Diane Glancy and Linda Rodriguez, eds. *The World Is One Place: Native American Poets Visit the Middle East*. University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2016. 128 pp. ISBN 978-1-943491-07-0.

http://www.newletters.org/bkmk-books/the-world-is-one-place

Editor Diane Glancy commences her Foreword by stating "The earth is language. The land essentially is story" (11). Glancy's statements provide a road map for the collection. Language, land, and story intertwine and permeate the assorted poems. Indigenous poets of diverse tribal affiliations embark on individual projects exploring questions of language, land, story, and indigeneity within a global context. The realm of the poetic allows for the exploration of cultural and linguistic boundaries and how they function on individual and collective levels. The collection expresses the journeys of the diverse poets who visited different regions of the Middle East. The collection is thus itself a journey across the pages, transferring readers (and poets) through time and space to Turkey, Syria, Jordan, and other places. The collection will prove useful in a number of contexts and learning environments: in particular I would highly recommend it be taught in American Indian studies classes, Middle Eastern classes, and comparative and world literature classes.

Three sections comprise the text: "Place, "People," and "Spirit." This division might be misleading, as the three concepts pervade the collection. One of the unique aspects of this text is the inclusion of work notes by the poets, preceding their poems. The work notes contextualize the creative pieces and act as road maps for how properly to read and absorb the words. Mvskoke Creek poet and musician Joy Harjo opens the first section, "Place," with her piece *Refugee.* The poem is set in the Palestinian city of Bethlehem, a city famous as the birthplace of Jesus, and indeed the speaker provides a brief summary of the Nativity. Harjo mentions that "Jesus became a healer. Walked far to help others, and to show that we, too, are healers" (19). We move from the historic and religious past to the harsh contemporary reality of Palestinians living in refugee camps. Harjo ends up staying with the Palestinian students "in a home that could have been my grandparents' house…" (20). The speaker laments the violence against the people and the land, forging connections with her tribal land in the United States, thereby affirming the oneness between all peoples and lands.

Navajo poet Bojan Louis connects the Armenian genocide with the Navajo Long Walk through his depiction of an ethnically Armenian band in "System of a Down." He attempts to reconcile these connections during his time in Turkey and the Turkish regime's adamant refusal to acknowledge the genocide. While in Turkey, Louis states "Every town I visit beyond the city, I'm tempted to ask, What's with Armenia? Everyone's forgotten, yeah?" (27). Silence blankets Turkey in regard to the Armenians who were massacred. The wordplay in "everyone's forgotten" connotes the people who have forgotten, as well as the forgotten, murdered Armenians. His mind transports him to Philadelphia, where the same propensity to forget the atrocities committed against Native peoples also lingers. The speaker gives advice on the suitable ways to bury

genocides and become complicit: "Help snip the thread of sewn-shut lips…Don't forget to say, thank you, always" (28). Silence, complicity, and forgetfulness plague both Turkey and the United States, rendering the people accessory to the crimes.

In the section entitled "People," Mohawk writer James Thomas Stevens tells the story of an ill-fated trip to Jordan which witnessed the cancelling of an all-Natives poetry festival. He and other poets decide to salvage the trip. His poem, *We Are,* captures the hospitality of Jordanians and the beauty of the country. Stevens speaks of attempts by Jordanians to identify him and Native poets of other tribal affiliations:

> *Where from? Who?*
> *Yes. America, but no*.
> The only way to signify--a feather
> at the back of the head.
> *Sauvagi!*
> We register
> displeasure-- *a yes, but no.*
> A third offers, *Al honood al humr.*
> Explains, Red Indians (56)

The efforts to identify their origins convey the power and dominance of mainstream Western cultural exports of Native peoples. The Jordanians they are speaking with recognize them as "savages" and "Red Indians." Stevens and his group manage to enjoy the people and the place despite this earlier misstep. The speaker says they "[read] poems in people's homes, in deserts, in cafés…*You have no family here, so we are your family"* (57). Words bring people together, salvaging the failed conference, and allowing Stevens to convey his fascination and connection with Jordan.

The final section of the book, "Spirit," includes an imagined poetic experience of Afghanistan. Fort Mojave writer and language activist Natalie Diaz creates fictional experiences of a made-up version of her brother who served in the U.S. military. She labels the poem *The Elephants* in reference to the Quranic s*urah* (section) named *Al-Fil* (The Elephant), and as a metaphor for the army tanks. Diaz's fictional brother remains haunted by the horrific war experiences he encountered. The speaker begins the poem "My brother still hears the tanks when he is angry--they rumble like a herd of hot green elephants…" (94). The poem addresses the fluidity of time and space. The brother cannot escape the war, internalizing the landscape with all the events he witnessed. Both countries bleed into each other as a manifestation of her brother's PTSD. The speaker comments "The heat from guns he'll never let go-rises up from his fists like a desert mirage…" (95). The speaker employs imagery from the Afghani desert to convey her brother's trauma. It serves as further proof of the interrelation between the disparate landscapes and their convergence in her brother's psyche.

As someone from Egypt, I consider the Arab world (and by extension) the Middle East to be my home. In light of this, my only qualms with this collection are the unfortunate Orientalizing and fetishizing tendencies. The same stereotypical images reproduced in literatures in the West on the Middle East are recurrent here. Some of these examples include "veiled" and "unveiled" women, "the call to prayer," references to wars, terrorists, Scheherazade, and other images and motifs. The "Othering" perpetuated by Western intellectuals and writers is reproduced in the collection.

Editor Linda Rodriguez closes the collection with an article titled "Are Our Hands Clean? A Meditation on the Middle East and the United States." Rodriguez addresses American interference in the Middle East, including policy-making, land exploitation, invading Middle Eastern countries, and other forms of interference. The essay reads as a confessional and an attempt to acknowledge the vicarious guilt felt by Americans who disagree with U.S. foreign policy. She writes "As a person of indigenous heritage and an American citizen and taxpayer, I weep at what is being done in my name and with my money" (107). She acknowledges the wrongs committed by the United States against Middle Easterners. I do think there are generalizing and stereotyping tendencies here as well. People from the Middle East are never given names or faces. Rodriguez mentions specific countries by name, however, the region is still regarded as a monolithic entity (an unfortunate trend in Western discourse). Rodriguez raises a call to action against injustices everywhere and to change the world for the better. She posits that in the face of overwhelming helplessness, the only recourse is to "sing," referring to the present collection as "our song" (108). "Singing" might be the only resort, but in response to Rordiguez's question of whether "our hands can be clean," the unfortunate answer is "no."

Dalia Ebeid, University of Arizona / Cairo University