, including literary theory.

This leads me to the second suggestion. As some of you may know, my own critical work tries to focus on the ways that literature intersects and interacts with politics and activism, and on the manner in which indigenous ways of thinking, writing, and telling represent meaningful forms of resistance to settler colonialism. As such, I am someone who feels a degree of sadness and anxiety as I watch the ways in which Native Studies recently seems to be turning its back on literature and literary studies in favor of the social sciences. Ask yourself what the big books in the field are in recent years. You are likely to call to mind titles like *Red Skin, White Masks* or Audra Simpson's *Mohawk Interruptus* (innovative works of political science and anthropology). I don't want to let the fact that I am part of a panel discussing the first of these at NALS suggest that I am throwing in the towel. What I would suggest instead is that there is great value for us, as literary scholars, in wrestling with a book like *Red Skins, White Masks* at the level of method. Read in that way, Coulthard's book reminds us that Native literary study benefits from deep, sustained efforts to interrogate and transform its very language and methods. For all its flaws, I admire much of Craig Womack's work for his efforts along these lines. To the extent that we here ARE doing that kind of work, we need to tell the story better, and encourage younger scholars in the field to experiment boldly. And to the extent that we aren't satisfied with our efforts along these lines, we might, perhaps, try to take inspiration from the way Coulthard revisits and sublates an old concept from Marx to make new thought. I'm eager to see more and more of this transformative work coming out of NALS. I want to see us experiment more boldly with our own concepts—with ideas like symbolism, or the reader, or the book.



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Recently, I was considering some examples of the potential that can be released through the dialectical transformation of literary, legal, and political concepts. I'll just mention a few here, as a vehicle for spurring further discussion. Consider, for example, how both Vine Deloria and John Mohawk, in different works, draw attention to the political power of reimagining what is meant by "The People." Deloria develops this idea in terms of U.S. constitutionalism in *We Talk, You Listen*. Mohawk's essays on the nature of Haudenosaunee political life (most readily accessible in the *John Mohawk Reader*) make interesting points about how the nature of political authority and the sense of how it is exercised is shaped by our sense of the relationship between individuals and the broader polity, mediated through the concept of peoplehood. There are further points of connection here with the work of Mark Rifkin and Kevin Bruyneel, all of which, taken together, reveal interesting ways that literature, storytelling, and political theory can come together.

For a second example of the importance of the dialectical transformation of concepts, we might consider a term like "claims" (I think this ties in with some of Carol's thoughts. Maybe "resentment" is also a key element underlying dialectical change in the present moment?) In his recent book on the federal Indian claims process in the U.S., *Hollow Justice*, David Wilkins offers up an interesting definition of a claim. "A claim is neither a request, nor a demand," he notes. "It is an appeal to a standard of justice, but also an assertion of willingness to back that appeal up with action." That's clearly not exactly the way the U.S. Court of Indian Claims has defined the term, of course, for there, it is more or less a form of tort (the payment of compensation). This, of course, calls to mind much of what Coulthard dislikes about the discourse of reconciliation in a Canadian context. Wilkins' counter-definition represents an interesting and important provocation, though, in a spirit that I think Coulthard would appreciate. In places, *Hollow Justice* seems to call for the start of a dialectical transformation of the concept of the claim, a process that literature and literary study can certainly play a role in, in part at least by advancing different types of narratives that underpin "appeals to standards of justice."

There are other examples I could throw out here. What about the concept of "reading" when that act is understood in dialogue with the oral tradition? Might Native Studies offer ways of thinking about text/reader that potentially transforms reader-response paradigms? What about figures like Gerald Vizenor, or N. Scott Momaday, or George Morrison, whose work suggests how indigenous writing, art, and theory can redefine modernism, and by extension "modernity,"

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an important topic indeed for indigenous peoples who continue to be disadvantaged by the discourses of western temporality. I'll stop here, though, with the hope that some of these points will strike others as worth picking up for further discussion.

**WARRIOR:** My responses are to the chapter called “Seeing Red,” in which Coulthard writes about the relationship between the politics of recognition and the trend of nation states to offer official apologies to surviving victims of state violence and other systemic abuses. The goal is to elicit forgiveness from the survivors—ostensibly, to foster “healing” between the parties, so that the nation can “move forward,” and of course, moving forward in this case means to proceed to control a population, but with more willing subjects. It's like an abusive spouse who, after knocking their partner around, says, “I'm sorry, honey, I'll never do that again. Please forgive me.” What if the partner were to say “no”? The apology is accompanied by a demand, rather than a request. And, like an abused spouse, the colonized population is expected to acquiesce—to forgive, and to forget—and they risk retaliation if they don't comply.

Using the discourse of reconciliation, settler colonial states Pure Indigenous peoples to accept conciliatory overtures, but only on the states' terms. These demands are underpinned by what Thomas Brudholm, writing on transitional justice, and quoted by Coulthard calls, the “logic of forgiveness”—which is the “normative assumption”—that forgiveness is “good,” and anger is not only “bad,” but is something that is sure to fester, preventing the wounds from healing (107). Of course, the roots of the “logic of forgiveness” are also familiar in everything from Christian dogma, to Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*, as Coulthard points out to both medical psychiatry and pop psychology. Individuals and collectives who won't or can't forgive are seen as being backward, reactive, and irrational—or, to trace it further, childlike and primitive (111). It's the source of the judgmental comment that we've all heard, “Why can't you people just get over it and move on?”

But Coulthard is an advocate of resentment as a necessary, transformative step toward decolonization. He differentiates resentment from anger, explaining that there are any number of things that a person or a people can be angry about, but *resentment* is a particular kind of anger that's always political—that is, it is concerned with power, and is generated in response to a perceived injustice (110).

Like Fanon, Coulthard thinks that resentment on the part of colonized people has a powerful “transformative potential,” that “can help prompt the very forms of self-affirmative praxis that generate rehabilitated Indigenous subjectivities and decolonized forms of life in ways that the combined politics of recognition and reconciliation has so far proven itself incapable of doing” (109). Though Coulthard doesn’t present a rosy picture of Indigenous resentment that is in any way immune from turning inward to self-hate and lateral violence—in fact, he explicitly warns that resentment can get stuck at this stage—he *also* demonstrates that resentment in response to injustice “represent[s]” a “coming-to-consciousness of the colonized,” allowing the colonized to *exorcise* internal colonization. He writes that resentment, then, is the *externalization* of that which was previously *internalized*: a purging,” of what the colonized had formerly accepted as “one’s own deficiencies” (114).

So—what does this have to do with Native literature? Well, Coulthard is interested in the resurgence of Indigenous transformative praxis, and I would argue that Indigenous literary “traditions” play an important role in that process, first, because they depict ways to be in respectful place-based relationships, or, they depict the devastation that occurs when those relationships are *disrespected*. In an earlier chapter, Coulthard also explains that, “Indigenous struggles against capitalist imperialism are best understood as struggles oriented around the question of *land*—struggles not only *for* land, but also deeply *informed* by what the land as a mode of reciprocal *relationships* [...] ought to teach us about living our lives in relation to one another and our surroundings in a respectful, nondominating and nonexploitative way. The ethical framework provided by these place-based practices and associated forms of knowledge is [called] ‘grounded normativity’ (60).”

Second, in many cases—from origin stories to contemporary Indigenous fiction—coming to a place of “grounded normativity” is something Indigenous storytellers have their characters perform, in something like an Indigenized *bildungsroman*. Such characters *also* go through transformations from colonized subjectivities to decolonized subjectivities. They pass through a phase of internal colonization, which then, through the movement of the plot, becomes externalized—and the resulting resentment that the character bears is, not always, but often enough, depicted as a righteous, slow-burning rage that’s prevented from being turned against the self through experience, and through training. Eventually, we see characters enact that thing that Coulthard refers to: place-based “grounded normativity.” These characters’ transformations

occasionally precede their participation in “direct action” against colonization. Reading a character’s transformation through resentment can actually be inspirational, opening up the readers’ conception of a possible self or possible selves as decolonized subjects.

Native literatures draw clear connections between settler colonial praxis and Indigenous suffering, and thus the literatures participate in consciousness-raising of Native readers. Indigenous readers experience an affective response when learning, through literature, that the subjection they (or we) experience isn’t limited to our own family or our own tribe. When learning through such literatures that the abuse is systemic and systematic, readers respond in ways that line up precisely with what Coulthard calls an “externalization of that which was previously internalized.” Most of us have experienced this process ourselves, and as I look out in this audience, I bet all of us repeatedly witness this same consciousness blossoming in our students as well.

In this way, Indigenous creative works inspire Indigenous readers and audiences to produce and sustain justifiable, and hopefully utilizable resentment against state- or settler-inflicted dispossession and colonial abuses, and such literature can thus prepare and arm people to *resist* narratives that Pure Indigenous peoples to forgive and reconcile before material change in the structures of colonial dominance is secured.

After becoming conscious of this clear connection between Indigenous literature and the transformation Coulthard elucidates in “Seeing Red,” the question that I’m left grappling with, is how, exactly, does Native literature offer insights into “reevaluating, reconstructing, and redeploying Indigenous cultural forms,” and present “radical alternatives” to colonial domination *without* redeploying the romantic tropes of being “children of nature,” or, as Ted has said, without reminding the reader every twelve lines that “this is an Indian book” (48-49).

**BURKHART:** The indigenous struggle for decolonial liberation has become increasingly a struggle for recognition by settler states, which of course ironically are the source of continued colonization. In *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* Coulthard argues that “the liberal recognition-based approach of Indigenous self-determination in Canada” not only fails but actually “serves to reproduce the very forms of colonial power which the original demands for recognition sought to transcend” (23-24). Coulthard conceptualizes the liberation from this vitiating circle of domination of colonial power through the politics of

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recognition as beginning by bracketing the legitimacy of the settler state and its power to recognize Indigenous nations as itself a function of settler colonial power. Through this bracketing of the legitimacy of the settler state and settler state power, one can perhaps analyze the manner in which the settler state is able to reproduce the very colonial power that is supposed to be renegotiated in the process of recognizing the legitimacy of Indigenous nations. One might come to see how the process of recognition redirects Indigenous liberation strategies into movements that reproduce settler power rather than liberate Indigenous people from it. As Mohawk philosopher Taiaiake Alfred puts it, “our nations have been co-opted into movements of “self-government” and “land claim settlements,” which are goals defined by the colonial state and which are in stark opposition to our original objectives... Large-scale statist solutions like self-government and land claims are not so much lies as they are irrelevant to the root problems. For a long time now, we have been on a quest for governmental power and money; somewhere along the journey from the past to the future, we forgot that our goal was to reconnect with our lands and to preserve our harmonious cultures and ways of life” (2005, 31).

Coulthard also recognizes the origin of Indigenous liberation in the land. As he puts it, “[t]he theory and practice of Indigenous anticolonialism is best understood as a struggle primarily inspired by and oriented around the question of land—a struggle not only for land in the material sense, but also deeply informed by what the land as system of reciprocal relations and obligations can teach us about living our lives in relation to one another and the natural world in nondominating and nonexploitative terms” (13). Coulthard calls “this place-based foundation of Indigenous decolonial thought and practice grounded normativity,” or “the modalities of Indigenous land-connected practices and longstanding experiential knowledge that inform and structure our ethical engagements with the world and our relationships with human and nonhuman others over time” (13). This foundation of Indigenous liberation in the Indigenous meaning of land is transformed into a foundation of Indigenous liberation as a struggle for land itself, which is a conception of land fundamentally at odds with the Indigenous meaning of land that was at the foundation of Indigenous liberation in the first place. Thus by the end of Coulthard’s chapter on his own Indigenous nation’s (the Dene) struggle regarding land he shows that “the meaning of self-determination” for many Indigenous people has “reoriented from Indigenous struggle that was once deeply informed by the land as a system of reciprocal relations and obligations (grounded normativity) to a struggle now increasingly for land” (78). The

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problem with Coulthard’s position regarding the transformation of the foundation of Indigenous liberation in the Indigenous relationship *with* land into a struggle *for* land is that it only looks for the source of this transformation in the colonial power of the settler state itself. It is my claim that the nature of the transformation is not housed in the power of the settler state but in the very conceptions of land and being in the Western philosophical imagination. It is only through an engagement with the philosophical concepts of land and being that one can grasp the nature of Indigenous liberation through the land and the manner in which coloniality operates to transform that liberation into settler power.

Coulthard uses Fanon to challenge “colonized people to transcend the fantasy that the settler-state apparatus is somehow capable of producing liberatory effects” (23). In Fanon’s conception, without a break from the structure of colonial power, the best the colonized can hope for is “white liberty and white justice” (*Black Skin, White Masks*, 221). Fanon claims that without establishing themselves as the creators of their own values and conceptions of their identity and its political relationship to the colonial state, colonized peoples will eventually be subtly shaped by the “seep” of colonial values that will undermine the possibilities of their liberation (*The Wretched of the Earth*, 9). The problem is that the recognition-based subjectivity is founded in a fundamental irrationality in the first place. The “seep” of colonial values and concepts happens at the level of the very concept of being human, of being a human subject in the first place.

Enrique Dussel details in a number of his works the foundation of the modern human subject in the ego conquiro (I conquer) that is a prototype of the Cartesian ego cogito (I think). Descartes’ ego cogito appears as a mere rational principle that attempts to defeat skepticism regarding knowledge of the external world. But as Nelson Maldonado-Torres argues the ego cogito arises from the ego conquiro as responses to “Manichean misanthropic skepticism,” which “is not skeptical about the existence of the world or the normative status of logics and mathematics,” but is “a form of questioning the very humanity of colonized peoples” (2007, 245). The ego conquiro and ego cogito overcome this skepticism of the humanity of the other through the creation of an ego that is undoubtable or unquestionable. The Manichean other to this undoubtable or unquestionable ego is relegated to the savage state. The savage other is no longer doubtable or questionable (as he or she is in the Inquisition) but is completely known as the dominated other. The domination of the savage other solidifies the claim to confidence that is

placed in the undoubtable and unquestionable ego. This domination is what brings the unquestionable ego into being. Its logical unquestionableness is manifested into an actual unquestionableness through the initial and continual domination of the savage other. It is through colonial domination that the ego of European humanness is fully actualized and the skepticism regarding the humanity of the Indigenous other is fully determined in the oppositional savage or non-human, dominatable other.

The irrationality of the Indigenous being becoming recognized as fully human is here exposed. The ego of European humanness exists only in relation to the non-human other. Thus, Indigenous being can only become human by becoming what it is not: European. Alternatively, Indigenous being can become an approximation of what it is not through the approximation of European being by approximating the ego conquiro. This is why even though Hegel's recognition-based subjectivity seeks to situate human subjectivity, in contrast to the seemingly solipsistic ego cogito, in relations of recognition that are constitutive of human subjectivity, the ego conquiro is maintained in recognition-based subjectivity and politics of recognition. Dialectically the colonizer/colonized relationship is supposed to move beyond the ego conquiro through mutual relations of recognition. Relations of recognition must move beyond the master and slave, "beyond the patterns of domination" (Williams, 16), a seemingly impossible task even in concept. Hegel's dominating subjectivity cannot move beyond this domination in relation to the savage other, I would argue. The savage other has become essentially savage and so can only become the kind of subjectivity that can recognize the colonizer in so far as he or she becomes something she is not. The only way the savage can hope to even approximate the kind of being that could give the colonizer the mutual recognition that Hegel claims he or she desires is to approximate the subjectivity of the colonizer, the ego conquiro.

Fanon sees the trap of the master/slave or colonizer/colonized through a lens of struggle. The liberation of colonized people through Hegel's dialectical progression to mutual recognition is undermined by the lack of struggle in present colonial contexts. Unlike Hegel's master/slave story, colonizer and colonized are not locked in a life or death struggle. In colonized societies, "the White Master, without conflict, recognize[s] the Negro slave" (Fanon, 1952, 217). "The black man," he writes is "acted upon." Values "not created by his actions" or "born of the systolic tide of his blood" are thrown upon him from without. Thus being set free by the master here means nothing to the slave. The slave goes "from one way of life to another, but not from

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one life to another” (220). For Fanon, it is through struggle and conflict, which he understands as often necessarily violent, that colonized peoples can shrug off the coloniality of their being. This kind of conflict is necessary on Fanon’s account in order for recognition to achieve self-transformation for the colonized subject, for her to achieve the “inner differentiation” at the level of her colonized being that is necessary to achieve the realization of freedom (Turner, 146). This is what Fanon understands as the break that is necessary for colonial struggles for “Liberty and Justice” to not merely be struggles for “white liberty and white justice,” a non-alienated identification with the recognition conferred upon the slave by the master (Fanon, 1952, 221)

Coulthard rightly questions Fanon’s instrumental view of the decolonial struggle. Coulthard points out that this view of colonial resistance does not match the views and practices of Indigenous people in their decolonial liberation strategies, particularly in the context of First Nations in Canada. Fanon does not see a deeper Indigenous resistance that already exists in the Indigenous relationship to land. Fanon thinks struggle is necessary for the colonized to differentiate, to begin to become aware of the deepest manners in which his being is colonized. But from the perspective of Indigeneity and its ontological connection to land, Fanon’s claim is not true. What creates the alienation from the coloniality of being that is necessary to manifest true acts of decolonial resistance is our ontological kinship, as Indigenous people, with the land. In this way, our being is never colonized to the point at which we do not experience the alienation of coloniality that Fanon thinks often requires a life or death struggle with the colonizer to achieve. No matter how powerful the colonial operation on human subjectivity through the *ego conquiro*, there is always a remainder of our Indigenous being that quite literally is in the land. Being is itself, in the context of Indigeneity, an ordinary and continual manifestation out of the land. It is thus this core of our being as Indigenous people that originates out of and continues to exist in the land, that provides the differentiation necessary to begin decolonial resistance—and not, as Fanon says, the struggle itself. Because of this lack of understanding of the intersection of Indigeneity and land that both creates the capacity of coloniality in the first place and means that colonialism will necessarily always be incomplete, Fanon cannot see the scope of the possibilities of decolonial resistance that can exist outside and transcend the vitiation circle of human subjectivity, the politics of recognition, and the life or death struggle between the colonizer and the colonized.



**STRATTON:** Glen Coulthard's *Red Skin, White Masks* serves as an especially prescient elaboration of the concern that Louis Owens expressed in his essay "As if an Indian Were Really an Indian: Native Voices and Postcolonial Theory" (adapted from a chapter of the same name in his 2001 book *I Hear the Train: Reflections, Inventions, Refractions*), which appears in Gretchen Bataille's edited collection, *Native American Representations: First Encounters, Distorted Images, and Literary Appropriations*. Writing on the inherent challenges of being a scholar or teacher whose work focuses on native American literature he states:

We are very properly expected to have and exhibit a crucial knowledge of canonical European and Euro-American literature; if we fail to be familiar with Shakespeare, Chaucer, Proust, Flaubert, Dickinson, Faulkner, Eliot, Joyce, Pound, Yeats, Keats, Woolf, Tolstoy, Tennyson, and so forth—not to mention the latest poststructuralist theory—we are simply not taken seriously and probably will not earn a degree in the first place. That, it is presumed, is the foundational knowledge, the "grand narrative of legitimation" in our particular field. (12)

*Red Skins, White Masks* is a work that not only addresses the theory and praxis of decolonization and postcolonial theory, but also articulates a critical stance that is self-reflexively positioned as an intervention that grapples with the dynamic valences that exist between global indigenous studies and continental philosophy.

In chapter one, for example, Coulthard interrogates Charles Taylor's widely influential essay "The Politics of Recognition," published in Amy Gutman's edited volume, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (1995). Coulthard utilizes a deconstructive approach in his analysis to show that Taylor's conception of identity formation is "shaped not only by recognition, but also its *absence*, often by the misrecognition of others" (30). One of Coulthard's primary concerns extends from the observation that structures of explicit colonial domination cannot be eliminated through the vehicle of "state recognition and accommodation," and are, in fact only transformed in the process (32). This insight is offered as the provocation for his challenge to oppressive epistemologies that function to reduce "a man among men" to "an object [among] other objects" (32).

While this critique is deeply informed by indigenous knowledge, giving substance to Coulthard's commitment to the praxis of First Nations/native sovereignty his broader claims are bolstered by support drawn from the work of Taiaiake Alfred. In Alfred's *Peace, Power,*

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*Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto* (1999), self-determination is conceived as the “asset of values that challenges the homogenizing force of Western liberalism and free-market capitalism,” while “honor[ing] the autonomy of individual conscience, non-coercive authority, and the deep interconnection between human beings and other elements of creation” (quoted in Coulthard).

Seeking to address the resistance to such ideas on a wide plane of political, social, and philosophical fronts, Coulthard also explores the work of continental philosophers and cultural critics such as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Michel Foucault, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Louis Althusser while drawing on Franz Fanon’s critique of “psycho-affective attachments” to “master-sanctioned forms of recognition” to help formulate an essential foundation for his ideas (26).

For Coulthard’s more sophisticated readers, especially those working within the fields of Native American/Indigenous studies, this philosophically engaged approach raises some complex questions about the relationship between indigenous knowledge and western knowledge, as well as the relevance and applicability of the latter for native/indigenous scholars, activists and communities. Representing a provocative incursion into these discursive fields it seems that Coulthard’s deep and sustained engagement with such discourse, which is both transhistoric and transcultural, could, perhaps, be seen as the philosophical equivalent of what Gloria Bird and Joy Harjo have termed “reinventing the enemy’s language.”

Furthermore, Coulthard’s text can also be seen as a call for the unification of anti-colonial and de-colonial knowledge in the form of classic Marxist theory, as well as neo-Marxist and structuralist orientations that have tended to be overlooked, or under-utilized in native/indigenous studies as it has thus far been formulated and applied. The reliance upon these Western forms of knowledge by critics such as Taylor, Nancy Fraser, and others, demands Coulthard’s engagement and offers a particularly fertile opportunity to return them to their origins, as it were.

In terms of postcolonial theory, Coulthard likewise extends the critiques offered by other native/indigenous and indigenous studies scholars such as Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Louis Owens, Jodi Bryd, Chadwick Allen, and Dale Turner who have addressed the long history and after-effects of colonialism in ways that have inexplicably escaped the notice of critics such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, while being conspicuously overlooked in Ashcroft,

Griffiths and Tiffin's seminal postcolonial text *The Empire Writes Back* (1989).

Louis Owens was among the first native American critics to address the perplexing absence of native/indigenous historical experience and literary perspectives from the growing body of postcolonial theory. Returning again to his observations on the absence of native perspectives in this discourse, Owens provocatively states: "It is difficult to take seriously any cultural or critical theorist who is ignorant of this rapidly growing body of work, or who, if he or she is aware of it, clearly relegates it to a 'minor,' 'subjugated,' or 'deterritorialized' knowledge worthy of only silence or erasure" (13-14). As a rejoinder to this, Coulthard reminds us that "colonial powers will only recognize the collective rights and identities of Indigenous peoples insofar as this recognition does not throw into question the background legal, political, and economic framework of the colonial relationship itself" (*Red Skins* 41).

These points of contact, of course, offer particularly fruitful avenues for the consideration of native storytelling/literature as an essential domain for the manifestation of collective *self*-recognition through "the establishment of relationships within and between peoples and the natural world built on principles of reciprocity and respectful coexistence" (*Red Skins* 48). Works such as Gerald Vizenor's *Blue Ravens*, Gordon Henry's *The Light People*, Franci Washburn's *Elsie's Business*, as well as the poetry of Luci Tapahonso, as typified by her work, "That American Flag" and "In 1864," and many others, bespeak the capacity of native writers and scholars to reflect on the postcolonial experience in significant ways. At the same time, such work highlights the foundational role that native American/First Nation and indigenous storytelling, in all of its previous and modern forms, plays in the continuation of such discourse.

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