Do You Recognize Who I Am? Decolonizing Rhetorics in Indigenous Rock Opera *Something Inside is Broken*

SHANNON TOLL

> Dear Dr. Miranda,
>
> What is your source for this? "In the 65 years that the California Missions were run by the Catholic Church, the numbers of California Indians went from about one million to 350,000."
>
> Mr. D. Thomas
> Theology Department
> Saint Junípero Serra, pray for us!
> Junípero Serra High School
>
> - "A Short Correspondence About a Long Story," *Bad NDNS*

The excerpt above is from a blog post by Chumash/Esselen writer and scholar Deborah A. Miranda, entitled "A Short Correspondence about a Long Story," on her website *Bad NDNS*. The post is a transcript of an email exchange with "D. Thomas" (a pseudonym she gave the inquirer to protect his identity), a Theology teacher at Junipero Serra High School.[1] In response to the question above, Miranda politely offers a thorough explication of the available research on the subject, only to be met by resistance from D. Thomas, who continues questioning Miranda's findings and expertise in the name of being "fair." In the face of Miranda's meticulous enumeration of the myriad ways the mission system resulted in the precipitous decline of Indigenous population (i.e. measles, displacement of traditional food practices by European agriculture, physical and sexual violence) and her refutation of his notion of "fairness," D. Thomas can only respond "I am sorry that my question offended you. I am Catholic. Your assertion deals with my history" ("A Short Correspondence").

This anecdote highlights the emotional labor Indigenous people are constantly compelled to expend on unwilling listeners such as D. Thomas, whose incredulity and insistence on

protecting what he calls "my history" is a microcosm of settler-colonial denial of Indigenous experiences of this *shared* history; the history of stolen spaces and the mythologies that protect the claims and the feelings of individuals who fear any narrative that undermines their own. Native California scholars, artists, and writers like Miranda and Jack Kohler—the creator of the Indigenous rock opera *Something Inside Is Broken*—are actively telling their histories and questioning California's celebration of its own history, which is mired in greed, racism, and outright theft in the name of 'progress.' *Something Inside is Broken* dramatizes the Nisenan people's experience of settler-colonialism, focusing particularly on the Gold Rush era and its broadly celebrated frontiersmen, such as Johann Sutter and Kit Carson.

Told from the perspective of Nisenan women, who were the subject of Sutter's sexual exploitation and slavery, the opera literally gives a voice to Indigenous experience that was otherwise historically silenced. Kohler explains how this work rights the wrongs of historical record, writing that "[s]eldom do we hear the stories of the women whose bodies, lives, and children were sacrificed to the men of the dominant culture in order for there to be some chance of survival" ("Author's Note 1). Kohler, founder of the *On Native Ground* media network and a member of the Hoopa Valley tribe in Northwestern California, co-authored *Something Inside is Broken* with Alan Wallace, a Nisenan storyteller. The men began collaborating on the production after Wallace attended a rock show that featured some students from Kohler's after-school program. Wallace shared Nisenan stories with the young people, who encouraged Wallace and Kohler to write a musical sharing the Native stories they were not reading in their assigned textbooks. Ultimately, Kohler and Wallace collaborated with half a dozen Indigenous California tribes to write, produce, and then present *Something Inside is Broken* throughout California and the Southwest (Trimble).

It is through the character of Lizzie Johnson, a Nisenan woman and daughter of star-crossed lovers Iine and Maj Kyle, that these canonically elided effects are explored, notably in her scenes set during the Congressional hearing for the State Appropriation Act of 1906. Lizzie is in attendance in order to pursue "appropriation" for her tribesmen and other displaced California tribes, who experienced first the theft of their ancestral homelands, and then subsequently the 'disappearance' of treaties that guaranteed them land, treaties which were actually hidden away under an oath of secrecy by the State Senate for 53 years (Covert 20). Supported by Helen Hunt, a member of the Daughters of the Western Frontier who acts as her

friend and translator, Lizzie presents these unratified treaties to skeptical and increasingly incensed senators, 'talking back' to the state legislature by reminding them of their responsibility to Native peoples, whose rightful claims to their lands are still not properly recognized at the state and federal levels. And, at the macro and micro levels, this scene demonstrates the transformative capability of what celebrated Choctaw writer LeAnne Howe terms tribalography to engender new understanding of difficult histories, particularly for a non-Native audience. As a work of tribalography, *Something Inside is Broken* combines traditional language and dance with the uniquely contemporary oeuvre of the rock opera, crossing time and genres to bring the power of Native storytelling to a historically non-Native space.

Tribalography has become a seminal term in Native Studies, centering Indigenous storytelling as cultural praxis by recognizing its epistemological and rhetorical importance, and removing it from the realm of 'folktales.' As a lens, tribalography highlights how

> Native stories, no matter what form they take (novel, poem, memoir, film, history), seem to pull all the elements together of the storyteller's tribe, meaning the people, the land, and multiple characters and all their manifestations and revelations, and connect these in past, present, and future milieus (present and future milieus mean non-Indians) ("The Story of America" 42).

In this sense, tribalography reflects Indigenous experience but also radiates outward, connecting Native and non-Native people in a shared experience. Stage and film have become formative spaces for Native storytelling, as described in Howe's essay "Tribalography: The Power of Native Stories." Howe relates the experience of attending the "A Celebration of Native Women Playwrights" conference, and how a particular work that focused on the trauma experienced by First Nations children at Catholic boarding schools in Canada led to a complicated but ultimately productive exchange between Native and settler scholars. The conversations caused Howe to consider how "native stories have the power to create conflict, pain, discord, but ultimately understanding and enlightenment - a sacred third act" ("Tribalography" 117). The catalyzing effect of performance, whether a reading, play, or any other of its diverse forms, can create conversations and mend cognitive dissonance in ways that extend beyond the immediacy of the theatrical space, making tribalography a "story that links Indians and non-Indians" ("The Story of America" 46).

By applying Howe's concept of tribalography to *Something Inside is Broken*, I will analyze the decolonizing rhetorics of Lizzie Johnson's testimony before the California State Senate, focusing on the songs "1852," "Appropriation," "Emelulu," and "Home Sweet Home." I have embedded audio files of the songs discussed in this article—the cast album is available for purchase on iTunes—in order to better illustrate the profundity of Lizzie's testimony and to allow the reader (and listener) to experience the Nisenan language, which is foregrounded in multiple songs in the production. Throughout this scene, Lizzie asserts herself as a representative of the interests of the Nisenan people in front of an increasingly hostile audience and shifts away from attempting to cater to the discursive norms of the Western legislative space. Instead, through her use of détournement, using the colonizers' own language against them, she upends these protocols and tells her story in her own language, with Helen acting as her translator. Specifically, Lizzie first uses the federal and state government's understanding of their own legal and legislative processes to critique their abuses of the California tribes, undermining their claim to legal and moral superiority over matters such as appropriation. Next, Lizzie takes on the role of storyteller as the opera features an important moment of "embodiment" in the song "Emelulu," in which her testimony comes to life onstage in vignettes that illustrate the difficulties faced by enslaved California Native peoples. Finally, in "Home Sweet Home," Lizzie rejects the ideology of the legislators and asserts her desire for survivance for her people, doing so in her own language and thereby enacting what Scott Lyons terms "rhetorical sovereignty" (449). While the flags of the United States and California hang from the walls, Lizzie's use of the Nisenan language acts as a reminder to the legislature that the land they currently occupy was once inhabited solely by California's existing Native populations and should be returned to these peoples. In her progression as a rhetorician in this scene, Lizzie reclaims the physical narrative space by telling the real story of its establishment in the language of those who were otherwise silenced, and how the primacy of these claims persists in the past, present, and future.

As a work of tribalography, *Something Inside is Broken* does not rely exclusively on Lizzie's voice to convey these stories; instead, the experiences of her mother and tribespeople during the reign of Johann Sutter are given voice in the opera, and "through multiplying stories, a communal worldview" is engendered (Stanlake 119). *Something Inside is Broken* does portray the exploitative and inhumane treatment of Native Californians during the Gold Rush, but also focuses on the Nisenan tribal members as people with a history on the land that precedes

European claims. Rather than only depicting reactions to colonialism, the opera emphasizes the wholeness of the Nisenan people's humanity, and it resists casting them merely as victims. Moreover, the opera orients its audience within an Indigenous narrative framework by not only featuring Nisenan songs and stories, but also reflecting Indigenous storytelling structures that trouble chornonormative temporalities. The opera reflects this synchronicity by opening the production with the song "Creation Story," (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xnz-II5kKc0&feature=youtu.be) during which the "Worldmaker" creates the first human beings and the character of Peheipe, a trickster figure. As a character, Peheipe is described in the Author's Note as a "spiritual guide" who is "neither good nor bad" and "can be seen by the audience, but not by the cast on stage" (Kohler 1). Traditionally, Peheipe is neither male nor female, and while the character of Peheipe is assigned to a female soprano, I will still use the pronoun 'they' in reference to this character throughout my analysis.

Peheipe guides the audience through the opera, offering historical contextualization and commentary on the events taking place. Kohler identifies these issues as ones that continue to plague America, such as gendered violence, ecological destruction, and systemic attacks on the health and continuance of marginalized communities (Trimble). *Something Inside is Broken* features tribalography's pivotal "synchronicity of storytime, the 'mythic,' including spiritually charged tricksters [Peheipe] and creation stories [Worldmaker], [which] intermingle with the 'facts' of daily experience" (Stanlake 120). Thus, the opera interrupts the linearity of colonial history that allows settler institutions to dismiss Indigenous knowledge production as obsolete and relegated to an irreproducible past. Instead, Peheipe is an active embodiment of a non-linear perspective, a personified "manifestation of cultural philosophies" that assert a "view of time in which the past, present, and future coexist and possess the vital ability to affect one another" (Stanlake 120). Through the guidance of Peheipe and the voices of Nisenan characters such as Lizzie Johnson, Maj Kyle, and Iine, *Something Inside is Broken* tells a story that may have its roots in 'history,' but continues to reproduce itself through settler-colonial ideologies and institutions. In the face of colonial misremembering, Nisenan stories and language provide an epistemological and rhetorical structure to bridge this knowledge gap and create a shared sense of understanding of land that is currently called California.

The persisting, devastating effects of these 'civilizing' forces in California are reflected in the sharp attenuation in the Indigenous population from the pre-contact period to the late

nineteenth century. Scholars have estimated that between 705,000 and one million Indigenous people lived in what is currently California, a number that far exceeds earlier estimations accepted as fact by both the academy and the aforementioned "D. Thomas" (Thornton 33).[2] After contact, it is believed that the population of Native Californians dropped sharply during missionization, down to 85,000 in 1852, declining even further during the Gold Rush era and to as low as 18,000 by 1890 (Thornton 109). As swarms of settlers descended upon Native lands in search of fame and fortune, "tribes were aggressively removed from their territories by state and state-funded public militia in violation of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848, which had provided that the United States would protect Native land grants in the treated areas" (Barker 149). Next came the passage of the Act for the Government and Protection of the Indians in 1851, which stipulated that any "white" property owner could force a "vagrant" Indian into work, opening the door to the enslavement of Indigenous people by white landowners and ranchers.[3] Since Native people were not permitted to testify against white people in court, they were unable to challenge either their enslavement or the rapid loss of their homelands. As Lenape scholar Joanne Barker writes, despite California's "status as a free state, [it] permitted the open sale and trade of Native people for labor and sex trade purposes" and powerful, well-connected men like Johann Sutter took full advantage of the utter lack of protection afforded to Indigenous Californians (149).

During this same year, Congress sat down with tribes to negotiate treaties "in order to secure land cession and tribal relocation onto reservations and under federal jurisdiction. By 1852, eighteen treaties had been negotiated with more than one hundred tribes. The treaties would have provided the tribes with approximately 8.5 million acres divided into eighteen reservations" (Barker 150). This effort was thwarted by the California governor, the California senate, and a coterie of 'concerned' wealthy landowners, resulting in an 'injunction of secrecy' being placed on the treaties, one which was set to last until 1905. The tribes who signed these treaties were never informed of their unratified status and were moved onto ostensibly temporary "rancherias"—which were far smaller than the original acreage promised in the treaties—allegedly until they could be moved onto their permanent reservations, while their "deserted" land was scooped up by prospectors (Barker 150).

In the Author's Note to *Something Inside is Broken*, Kohler describes this context as a reign of terror, with Sutter exerting unchecked power over the "Sacramento Valley like a king."

He writes that while Sutter had an understanding with the local Nisenan chief, his slave hunters continued their unrelenting search for "vagrant" Indians to work at Sutter's Mill, "especially young boys and girls, to work the fields, service the food and service the men" (1). The Nisenan women in the opera are prey to the violent desires of the 'civilized' men who have come to Nisenan lands to seek out fame, fortune, and plunder in all forms.[4] Along with Sutter, we see dramatizations of "Captain Fremont, Kit Carson and US forces" exploring what stores of wealth California could offer them. Altogether, *Something Inside is Broken* presents a confluence of celebrated historical figures whose portrayals show that there was little to celebrate and characterizes the toll that the tenets of Manifest Destiny wrought on communities there. In *Something Inside is Broken,* hidden treaties and the enslavement and exploitation of the Nisenan people in particular, and California Native peoples more broadly, are at the heart of Lizzie's testimony to the Congressional hearing of the Appropriation Act of 1906. In this scene, the state of California is forced to confront the eighteen unratified treaties of 1852 with the peaceful tribes of California.[5]

The political intrigue, romance, and tragedy of *Something Inside is Broken* make it a compelling addition to the American operatic canon, which has had a complicated relationship with Native American representation. Beverley Diamond explains that, historically, Indigenous people were not only featured in operas (though usually limited to representing the exotic Other) but also attended and enjoyed the productions as foreign dignitaries while visiting European capitals, particularly during the 18th century and the years of the Red Atlantic exchange (32). In the early 20th century, at the height of ethnographic and anthropological efforts to 'save' Native American cultures from their assumed demise, American opera began featuring "exotic representation of Indians and Indian life." These renderings were presented as 'authentic' to American audiences struggling to "fill a spiritual void created by the nervous energy of modernism and the diminishing roles of religion and high culture" (Pisani 3).[6] In later eras, Indigenous performers were featured in opera, from traveling Maori singers to North American performers such as Tsianina Redfeather (Muskogee-Creek/Cherokee) (Diamond 32-33). During this time opera also became an unlikely but important space for Indigenous performers to assert themselves not just as singers, but also, in the case of women like Redfeather and Gertrude Bonnin (Yankton-Sioux), as storytellers who used the genre to present actual Indigenous narratives and perspectives. Collaborations between these women and mainstream composers—

Charles Wakefield Cadman and William F. Hanson, respectively—produced the operas *Shanewis* and *Sun Dance Opera*, both of which appeal to Western opera's desire to portray the 'romantic Indian' while complicating the tropes of the disappearing Indian that had lodged in the national consciousness.

Since then, contemporary Indigenous operas from around the globe have expanded the capabilities of this genre, centering on Indigenous stories and interrogating sociohistorical narratives of contact that privilege nationalistic and imperialistic interests. The transindigenous body of Indigenous opera by First Nations, Native American, Maori, Sami, and Aboriginal peoples has galvanized a decolonizing energy within the genre by integrating their respective oratures, dances, and linguistic traditions, thus transcending a frame of mere reaction to invasion and instead creating a multidisciplinary immersion into their lived experiences as people. There is no singular set definition of what constitutes an Indigenous opera. Generally speaking, though, these productions are collaborations between Indigenous lyricists, choreographers, and performers who are invested in "addressing the social and political issues and honoring the worldviews of the indigenous communities these operas are written in association with, as well as presenting such works for the benefit of those very communities" (Karantonis and Robinson 5). As a work of indigenous opera, *Something Inside is Broken* is an intertribal collaboration between Kohler (Hoopa Valley tribe) and Alan Wallace (Nisenan tribe) to tell a Nisenan story that is oriented around Nisenan worldviews. Although Kohler states that the show is in fact "geared toward non-Natives" as a means of educating them about California's history, it focuses on the humanity and survivance of the Nisenan people, avoiding the narrative traps of the 'exotic Indian' or 'white savior' that often plague Western opera (Trimble).

More specifically, Diamond views these contemporary productions as having three distinct "creative dimensions" that create the "transformative possibility" of decolonization: "language, genre shifts, and embodiment" (36). First, opera is uniquely situated to present Indigenous languages to non-fluent audience members, as it "often crosses language barriers, with surtitles in the local language allowing audiences to understand performance in the original one" (36). Second, Indigenous operas are hybridized affairs, featuring a variety of performers with "skills honed within contrasting artistic worlds, as culture bearers of oral traditions with no music literacy skills, as pop musicians, or as opera singers with no knowledge of or competence in indigenous traditional song. Hence, such productions must bridge orality and literacy" (36-

37). Finally, Diamond notes that Indigenous operas often experiment with "embodiment," exhibiting that "fluid boundaries of existence—crossing animal, human, and spirit—are more fundamental and integral" (37). These elements of Indigenous opera enhance the impact of the stories being told—their ability to "transform"—and as a genre, opera becomes a rich site for the enactment of tribalography, as the "power of Native storytelling is revealed as a living character who continues to influence our culture" (Howe "Tribalography" 118). Thus, opera has become a transindigenous vehicle for expression and storytelling that literally gives a voice to untold or erased histories.

In the Congressional Hearing scenes, Lizzie wields a variety of rhetorical tools that reflect both Western and Nisenan oratory practices. While the courtroom of the colonizer might be an unexpected space for Native storying to take place, Lizzie deftly demonstrates the latter's importance as a decolonial praxis while undermining the former's claim to 'rationality' or 'neutrality.' To highlight the government's hypocrisy in its dealing with the California tribes, Lizzie engages in "détournement…using the government's language against it" (Black 12). Jason Black writes that within colonizer-Indigenous political relationships, there exists a rhetorical "presentation of resistance," a "decolonial move" that unsettles the primacy ascribed to settler governments and "unmask[s] governmental cycles of abuse" inflicted on Native communities (11). Specifically, by "repurposing the rhetoric of those in power in order to drain the original language of its oppressive assaults," Native rhetoricians and politicians have been able to "clarify how the powerful, or *master*, rhetoric presents problems, inaccuracies, hypocrisies, distortions, and inconsistencies" (Black 12). The act of détourning the colonizer's language highlights its inherent contradictions and offers a framework for Indigenous interpretations of narratives that otherwise privilege the colonizer's position. To acknowledge the longstanding presence of détournement in Indigenous rhetoric is to understand that rather than remaining passive in the face of settler aggression, Native communities have "*acted* by maneuvering to possess economic modalities, sovereignty, safety, and other subsistent needs of the human experience" (Black 12, emphasis original). And in viewing these purposeful *actions,* we can see how Indigenous communities have always and continue to advocate for Indigenous survivance, rather than accept the fate of assimilation and disappearance that colonial rhetoric demands.

Lizzie Johnson's testimony before the state senate is a both a plea for a better future for California tribes and a powerful denunciation of their treatment at the hands of the nascent

California government. The scene opens with the Congressional Hearing being brought to order, and the song "1852" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6rSr2g2MI8&feature=youtu.be) begins with the Chairman recognizing Lizzie Johnson as a representative of the Nisenan tribe, with Helen Hunt acting as her translator. While Lizzie has prepared a statement for her testimony she is overcome with emotion in the moment, and Helen steps in to assist her in reading it. Over the objections of the senators, Lizzie and Helen present a "document of grave rescission," detailing how the eighteen treaties that were signed by Indian nations were left unratified and declared dead "under an injunction of secrecy" by the California senate (Kohler et al 8). As the women speak, the room descends into chaos, with senators accusing the women of "lies," "hearsay," and "trickery," with one senator declaring "I'm not learned on what you spew!" and another threatening "And some evidence to prove this too!" (9-10). The senators' hostile reaction to Lizzie's statement and the emphasis on their lack of previous knowledge on the subject serve to undermine Lizzie's credibility, privileging their narratives over her own.

Amidst the fray, the Chairman calls for order and asks Lizzie to continue. She and Helen begin the song "Appropriation," (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-VCzFzpkefk&feature=youtu.be) calling for the senate to ratify the hidden treaties and provide land for the homeless California Indians. Helen begins by demanding "Appropriation… for all of the tribes," who have been denied the land promised to them, while Lizzie decries the "extermination" that "became law of the land" under "Burnett, Bigler and the Senators of California" (referring to previous California Governors Pete Burnett and John Bigler, whose tenures were disastrous for California Indians) (Kohler et al 11). As the women continue their testimony, the Chairman reads aloud from the evidence Lizzie has provided him, noting the "official seal, dated 1852. The 18 unratified treaties of California," only to be interrupted by the haranguing of the senators, who are irate by what they perceive to be "hearsay…lies…[and] trickery" at play (Kohler et al 12). Their objections notwithstanding, Lizzie and Helen persist, denouncing the land theft and the concealment of the treaties that were bargained in good faith by the Indigenous leaders, leaving the tribes facing potential extinction. Lizzie champions the need for appropriation, stating that "what they did was wrong," and begging "Let us live, Let my tribe live." The blunt response from the irate senators is "that will never be the outcome," and "that's not why we're here" (Kohler et al 13). As a song, "Appropriation" is a cacophony of competing interests and competing voices and plays out as a tense dialogue between determined

women and antagonistic men, but the heteroglossic discord does not undermine the work of tribalography in the opera. Indeed, "incongruity is at the core of tribalography, because the discourse is concerned with the process of gathering multiple voices, diverse points of view, and competing perspectives," and the tensions revealed in this scene produce cracks in otherwise stable narratives of settler-colonial moral superiority (Stanlake 129). It is in these uncomfortable spaces that the audience can grapple with their own assumptions and selfhood in relation to the voiced experience of the Nisenan.

Within this dialogue, we see Lizzie and Helen forcing the legislature to face the dark history of their early statehood, and how the government engaged in a calculated campaign of death and disenfranchisement of the California tribes. When Lizzie invokes "extermination" in the song, she refers to state-sanctioned genocide brought to fruition under the orders of Governor Peter H. Burnett. In an 1851 address to the California legislature, Burnett called for a "war of extermination" against the tribes that would only cease once "the Indian race becomes extinct," a measure approved by the legislature two years later (Barker 149). This led to a cooperative effort between the state and federal government to pay bounties on the scalps of Native men, women, and children, resulting in over one million dollars being paid outs to bounty hunters (Barker 149-150). Lizzie's repeated invocation of the word "extermination" directly mirrors Burnett's own language despite pushback from her audience, and she refuses to hedge or choose a euphemism to appease them. As Helen continues her appeal for appropriation for the tribes, Lizzie insists on reminding the senators, through détournement, why appropriation is a necessary measure in the first place, using their own language of "extermination" to show that they, as members of the governing body of California, have benefited from this campaign of extermination. Consequently, she illustrates that they have inherited the responsibility for the sufferings of the eighteen tribes, which must result in recompense for these atrocities. For all her early fears and misgivings, Lizzie becomes a powerful voice in this unfriendly environment, and continues to pursue a future for her people.

After "Appropriation," Lizzie's testimony continues, and one senator asks her how she came to know English so well. Lizzie describes her negative experiences at boarding school and is immediately accused of "trying to instill sympathy." The Chairman asks Lizzie to "stick to the facts," a request she responds to by presenting her "historical documents," pictures of Sutter and his "workers" (read: slaves), including Lizzie's mother, Maj Kyle (Kohler et al 14). As these

pictures are shown to the legislature, the audience sees Peheipe enter, unseen by the cast members onstage. Peheipe is followed by Nisenan men and women, who file in as Peheipe sings "Emelulu" ("housefly"; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tmr7hQEm1cQ&feature=youtu.be), an operatic adaptation of "Ten Little Indians." Peheipe sings through the song once, "One little, two little, three little Indians…" with the small but poignant closing edition "Ten little Indian *slaves*" (Kohler et al 15). The slaves respond by singing the song back in Nisenan,

> myynte ni 'emelulu wek'etk'eti
> 'emelulu
> tol nik'i paj nik'i maa nik'i
> 'emelulu
> myynte ni 'emelulu wek'etk'eti
> 'emelulu
> tol nik'i paj nik'i maa nik'i
> 'emelulu (Kohler et al 15).

Peheipe is then joined by Sutter, who repeats the song in English, with another response by the slaves in Nisenan. As the song ends, they all exit the stage, and the focus is brought back to Lizzie and the senators. Lizzie declares that her mother "was a slave" of Sutter's, angering one Senator to the extent that he "jumps to his feet," insisting that:

> Slavery was a Southern
> thing, a Negro thing. Indians were
> never proven slaves, but servants.
> Sutter paid his servants. The
> witness is trying to instill
> sympathy again. (Kohler et al 16)

The repeated interruptions and negations of Lizzie's assertions are emblematic of the erasure of Indigenous experience under settler-colonialism, a force that was touted as being civilizing and positive for Indigenous people, when in reality it resulted in genocide and subjugation. This repeated insistence that she "stick to the facts" by complying with the rigid norms of the Congressional hearing privileges what Kimberly Wieser refers to as the "linear, analytical reasoning that argues for the 'right answer' by creating misleading dichotomies and discounting other kinds of reasoning" endemic to Western institutions (7). Lizzie does not comply and

continues her impassioned testimony, which comes alive onstage with the characters of Sutter, Maj Kyle, and other Nisenan slaves enacting the horrors Lizzie, and at times Helen, describe. In one such vignette, Lizzie narrates how her mother, Maj Kyle, was one of Sutter's house servants who was "treated like an animal. She cleaned the house, made the food, fed the slaves and sometimes was used in other ways" (Kohler et al 18). As Lizzie recounts this, we see a flashback illustrating Sutter's treatment of Maj Kyle: Sutter rings for Maj Kyle who enters, carrying a pitcher. Maj Kyle leans in to serve Sutter and he aggressively grabs her wrist, causing her to drop the pitcher. He then drags her offstage as she screams.

While the senators are not privy to this reenactment, the audience sees a clear picture of the depraved treatment women like Maj Kyle were subjected to in their 'servitude' and are faced with the legacy of trauma experienced by Native women across the United States. As Sarah Deer (Muskogee [Creek] Nation) writes in *The Beginning and End of Rape: Confronting Sexual Violence in Native America*, the widespread sexual abuse of Native American women is not an inexplicable phenomenon but a "fundamental result of colonialism" (x). Maj Kyle is one of many victims whose trauma extends as far back as first contact and continues into our present day.

The staging of Lizzie's testimony, while disturbing in its implications, is an important example of "embodiment" in Indigenous opera; while Lizzie euphemistically describes her mother's abuse as being "used in other ways," Maj Kyle's body tells the true story on stage. This encounter introduces the physical and psychological toll of Sutter's enduring sexual exploitation of Maj Kyle, and her anguished bodily response (her resistance, her scream) becomes "comment[ary] on encounter" and its atrocities (Diamond 36). Moreover, this embodiment resonates with the audience, who are confronted by the enforced emotional sterility of the courtroom and the raw emotional exchange between Maj Kyle and Sutter. While Lizzie is acting as a witness for her tribe, the audience is *witnessing* the testimony unfold beyond the words themselves, as Lizzie's allusions to Sutter's rape of her mother are shown to "transcend [her] own memories, to include those of [her] relatives and tribal community" (Howe "The Story of America" 43-4). Lizzie's testimony is crafted to persuade the members of the legislature, but Christy Stanlake argues that in staged works of tribalography, "audience members often do not derive meanings…from following a single story or protagonist, but from witnessing a multitude of stories" (130). Therefore, it is Maj Kyle's voiced and embodied experience (and those of other

Nisenan women and men) that engenders the "multi-vocal authenticity" that "models for audiences the concept of communal truth" (Stanlake 129). This staging of Lizzie and Maj Kyle's stories reminds the audience of what is omitted from the historical records that they are meant to take as fact, and presents them with a more collective understanding of the human toll that these institutions have wrought.

Through these reenactments of the treatment of slaves during her testimony, Lizzie bears witness to the experiences of the Nisenan people. The scene-within-a-scene that shows Lizzie's words in motion, embodied in Maj Kyle's suffering, serves as a critique of "master narratives" while amplifying the voices of those who experienced this treatment (Black 7). In this moment, as the committee and the audience are experiencing Lizzie's decolonizing narrative of California history, the committee stand in as avatars for the audience, whose own understanding of this history might provoke feelings of resistance to the information being presented. As Diamond writes, the "transformative possibilities" of Indigenous operas such as *Something Inside is Broken* as decolonizing works lie not just in the telling of Indigenous stories, but in the reactions of mainstream audiences to their content, especially if these narratives contradict deeply held beliefs or privileged histories (31). The audience observes the senators' dismissive and hostile reactions to Lizzie's painful testimony, and in turn, the audience may reflect on their own responses to the multiple stories being presented, demonstrating how the "significance of collective creation resides not in a play's ability to model concepts of tribalography but in the potential for the play's stories to enter the audience and change the world" (Stanlake 153). Non-Native audience members might be challenged to consider whether they would be dismissive or hostile to someone sharing these difficult stories in other spaces, thus, as an Indigenous opera and a work of tribalography, *Something Inside is Broken* can extend its ideological impact beyond the stage and into outside conversations.

As the senators become increasingly resistant to Lizzie's story, she upends the power dynamic, insisting on continuing her testimony in the Nisenan language. This is a radical shift that I view as an act of Lyons' notion of rhetorical sovereignty. After the committee's Chairman addresses Helen to ask her "if her client [is] going somewhere with this" (rather than addressing Lizzie herself), Helen responds; "Chairman, did we not come here to/ hear the history of her tribe, her/history, she should be free to tell/ her own story" (Kohler et al. 18). This leads into the song "Home Sweet Home,"

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i5pZftJGHvo&feature=youtu.be) as Lizzie decides to "tell her own story" in her own language with Helen acting as her translator. Lyons writes that "rhetorical sovereignty is the inherent right and ability of peoples to determine their own communicative needs and desire…to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse" (449-50). Lizzie's insistence on speaking Nisenan and absolute resistance to the repeated admonishments of the Chairmen to speak English, then, reorients the "goals" of the hearing to fit her purpose of representing her community's collective experience. Lizzie begins by repeating "Homaa nik' c'esak' bemi," which Helen translates to "Do you recognize who I am?" Their statements are met by objections to her use of Nisenan language, and the Chairman retorts that they "recognize Lizzie Johnson" or "recognize case number 95603" (Kohler et al 19). While the court recognizes Lizzie as an individual representative within the scope of the proceedings, they struggle to locate her within a collective, within "the logic of a nation-people, which takes as its supreme charge the sovereignty of the group through a privileging of its traditions and culture and continuity" (Lyons 455). In a move that privileges the primacy of Nisenan language and demonstrates its continuity, Lizzie continues her calls for "recognition," asking "nik' majdy mee'u meem," ("Do you recognize my plea?") and "niseek' k'awi mee'u min" ("Do you recognize what I stand for?") (Kohler et al 19).

It is in this moment that Lizzie comes into her own as a speaker, abandoning the insufficient language of the colonizer to convey her message and instead asserting herself in Nisenan. *Something Inside is Broken*'s co-creator Wallace has emphasized the importance of the use of Nisenan in the opera, stating that "I've always thought the Nisenan language had the potential for a much higher level of communication than can be done in English…It's much more intellectual. It's much more multi-dimensional" (qtd. in Madeson). When Lizzie first engages in English, the senators and chairman understand her words but reject her meaning; when she switches to Nisenan, they are are confused and unable to follow her without Helen's translations. While it may seem that Lizzie is complicating her pursuit for appropriation and recognition, she wields the Nisenan language as a "multi-dimensional" assertion of the rights of California tribes to "rebuild…to exist and present [their] gifts to the world." Moreover, her "rhetorics of sovereignty" constitute an "adamant refusal to disassociate culture, identity, and power from the land," as the appropriation she seeks is in the form of the land promised to the tribes that was withheld in an of bad faith by the legislature (Lyons 457). While Lizzie's words

are ostensibly framed as a series of questions, they emerge as demands made of the committee to reorient their perspective of her and what she represents, as well as her own recognition of the importance of the position she is taking in this space —what she "stand[s] for." Moreover, although Helen still has to translate Lizzie's words in order for the members of the committee to understand her, her decision to make these demands in her language and disregard the conventions of the colonized space serves to reassert Indigenous claims to this space, and to place the needs of her people and other California tribes on par with the interests of the nascent state.

The Chairman demands that Lizzie adhere to the colonial conventions of the courtroom, but she continues her testimony in Nisenan. She accuses the state of enslaving and attempting to "exterminate [her] race" (Kohler et al 20), and breaks into the following solo, which is translated by Helen:

LIZZIE:
homaa nik' c'esak' bemi
homaa nisee c'esak' bemi
hedem k'awinaan 'ydawmukum
neseek' hypy wentin hypym
homaa nik' c'esak' bemi
homaa nisee c'esak' bemi
homaa nik' c'esak' bemi
homaa nisee c'esak' bemi
hedem k'awinaan 'ydawmukum
wej wej ha nik hipin k'ojonaan
wej wej ha nik jamanmanto
bomy nik hedem k'awi wentin

HELEN:
What truth or facts will prove the
case I plead
How can I try
To undo all that's been decreed

> You took my people
> You took our land
> Then you made us homeless Indians
> Here I stand
> Here I stand (Kohler et al 20)

In this song, Lizzie implies that the senatorial committee's insistence on "truth and facts" is actually arbitrary, self-serving, and insufficient to encapsulate the depth of the "homeless Indians'" struggle to survive. As Wieser writes, within Indigenous epistemologies, "experience in general—whether derived from experiences of the culture encoded in story, those of an authoritative elder, or those of an individual who shared the same cultural values—is held as evidence" (Wieser 37). The senators' repeated interjections attempt to invalidate Lizzie's claims either on the grounds that they are steeped in the pathos of experienced suffering or contradict 'facts' that the senators have already accepted as true. And this belies the committee's underlying desire to dismiss her claims precisely because of their potential impact.

To disregard experience as somehow counterfactual has consistently benefited white, heteropatriarchal Christian society by disqualifying oppressed peoples from social discourses that affect their communities based on their supposed inability to remain 'unbiased' in their experienctial narratives. In her own language, Lizzie makes it clear that she will not be deterred by their attempts to discredit her or deflect from the truth of her testimony. Instead, within the 'theater' of the Congressional Hearing and Howe's concept of the "living theater" of the performative space of the stage, *Something Inside is Broken* "responds to colonization's harm by listening to, remembering, and repeating stories on behalf of the collective" (Horan and Kim 29). The repetition of "Here I stand" is an assertion of continuance for both the Senators and the audience: California Indians have not disappeared, despite the best efforts of colonial forces, and they will continue to assert their rights to their land, language, and traditions. As Wieser reminds us, "art may engage heavily with the mainstream, but it asserts cultural difference, and a Native perspective on history within the milieu of popular culture is a statement: we are still here" (56). Like "we are still here," "Here I stand" shows what recognition actually entails: reinstatement, repatriation, recompense, and hopefully, one day, *actual* reconciliation. They show that the story is not yet complete.

This recognition is at the heart of what the show means to its performers, particularly its Indigenous performers. In an interview with *Indian Country Today,* Natalie Benally (Navajo), a dancer and actress who portrayed Pulba in the 2016 touring show, describes that she had "been waiting for something like this to come about…When I was acting in school shows at Fort Lewis College, I'd think, maybe someday I'll be able to play one of my people in a show" (Madeson). Benally's desire to "play one of my people" is more than a self-affirming statement or an articulation of communal connectivity; it is a recognition of the potential of and responsibility inherent to tribalographic enactments. That one must, as Howe writes, "learn more about my ancestors, understand them better than I imagined. Then I must be able to render all our collective experiences into a meaningful form" (qtd. in Horan and Kim 29). It acknowledges the potential of the theater as a site of cultural continuance, where historically silenced voices can interrupt and interact with mainstream narratives to produce collective understanding. This echoes back to Howe's narrative about the "A Celebration of Native Women Playwrights" conference and the piece discussing the ramifications of residential schools. Howe notes that while certain members of the audience were intitially hostile to the subject of the piece, others were moved to share their families' experiences with persecution and oppression, from fleeing the Holocaust to surviving chattel slavery on American soil. As they shared their respective stories, Howe noticed a shift in the room, as the non-Native audience members ceased their denial of Indigenous history and instead "were threading their lives and experiences into ours. A shift in paradigm, it's generally believed to be the other way around: Indians assimilating into the mainstream" ("Tribalography" 124). Benally and Howe's words interweave with the concept of this "shift in paradigm," of genres and spaces being assimilated to account for the experiences of Indigenous people, rather than "Indians assimilating into the mainstream." By portraying alternative narratives that complicate and contradict the historical accounts that we otherwise accept as complete, *Something Inside is Broken* reaches out to a non-Native audience as well as Native ones, assimilating the former into a new reality that acknowledges the wrongs of the past and present, and creates a catalyzing environment to have dialogues that envision a different path forward.

Notes

[1] In "Serra the Saint: Why Not?" Miranda articulates the frustration and anger Indigenous Californians felt at the canonization of Father Junípero Serra in 2015. Miranda writes that "Serra did not just 'bring' us Christianity; he imposed it, he forced it, he violated us with it, giving us no choice in the matter." Moreover, Miranda dismisses the claims invoked by Serra's supporters, who deemed him a "man of his times" to excuse his culpability in the abuse and exploitation experienced by Indigenous Californians at the mercy of the mission system (Miranda, "Serra the Saint: Why Not?").

[2] In "A Short Correspondence," Miranda writes that she double-checked Russell Thornton's amendment of earlier estimates of the California Native population with Dr. William Preston, whose research focused on the California mission system. Preston responded that "[a]t this point I think that Thornton's high number is totally reasonable. In fact, keeping in mind that populations no doubt fluctuated over time, I'm thinking that at times 1 million or more Native Californians were resident in the state" (qtd. in Miranda, "A Short Correspondence About a Long Story").

[3] During the Gold Rush era, "Mexicans were then legally classified as 'whites' by the state law," and also engaged in the enslavement of Native Californians (Barker 149).

[4] The experience of the Nisenan and other Indigenous California women is neither unique nor relegated to the past. Currently, reservations are treated as hunting grounds by workers in the extractive industries. This issue is further articulated in a report issued by the 2016 American Indian Law Clinic, which describes the significant and "unprecedented" spike in violent crimes, including sexual assault against Native women, children, and men on the Fort Berthold reservation. Men in particular have experienced a 75% increase in sexual assault, and the report draws a connection between these upward swings of crime and the "influx of well-paid male oil and gas workers, living in temporary housing often referred to as "man camps" (Finn et. al 2-3). The report attributes this rise in trafficking in Fort Berthold to a "combination of economic hardship, an influx of temporary workers, historical violence against Native women, a lack of law enforcement resources, and increased oil and gas development," and notes that the complexities of federal Indian law create issues in enforcing and prosecuting offenders (9). Moreover, the authors discuss how "resource-based boom communities" lead to an overwhelming of local law enforcement, who must respond to a sharp uptick in calls to respond to a variety of violent crimes, leaving tribal communities vulnerable (8).

[5] Kohler's linking of the issues facing Native Californians in the Gold Rush era to our present moment is an unfortunately appropriate analogy, and the repercussions of settler aggression continue to play out in similar ways. One must only replace Johann Sutter with Energy Transfer Partners and the private and state-enacted violence inflicted on water protectors at Standing Rock or consider the current administration's opening of federal land in Utah--including Bears Ears, a sacred site for Native American nations and tribes, including the "Hopi Tribe, Navajo Nation, Ute Indian Tribe, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe and Zuni Tribe"—to a variety of energy prospecting interests (Kestler-D'Amours). Specifically, this administration is invoking the General Mining Law of 1872, which functions in the same manner *as* Gold Rush era policies, merely requiring prospectors who wish to mine for precious metals to "hammer four poles into the ground corresponding to the four points of a parcel that can be as big as 20 acres," with a corresponding description of the claim attached to one of the poles (Volcovici).

[6] Charles Wakefield Cadman, the celebrated American composer, professed the importance of "idealizing" Native American music for Western audiences. He recommended that Indian

composers" should, to the best of their abilities, "be in touch with the Indian's legends, his stories and the odd characteristics of his music, primitive though they may be, and one should have an insight into the Indian emotional life concomitant with his naïve and charming art-creations. And while not absolutely necessary, a hearing of his songs on the Reservation amidst native surroundings adds something of value to a composer's efforts at idealizing. (qtd. inLevy 91).

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