

Ecopoetics and Decolonial Resistance: the Politics of Land and Language in Selected Poems by Natalie Diaz and Adonis

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Abstract

This study examines how selected poems by Natalie Diaz and Adonis transform land and language into sites of cultural, ecological, and decolonial resistance. Their poems are not mere records of environmental degradation or linguistic loss, but use poetic language to challenge forms of cultural and colonial power. Through a comparative textual analysis informed by ecopoetics and decolonial theory, the study examines “The First Water Is the Body” and “They Don’t Love You Like I Love You” by Natalie Diaz and “The Solitary Land”, “The Wound” and “A Vision” by Adonis. Diaz's poetry emphasizes the connection between the Mojave Desert, Native identity and cultural revitalization, and the history of violence against Native land and culture. Adonis' poetry occurs in an Arab and Syrian historical and cultural context and addresses such issues as land, displacement, cultural memory, and linguistic identity. The study argues that despite the significant differences in historical and geographical backgrounds and contexts, both poets render the sites of land and language as sites of contestation and contestation of domination, simultaneously imagining alternative forms of cultural identity and sense of belonging. The study's comparative use of their poetry as a means of dialogue contributes to scholarship on ecopoetics and decolonial resistance by examining the intersections of land and language as sites of power, memory and resistance.

Keywords:

Decolonial, ecological resistance, ecopoetics, land, language.



1.Introduction

Many modern poets resist and rewrite colonial narratives through representations of elements of land and language in response to the colonial policies of the colonizer. Some of these poets use literary themes and techniques to resist and criticize the destructive policies of the colonizers to the land and language of the colonized countries. Natalie Diaz and Adonis are two modern poets whose poetry engages with questions about land, identity and cultural domination. Although they emerge from different geographical, historical, and cultural context, their poetry provides a productive basis for examining the relationship between ecopoetics and decolonial resistance. Their poetry connects land and language with cultural identity and belonging, using literary images through which relationships to place and cultural memory are articulated (Hodge et al, 2022, p. 15).

Modern decolonial movements reframe land recovery and language revival not only as acts of justice but as strategies for survival, ecological stewardship, and cultural regeneration (Hodge, 2022). The conquest of territory involves physical takeover as well as the infliction of symbolic aggression upon the indigenous population. Many nations regard land holds meanings beyond its nutritional value because they believe that it embodies collective history and spiritual significance and ancestral heritage. Patrick Wolfe's theory of settler colonialism helps how the elimination or displacement of indigenous people is structurally connected to the acquisition and control of Indigenous land (Wolfe, 1999). The physical deprivation resulting from land dispossession creates a lasting separation between indigenous peoples and their ancestral cultural, natural and sacred ties renewing their ancestral territory. Simpson (2017) explains that native cultures require land as their essential life force to survive. Simpson establishes that current environmental destruction and native land exploitation directly result from colonial practices which continue in the present time (Simpson, 2017). Indigenous resistance groups across North America and Australia strive to defend their territory from mining operations and logging activities because they aim to protect their way of life and ancestral territory. Settler colonialism leads to land loss which enables the establishment of capitalist economic systems and new land utilization methods that replace and change ancestral ecological bonds.



However, post-colonial countries rediscover land through actions which restore their cultural background. When marginalized people seize their land they recover their cultural heritage while making a statement of national autonomy and fight existing colonial systems which refuse to acknowledge their inherent governance power (Adams & Mulligan, 2012). Post-colonial conflicts traditionally used language as a combat zone similar to land control. The enforcement of European languages during colonization damaged native languages to such an extent that it almost erased both languages and the cultural understandings they contained. Post-colonial writers select the restoration of indigenous languages as their main method to fight back against colonial control methods.

In this theoretical framework, Diaz and Adonis offer two separate poetic settings for the interrelationship between land and language, along with cultural identity and resistance. Diaz's poetry is about Native relationships to land and the effects cultural dispossession has had on the Native community, whilst Adonis' poetry is about the Arab and Syrian cultural history, displacement, and linguistic identity. The differences of theirs are really not distracting but the focus of the comparison (Decuir, 2024).

This research addresses a significant gap in ecopoetic scholarship by uniting two culturally distinct poets, Natalie Diaz and Adonis, to demonstrate how cross-cultural poetic practices mobilize ecological and linguistic resistance against colonial frameworks. Previous scholarship on Natalie Diaz's poetry and Indigenous identity, land, and environmental justice has neglected to examine how her poetic engagement with land and language can be analyzed alongside Adonis's poetry, which has been explored in terms of modernity, cultural transformation, exile, and linguistic innovation, all in an ecopoetic and decolonial framework. This study fills this gap by placing the two poets in comparative discourse, while continuing to be sensitive to their historical and cultural differences. Accordingly, this study asks to how selected poems by Diaz and Adonis represent land as a site of cultural memory, identity and resistance? How their uses of language and poetic form challenge dominant cultural and epistemological structures? And how their distinct historical and cultural contexts shape their respective forms of ecopoetic and decolonial resistance?



The study explores the role of land and language in relation each other as areas of power, memory, identity and resistance in the selected poems through comparative textual analysis informed by ecopoetics and decolonial theory.

2. Literature Review

Ecopoetics, decolonial resistance, and the connected functions of land and language in contemporary literature have been topics of many research studies. Numerous scholarly works explored the roles of these factors within indigenous and postcolonial resistant movements by focusing on discussing poets that exploit the literary conventions to subvert colonialist discourses and ecological destruction. The present paper synthesizes and uses crucial research in the area to explain how critical scholarship helps our comprehension of ecopoetics and decolonial resistance. What is more important is that it reveals a significant lacuna, i.e. the lack of a dedicated comparative study of the role of land and language as the instruments of resistance in Western and Eastern poetic traditions. Most of the past studies have discussed the strength of literature in opposing the colonial ideologies, but none have compared and contrasted Diaz and Adonis in one comparative study aimed at determining how the two writers of different yet overlapping land and language use their artistic career to represent resistance, survival and authority. Firstly, Wolfe (1999) provides a settler colonialism basis of thinking by asserting that settler colonialism is aimed at acquiring lands by attempting to erase the Indigenous people. The work by Wolfe is central to the study of the political aspects of land dispossession, and it can serve as the essential reference point to those researchers who study postcolonial and Indigenous struggles. Nevertheless, structurally sound as it is, the study by Wolfe fails to include the aspect of how cultural production (and specifically poetry) resists and rewrites these hegemonic colonial narratives.

Likewise, Simpson (2017) stipulates that the land and language are crucial to the Indigenous resistance, as they are spiritual and epistemological bases. She claims that the Indigenous resurgence cannot happen outside the land and Indigenous language revitalization, which are foundations of cultural survival. However, though Simpson provides an excellent foundation to conceptualize resistance, her discussion does not extend to how poets like Diaz can express these thoughts in the poetic structure, which is the aim of this research to shed light on. A classic account of the colonial imposition of language can be found in the work of Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o (1986) who



highlights the role of English and French as a tool of cultural subjugation in Africa. His promotion of the use of African languages in writing forms the core of postcolonial theory and decolonization of the literature. This study expounds on the works of Wa Thiong to explain how Diaz and Adonis utilize language not only as a medium of communication but also as a place of ecological and cultural refunctioning. In a more modern concept, Dhillon (2022) states that the reclamation of the land is a fundamental characteristic of the anti-colonial resistance, yet he focuses mostly on the activism movements and not literary reactions. Although his attempt to uncover the cultural meaning of land is valuable, he does not expand his analysis to the role poetry as an ecopoetic intervention that can play on its own.

Shockley (2011) investigates the ways in which African American poets have employed language as an instrument of resisting racial and colonial oppression, and provides the notion of renegade poetics, which is a formal and thematic subversion. Although her analysis highlights the significance of poetic form to the resistance, it lacks an ecopoetic element to it, not to mention that it is limited to the non-Western poets like Adonis. These intellectual contributions show how land and language have been armed as a location of postcolonial opposition, although the majority of the analysis considers them as distinct areas or confine them to area studies. There has been little study of the way that ecopoetic expression is combined with decolonial resistance in poems in a wide variety of cultural geographies. Poetic form, land recuperation, and language sovereignty have not been fully realized in connection with one another, especially in the comparative frame of Diaz (Indigenous North American poetic tradition) and Adonis (Arab poetic tradition) (Adamson, 2001).

This paper argues that the two poets use their writing to oppose the colonial systems as they reclaim ecological and cultural space in language and landscape. Through making their poetic strategies foreground, the research insists that ecopoetics is not an aesthetic category only, but a political tool of decolonial survival. In such a manner, poetry turns into the form of environmental awareness, cultural healing, and group protest (Fiedorczuk et al., 2024).

Methodology

This study uses comparative textual analysis and close reading of some of the poems by Natalie Diaz and Adonis. The analysis is centered on images,



metaphor, diction, poetic form, and metaphors of land and language. The elements of these texts are explored from an ecocritical and decolonial perspective to uncover the poems' attempts to engage with environmental relations, cultural memory, linguistic power, and resistance. The method of comparison emphasizes the commonalities and differences of the poets' interest in similar topics and their differing historical and cultural backgrounds.

3. Ecopoetics and Decolonial Theory as Framework: Historical and Analytical Explanation

This study uses ecopoetics as its primary literary lens and decolonial theory as critical perspective. Postcolonial theory is a history and culture of colonial and imperial domination. In this context, land and language are considered as overlapping spaces of expression of power, identity, memory and resistance. Settler colonialism and land dispossession are therefore discussed, if applicable, within Diaz's Indigenous context, and linguistic and cultural domination are discussed in both poets' contexts. The term ecopoetics is used to denote poetic practices that emphasise relationships between human, land and more-than-human worlds. Decolonial theory is a collection of theories that address and deconstruct the ongoing architecture of coloniality. Postcolonial is more specific in terms of the historical and cultural impact of colonialism and imperialism. Land dispossession is the severing or disruption of Indigenous relationships to land, language resistance is poetic practices that disrupt the domination of language and assert cultural memory and identity. These ideas are synthesized to analyze the land and language as decolonial resistance in the poems selected. Ecopoetics has already become a specific methodological and theoretical approach, which unites environmental awareness with language and aesthetics, philosophy, and political criticism (Bloomfield, 2019, p. 134). This is an interdisciplinary approach, inspired by the convergence of environmentalism and literary theory, especially the contributions of postmodern and postcolonial theory on the representation of nature and space. Ecopoetics is not just a description of the natural world but an interrogation of the role of poetry in relation to ecological crisis and the breaking of the human-nature relationships (Siddiqui, 1995, p. 146). The study engages ecopoetics, postcolonial theory and decolonial theory, moving them into conversation to explore the ways in which poetry can stand for relationship between land, language, cultural identity, and structure of power.



These strategies are similar but not equivalent. Ecopoetics offers the major literary (poetic) point of view on the human relationship to the material and more-than-human world, and postcolonial theory the interpretive framework for examining the historical and cultural impacts of the colonial and imperial power. Decolonial theory further extends this questioning to the continuation of colonial power structures, knowledge and cultural hierarchy beyond colonial rule. Combined, these perspectives enable the study to explore the meanings of land and language as contested spaces where power, memory, identity and resistance are negotiated. In this study, ecopoetics is defined as an aesthetic mode of poetry that focuses on the interconnections between human beings and material world, nonhuman life and cultural place meanings. An ecopoetic reading does not simply foreground the subject of research that is human, but foregrounds ecological vulnerability, competing understandings of human-nature relations, and relations to the more-than-human. This view is especially important for the current research, as both Diaz and Adonis use imagery of land, place, material environment, and ecological conditions that relate to issues of identity, history, and power (Nolan, 2017). Ecopoetics officially started in the 20th century as a response to industrialization and environmental fear across the globe. It can however be traced back in the 19th century American poetry where authors such as Walt Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson advocated a religious and aesthetic experience in nature. As a source of inspiration and moral clarity, these early poets liked to look at nature through an idealized lens that did not disturb the colonial underpinnings and ecological injustices of the modern world (Hossain et al., 2024). That romantic conception started to break up with the increasing environmental collapse awareness and postcolonial criticism. This situation changed in the late 20th century, when ecopoetics began to flourish as part of what Lawrence Buell (2009) calls "the environmental turn" in literary studies. Buell stressed the idea that nature cannot be regarded as a passive setting but as a textual and ethical agency. He maintained that literature has a diagnostic value to ecological consciousness, revealing the ideological apparatus which condition us to relate to the environment in a certain way. Through his work, poetry was defined as an imaginative registration that could describe the environmental crisis and rearrange the human relationship with nature (Buell, 2009).

A Kenyan author and critic Wa Thiong'o (1986) has persistently advocated the central role of language within decolonization struggles.



According to Wa Thiong'o, English alongside French were instruments of cultural imperialism that destroyed African identities while choking native creativity (Wa Thiong'o, 1986). He has advocated for African languages in literature since they serve as a tool to restore African historical knowledge, cultural perspective and group mind awareness. The power of language in post-colonial resistance is also evident in the work of Tayeb Salih (2009), a Sudanese author who critiques the alienating effects of Westernization on Arab identities in his novel *"Season of Migration to the North"*. The way Salih portrays language shows how linguistic and cultural breakdown during colonization shapes both personal identities and cultural groups. Salih demonstrates how his characters experience psychological trauma as they attempt to bridge their Arabic language with colonial English (Salih, 2009). The battles over land territory directly link with language preservation which becomes essential after colonial periods end.

However, this concept of ecopoetic literature does not belong to the present days. Romantic nature (especially in works of Wordsworth and Coleridge) immersed itself in nature, positioning it as a moral and philosophical looking-glass, in which human pain and the possibility of transcendence were reflected (Rigby, 2022). However Romanticism had a tendency to avert its eyes to the violent nature of the colonial land grab and industrialization, which contemporary ecopoetics highlights. Ecopoetics is construed today as a literary approach that connects eco-imagination and resistance politics. It moves beyond environmentalism to the social and cultural aspects of the ecological crisis, in particular, colonialism. Contemporary theorist Ecopoetics should also address not only the destruction of ecosystems but also the dispossession of the Indigenous land and culture, argues modern theorist. In this way, ecopoetics take the form of a framework that liberates environmental, linguistic, and cultural systems which allows to rearticulating human and nonhuman relations in a decolonial way (Rigby, 2022). Ecopoetics also deals with the historical trauma and shows how colonialism did not only affect the landscapes but also eliminated the Indigenous ecological knowledge and languages. According to Hodge (2022), land and language serve as twin pillars of cultural sovereignty. Their disruption under colonial regimes fractures both ecological and epistemic systems. Epistemological and spiritual attachments to place were also torn as



an outcome of the compelled migration of original populations and the ruin of their surroundings (Fiedorczuk, 2024).

For Adonis, colonialism needs to be seen in the context of the general history of European colonization of the Arab world, specifically the French Mandate of Syria and Lebanon after the First World War. The study of his interaction with language and cultural tradition can therefore be discussed in terms of the violation of Arab cultural and political autonomy, and be extended to consider that his poetry deals with wider issues of modernity, political sovereignty, cultural heritage, and language change, not only with colonialism (Hakim, 2019). Adonis employs desert imagery, fragmented language and mystical symbolism to address issues of displacement, loss and regeneration in the Arab world. His poetry denounces colonial violence, as well as the stagnation of culture, and provides an eschatological perspective of reform, which is poetic and ecological revival (Fiedorczuk et al., 2024). The way he intertwines the Arabic poetic tradition with modernist experimentation makes him a transcultural ecopoet who reacted to the ecological as well as political destruction. To an Indigenous mind, land is not inert resource; it is alive and has historical, cultural, spiritual memory. According to Joni Adamson (2001), Native literatures provide criticism of capitalist commodification of nature and reaffirm non-extractive relations with place.

In the end, the similarity between Diaz and Adonis, is that they use decolonial ecopoetics as a literary tactic to criticize, re-vision and change the colonial harm into potential. In it, they place poetry in a testimonial and speculative position, one that can both oppose extractive structures and give narrative power back to the suppressed ecologies and voices. The ecopoetics element of this argument is that it functions not just as a form of criticism, but also as a generative practice of reworlding: the imaginative work by which new ecological, linguistic, and cultural relationships might be brought into existence. Diaz and Adonis show, through their different linguistic registers, that poetry can undo ruination, offer a restoration of dignity, and constitute a sustainable future to oppressed peoples and the land they inhabit (Pearson, 2013). The terms land and language are used to describe both the physical space and the cultural, historical and relational significance of place, and the poetic and cultural dimensions of language in which identity, memory and knowledge is expressed. Colonialism is defined as systems of historical domination and colonality is defined as ongoing structures of power and



knowledge. Decolonial resistance, then, is a poetic practice that resists these structures by asserting other marginalized relationships to land, language, culture, and identity. The comparison between Diaz and Adonis is not intended to highlight similarity in historical and cultural contexts but rather to offer different angles on the interplay of land, language, power and resistance. Diaz's work is born in an Indigenous U.S. context and Adonis writes from an Arab and Syrian cultural and historical context. It is because of their differences that a comparison is needed: reading them together shows the convergences and differences in the ways ecopoetic and decolonial resistance work in different historical moments.

4. Natalie Diaz: Reclaiming Indigenous Land and Language

Natalie Diaz was born in 1978 in Needles, California, situated within the Fort Mojave Indian Reservation. Her early life in this culturally rich and historically significant region deeply informs the thematic focus of her poetic work. Through her poetry, Natalie Diaz powerfully illustrates how Indigenous peoples and their environments have endured despite centuries of colonization. As a Mojave poet and a member of the Gila River Indian Community, Diaz dedicates her creative work to the places and languages her ancestors once inhabited. Her poetry simultaneously condemns the cultural and environmental violence inflicted on Indigenous communities and celebrates their enduring relationship with the land and ancestral languages (Decuir, 2024). Diaz creates a poetic terrain by weaving Mojave linguistic elements with English, thereby resisting erasure and asserting the continued presence and resilience of Indigenous identity.

In her poem, Diaz discusses the ecological destruction of Native lands, connecting the damages to the colonialism exploitation and the systematic genocide (Diaz, 2020). The empirical evidence still shows the dispossession and marginalization of the Indigenous people by settlers, or colonizers, which suggests the relevance of her poetic intrusion. Diaz provides a reimagining of the land as a living archive and a place of active resistance, in which Indigenous systems of knowledge and ecologies have persisted despite centuries of colonization (Davis, 2016). Diaz additionally emphasizes the healing power of the planet, imagining regeneration and recovery by way of reconnection to ancestral land. Diaz states in her poem *Cranes, Mafiosos*, and a *Polaroid Camera*: “The land remembers us, even when we forget it” (Diaz, 2020, p. 76). In her case, healing takes place when Indigenous people go back



to their homelands where cultural memory and ecological belonging are re-generated. In the poetry of Diaz, language functions as a means of communication, of course, but it is also a technology of survival and resistance on a cultural level. She challenges the dominance of the English language by building a multilingual space in English poetic forms through the insertion of Mojave words into her poetic texts. In her poem “The First Water is the Body”, she declares: “The Colorado River is my sister. I am the flesh of her” (Diaz, 2022, p. 66). Through this phrase, Diaz takes language and landscape back in a single stroke, declaring that colonial efforts to disconnect Indigenous people to place have unsuccessfully worked.

The ecological and spiritual identity is interwoven with the poetic language of Diaz. Poetry is turned into a place of renewing language heritage, where land and language can heal together. In this part, three important poems are discussed with an aim of illustrating how Diaz uses poetry as an anti-colonial critical tool, speaking about both the past dispossession and the present-day erasure of culture.

4.1 “Fluid Sovereignty” in Natalie Diaz’s *The First Water is the Body*

In “*The First Water is the Body*”, Diaz emphasizes the inseparability of land, body, and language, creating a lyrical space where the Indigenous subject can reclaim cultural and political sovereignty. This long poem is obviously difficult to be analyzed, but in this section there will be a clear analysis for some excerpts from the poem. This poem, part of her celebrated collection *Postcolonial Love Poem* (2020), begins with an invocation of water, a sacred and essential element in Mojave cosmology. She writes:

“The Colorado River is the most endangered river in the United States—also, it is a part of my body.

I carry a river. It is who I am: ‘Aha Makav. This is not metaphor.’ ” (Diaz, 2020, p. 50).

Here, Diaz proposes that water and language are not metaphorical, but material components of life and identity. Water sustains bodily existence, just as language sustains cultural continuity. Through this intimate entanglement, Diaz affirms that Indigenous communities maintain an unbroken link to their ecological surroundings and linguistic traditions. Linguistic reclamation, in her poetics, becomes a sovereign act, one that restores ownership of land, culture, and voice.



The colonialism and the degradation of the Indigenous water sources by the industry and the politicians are also criticized by Diaz in the poem. She writes: “The Colorado River is my sister— / I am not a metaphor” (Diaz, 2020, p. 51). Diaz does not permit metaphorical removal in these lines but continues to proclaim that the colonial infrastructures, such as dams, are not symbolic attacks on Indigeness and the Indigenous body, but a physical one. Her concept of sovereignty is liquid, as water itself, molded by flow, opposition and strength (Hansen, 2022).

In this regard, the recovery of language would mean the healing of the ecology. The main metaphor of the poem is the attack on rivers. The poet explains that the attack on the environment means the attack on the Indigenous languages, showing the interconnection of environmental and linguistic genocide (Stephens, 2024, p. 46). Diaz writes:

“*My body is a river, my body is a dam*” (Diaz, 2020, p. 51).

This dual imagery embraces the contradiction of being a natural power and the colonial object at the same time, the conqueror and the victim.

These lines also speak to the embodied trauma of colonization. The “dam” becomes a symbol of interruption, a structure that disrupts natural and cultural flows, while the “river” conveys the indomitable strength of Indigenous continuity. Diaz makes the crisis of the environment tangible and material, in which the body itself assimilates and visualizes the burnout of constant struggle. Her minimalist and declarative expressions sound urgent and profound, although words cannot possibly convey the pain that is inherited. She writes:

“I carry a river. It is who I am: ‘Aha Makav.’ This is not metaphor”
I carry a river. It is who I am: ‘Aha Makav. This is not metaphor.
When a Mojave says, *Inyech ‘Aha Makavch ithuum*, we are saying our name. We are telling a story of our existence. *The river runs through the middle of my body.*”

(Diaz, 2020, p. 51).

Here, “Aha Makav”, means “the river people,” is not a poetic device it is a declaration of identity. The poem rejects commodified, tourist-friendly images of Indigenous life, offering instead a raw, embodied truth about what it means to carry ancestral land and language (Stephens, 2024, p. 47).

In such a way, the work by Diaz demands reclaiming rivers, tongues, and traditions. However, as Davis (2017) dispenses, the role of water in the poetry



of Diaz is that of a literal and symbolic battleground where ecological protection and cultural survival meet. Likewise, Hansen (2022) views the interpretation of the river as a metaphor of human life and memory and notes how Diaz concludes the poem with a chilling question:

“And once remembered, will we return to that first water, and in doing so return to ourselves, to each other?

Do you think the water will forget what we have done, what we continue to do?” (Diaz, 2020, p. 54).

In the last lines of the poem, the river is transformed into a witness, an archive, the flow of which bears a print of human activity. Diaz uses the character of "water" as the “last memory”, the effective power that keeps the account of the colonial violence and promotes the chance of reparative justice. The pause, which follows her question, is not nothingness--it is a spiritual appeal to listen.

4-2. Resistance and Decolonial Imaginary in Natalie Diaz’s “They Don’t Love You Like I Love You”

Natalie Diaz’s poem “They Don’t Love You Like I Love You” is one of the most important poems in her poetic collection “Postcolonial Love Poem” (2020). In this poem Diaz creates a transformative ecopoetic system that not only abolishes European traditions in land ownership, language and affection but replaces them with Indigenous interconnection as both artistic and anti-erasure political action. In the opening lines “Maps / are ghosts” the poem launches an immediate attack on cartographic violence that historically made Indigenous territories appear empty before settler colonial invasion (Goeman, 2013, p. 45). Diaz uses spectral analogies about maps to reveal colonial land ownership weaknesses while preserving indigenous spatial knowledge systems which animate geography through stories. She says:

“My mother said this to me
long before Beyoncé lifted the lyrics
from the Yeah Yeah Yeahs,

of clouds? If not spilled milk? Or blood?
If not the place we once were
in the millions? America is *Maps*—
Maps are ghosts: white and
layered with people and places I see through.
My mother has always known best,”



(Diaz, 2020, p. 44)

Accordingly, in this poem Diaz positions herself as a rebel in modern ecopoetics through actions that break settler-colonial control of possessions and establish Native epistemological survival based on relationships. The seemingly basic maternal warning “Don’t stray” by Diaz (2020) morphs into an anti-colonial document which transforms land and language alongside love into resistance tools. Through the lines “America is Maps— / Maps are ghosts” Diaz exposes cartographic violence by evoking Mishuana Goeman’s (2013) explanation that “mapping became the visual process of disappearing Native bodies from the land” (Goeman, 2013, p. 45). The ghost metaphor in Diaz’s work exceeds criticism by creating palimpsests which show Indigenous existence despite the settler state’s archival strategies of removal. The poem uses ecological imagery such as “cloud clots” and “spilled milk” and “blood” to turn nature into an ally that helps Indigenous peoples fight against colonizers.

The specific quotation from Beyoncé (“They don’t love you like I love you”) becomes part of Diaz’s decolonial strategy to reveal how using these words without historical context allows Black feminists to entertain consumption of Indigenous suffering. According to Simpson (2017) the mother’s warning about interracial love reveals the concept of “liberation as intimacy” since proper decolonization means rejecting “toxic seduction” from settlers (Simpson, 2017, p. 112). Then, in the next three stanzas, Diaz reveals her personal existence under settler colonialism relies on factual Native extermination (Mbembe 2003). The transition between “some one” and “some many” creates a visual effect of Native body displacement and the “live on top of phrase materialization” of the vertical segregation developed by Patrick Wolfe as “eliminary structures” (Mbembe, 2003). She says:

“knew that I’d been begging for them,
to lay my face against their white
laps, to be held in something more than the loud light of their projectors
as they flicker themselves—sepia
or blue—all over my body.” (Diaz, 2020, p. 44)

Diaz uses particular images across stanzas 10 through 13 to both confirm her indigenous heritage and attack colonial practices. The poet probes colonial psychological violence by analyzing the reducing image of “white laps” which



Glen Coulthard describes as “the libidinal economy of settler colonialism” (Tuck & Yang, 2018). The stanza demonstrates how Jolene Rickard describes “the visual sovereignty” as artists fight back against their representation being wiped out (Rickard, 2022, p. 23).

In the next stanzas, the poet changes the tone of the poem to be more serious and fast when the poet rejects all forms of liberty in the presence of the colonizer. The poet deeply transforms “Wait” to achieve “Weight” to demonstrate how colonial anticipations generate the “heaviness of survivance” through which enduring turns into forming a kind of warfare (Tuck & Yang, 2018, p. 36). She states:

“All this time,
I thought my mother said, *Wait*,
as in, *Give them a little more time*
to know your worth,
when really, she said, *Weight*,
meaning *heft*, preparing me” (Diaz, 2020, p. 45)

Through the witching of words, the poem develops its decolonial purpose which throws away liberal time-based ideas in favor of using real-world weight of colonization. The poem uses “yoke” and “plow” as agricultural tools to render images of Indigenous suffering while following the analysis of Whyte (2017), about “colonial climates” of environmental racism (Whyte, 2017, p. 227). Diaz uses the comparative “less worse than” as an indirect rebellious approach for refusing accounts focused on damage dynamics. She writes:

“for the yoke of myself,
the beast of my country’s burdens,
which is less worse than
my country’s plow. Yes,
when my mother said,
They don’t love you like I love you,” (Diaz, 2020, p. 45)

According to Juictice (2018), the last lines are regarded to be a defeat to the policy and ideology of value when Diaz reveals “Indigenous goodness as a revolutionary ontology” (Justice, 2018, p. 204). The resolution of the poem presents Indigenous wisdom about love which protects Indigenous lives while showing direction to keep them safe from settler dehumanization. According



to Simpson (2017), Diaz develops through her writing a “sovereign aesthetic” (Simpson 2017, p. 22) because she uses each image and pause to reclaim land. She closes the poem by saying:

“she meant,
Natalie, that doesn't mean
you aren't good.” (Diaz, 2020, p. 45)

Through her last statement the mother establishes Indigenous worth beyond white recognition according to Saidiya Hartman (Hartman, 2025, 311). The collection comes to completion by expressing its central idea of “postcolonial love” as Daniel Heath Justice describes it as “Indigenous kinship that remembers our way back to each other through colonial wreckage” (Justice, 2018, p. 208). The last lines also emphasize that Diaz develops academic theories through her poetic form to create a “sacred Hoop of meaning” (Hartman, 2025). The next section thoroughly discusses how Adonis uses language and land as literary techniques to challenge and denounce colonialism.

5. Adonis: Use of Land and Language as a Site of Memory and Transformation

Ali Ahmad Said Esber (commonly published under the pen name Adonis (or Adunis) is a Syrian-born poet and essayist who has lived in Syria, Lebanon and France. Born in Syria in 1930, Adonis is regarded as one of the most significant Arab poets of the 20th and 21st centuries, whose extensive oeuvre rearranges Arabic poetry tradition by means of mysticism, modernist experimentation, and political commentary. One of the key metaphors of his work is the desert, which he uses not as a geographic phenomenon, but as a transitional area of historical memory, cultural confrontation and spiritual transfiguration (Arabi, 2015).

The desert in Adonis's poetics is both literal and symbolic—a site of trauma and possibility, ruin and renewal. In "A Desert in the Void", he writes, "The desert is not a place, it is a time / where the past and future collide" (Adonis, Selected Poems, 2010). This vision dismantles chronological linearity, allowing historical pain and revolutionary futurity to coexist. The desert becomes a temporal rupture, a scenario where colonization, resistance, and rebirth intermingle. Adonis's writings explore how colonial wars, displacement, and modern warfare devastate both the natural environment and human consciousness.



In *The Desert: The Diary of Beirut Under Siege* (1982), he writes: "The city is a body / that writes itself in blood" (Adonis, 2010, p. 66). This line captures the inseparability of human and environmental suffering, portraying war-torn urbanity as both victim and archive. The city, like the body, bleeds and remembers, suggesting that land is not passive but reactive to violence (Shideed, 2023, p. 273).

Through poems such as "*Elegy for the Time at Hand*", Adonis assumes his role both as a poet-historian and ecological witness. He asserts: "*I am the one who writes / the history of the wind*," (Adonis, 2010, p. 67). By doing thus, he assumes an aesthetic authority to tell an account of resistance using elemental metaphors. The wind turns into a mnemonic power that fights against state-sponsored erasure and repossesses natural elements as the mnemonic and uprising forces (Shideed, 2023, p. 274).

The poetry of Adonis has the tendency to act as an archaeological digging up of rooted histories, spiritual genealogies, and decentered identities. He invokes Sufi concepts such as "fana" (annihilation) to dissolve rigid subjectivities and transcend nationalist boundaries. In this sense, Adonis visualizes the desert as the sacred topography as well as spiritual exile, where identity is continuously dispossessed and re-envisioned (Adonis, 2005).

Language in Adonis's poetry becomes a militant terrain. His radical reworking of Arabic poetic form and syntax functions as a resistance to traditionalism and colonial inscription. He resists cultural stagnation by creating linguistic fractures that mirror the disorientation of postcolonial realities. Adonis introduces the land and language as the disputed territories, which carry not only the marks of the colonialism, but also contain the grains of the renewal. His poetry allows ecology of memory to operate where remembering is a political act and speaking itself turns into a transformation by blurring the boundaries between the mythic pasts and revolutionary futures. This section will now analyze three critical poems by Adonis "*The Solitary Land*", "*The Wound*", and "*A Vision*" to investigate how his poetic language and desert imagery challenge colonialism and envision a postcolonial ecology of renewal.



5.1. "Bare Land, Broken Tongues in Adonis's *The Solitary Land*"

This poem was first published in Adonis's poetic collection *Songs of Mihiyar the Damascene* (2021), translated into English by Ivan Eubanks and Kareem James Abu-Zeid (Adonis, 2021, p. 5). The title immediately evokes Edward Said's concept of "invented geographies", where land is not merely physical, but a contested ideological and discursive space (Said, 2014). Similarly, Achille Mbembe (2003) discusses how the adjective "solitary" suggests "a terrain where sovereignty is exercised through isolation and abandonment" (p. 88).

In the opening stanza, Adonis subverts conventional agricultural and geographic imagery, repurposing motifs from classical Arabic poetry to explore contemporary ruins and unanswered political trauma. In modern trauma theory, land often appears as a palimpsest of unresolved historical violence. In this poem, linguistic space becomes a site of resistance; the words represent the feeling of the poet—slipping from surveillance, resisting documentation, and refusing to conform, much like dissident bodies under authoritarian scrutiny (Adonis, 2021). The poet says:

I inhabit these fugitive words,
I live, my face my face's lone companion,
And my face is my path, (Adonis, 2021, p. 45)

The speaker of the poem is Adonis himself, who encourages the agency of the individual in the fight against colonization and mentions the Palestinian cause as an example of self-representation through sacrifice and martyrdom. He takes the term "face" as an identity: alone but adequate, a reflection of the strength of the colonized. The repetition of the word "face" helps Adonis to reaffirm the individual and group identity and resist the colonialist imposing of otherness subjectivities and reclaim cultural presence against the systematic erasure (Shideed, 2023, p. 276). The element of land in the poem acquires the manuscript of divinity- it is holy and worth dying about. The power to name land is positioned as a spiritual reclaiming against colonial erasures and renaming (e.g. Palestine/Israel or Indigenous territories renamed by settlers). The poem builds up to an anti-colonial epistemology, in which land, myth and death become a revolutionary trinity against the imperial power.

The incantatory repetition of "In your name" performs liturgical work, invoking sanctity through rhythm and syntax. This ritualistic structure transforms poetic resistance into a sacred offering. Anthropologist Michael



Taussig describes this stance as the land's ability to "stand tall" as the nervous system of the earth itself," resisting its reduction to mere territory (Taussig, 1993, p. 88). The poet says:

In your name, my land
That stands tall, enchanted and solitary;
In your name, death, my friend. (Adonis, 2021, p. 45)

Such discursivity of the poem is especially applicable to the use of the word "enchanted". It reverses the disenchantment of land, characterized by its colonial rationality, theorized by Mbembe (2003) and restoration of the spiritual vitality and an agency of natural world. By doing that, Adonis also resonates with the idea of so-called slow violence offered by Rob Nixon (2011) the gradual, unseen destruction of the ecology by colonial capitalism. The geographical isolation of the land is then turned into a prerequisite of decolonial sovereignty, not a place of abandonment, but of revolutionary gestation.

It is in this "desolated" land that Adonis develops a poetics of resistance based on spatial holy-ness, language revolt, and invocation of myths. The land is articulated not simply in myth and metaphor, but also in terms of suffering, memory and opposition, as a key location in the very centre of postcolonial poetic practice.

5.2. Adonis's *The Wound*: A Bloomian Reading of Poetic Transumption and Decolonial Vision

Adonis's poem "*The Wound*" was first published in his collection *Songs of Mihyar the Damascene* (2021), translated into English by Ivan Eubanks and Kareem James Abu-Zeid. Interestingly, Adonis penned two different poems with the identical title: another one is included in his earlier book *Adonis: Selected Poems* (2010), and both of them tell about colonialism and reappropriation of land and language as tactical literary acts of resistance to the imperial authority. In the latter, Adonis creates an inverted pastoral mode that disrupts the Romantic traditions. The poem begins with the botanical imagery of leaves and trees and lakes that connote a sense of renewal, yet within a necropolitical paradigm that resemble what Achille Mbembe (2003) regarded to be one of the concept of democracy and close proximity to death. The vessel, a central image in Arabic mystical poetics (e.g., Ibn Arabi's *Fusus al-Hikam*), is inverted: it no longer holds divine knowledge but bleeds



historical trauma. The wound becomes an archive, unstable and generative, producing a counter-memory through excess and rupture.

Adonis ties his own identity to the wound, aligning it with poetic glory:

“Time perishing: the glory of the wound.”
 “The trees rising among our lashes: / A lake for the wound.”
 (Adonis, 2021, p. 37)

These lines enact a chiasmic structure, reversing Hegel’s *Aufhebung* (sublation) by absorbing contradictions without resolving them. In doing so, Adonis engages in a Bloomian act of poetic misreading or *clinamen*—specifically departing from T. S. Eliot’s “wound” in *Four Quartets*, which seeks spiritual redemption (Burbidge, 2020, p. 169). Adonis instead politicizes the wound. His image of trees in lashes moves from surrealist absurdity to revolutionary grotesque, where vision itself becomes wounded perception.

Water, typically life-giving in classical Arabic verse, is recontextualized as a trauma-laden reservoir—what Arabi (2015) calls “sacred topography undone by grief.” This lake is not an oasis but a burial site, pooling memory into fluid permanence.

The theme of the bridge, which in the lyric traditions is a symbol of unity, is changed here into a forensic relic. It extends into a “deepening grave,” pushing on Foucault heterotopia of colonial violence that occurs in space, not time. Adonis explains both liturgical and ethnocultural symbolism when he says:

“I give the voice of the wound / To the tongue of strangled bells.” (Adonis, 2021, p. 37).

These bells refer both to the Christian carillons and to the Ethiopian “nagus”, and by means of their silence, Adonis refers to the criticism of Abdelkebir Khatibi (1983) the theory of the “double critique” - hybridity being strangled by nationalist purity (Khatibi, 2019, p. 77).

“The wound lies in bridges / When the grave lengthens
 I give the voice of the wound / To the tongue of strangled bells
 When I shout during the day, / Who are you?
 Who’s thrusting you / Into my notebooks”
 (Adonis, 2021, p. 37)

In this stanza, naming becomes both invocation and resistance. The voice of the poet turns into palimpsest, overwritten, but remaining. The notebook, colonial archive, has now been taken over by the poet cry itself. Adonis



continues this criticism in the next stanzas by daemonizing metaphors of traditional religion. He re-baptizes the wound into “cloud” and “dove”, therefore, deterritorializing both Christian and Islamic symbolic. The dove, which is interpreted as the Holy Spirit in Christianity or as “ruh” in Sufism, is reconsidered as an entity of exilic breach, deprived of any transcendence (Arabi, 2015). The ancient fall is no longer a reference to the Edenic sin, but the pre-colonial dispossession. The islands do not indicate the Western epic adventure but the Phoenician diaspora and the Mediterranean fragmentation. He says:

“I named you cloud, / Wound, dove of departure
On the isles of exodus, / On the archipelago of the ancient fall.”
(Adonis, 2021, p. 37)

The poet continues this conditional structure by saying:

“Had I a harbor, had I a vessel... / I would forge them all for the wound”
“Rain down on our deserts, / ... palms of the wound
Come no closer—the wound is closer than you.”
(Adonis, 2021, p. 37)

This natural description creates a metaleptic disruption of lyric tradition. The harbors of colonial navigation (Beirut, Alexandria) become stations of insurgency, and the “spear-like songs” they yield suggest a militarized lyricism akin to Aimé Césaire’s *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* (Césaire, 1990).

The poem concludes with a theological inversion. The wound becomes both subject and sovereign, echoing the Sufi concept of “qurb” (proximity to the divine), but secularized into a decolonial intimacy that eclipses the colonizer’s gaze. The wound is now closer than the imperial archive, more enduring than its monuments. In this way, Adonis does not merely anticipate decolonial thought—he performs it through poetic praxis.

5-3. Ecologies of Erasure: Adonis’s *A Vision* and the Poetics of Decolonial Refusal

Adonis’s poem *A Vision*, featured in his 2021 collection *Songs of Mihiyar the Damascene*, stands as a seminal piece that critically undermines colonial conceptions of space and time by advancing a radical form of ecopoetics. Land and language serve in this poem as a place where recalcitrant memories are written and rebellious histories repossessed. The first line, “Our city fled”,



disturbs at once the colonialist idea of the city as something fixed, immovable. The seeking of the “paths” that lead into “only horizon” can be seen as a dynamic decolonial movement that does not accept the offered maps and geographies by settler colonial forces. When the poet writes: “Are a body I tear apart on my page,” he enacts what Khatibi theorized as *bi-langue* (1983), transforming the Arabic script into a contested battleground whose fragments actively resist colonial archival and epistemic domination (Khatibi, 2019). He says:

“Our city fled,
So I sought its paths in haste
And looked around—I saw only horizon,
And I perceived that those who flee tomorrow
And those who return tomorrow
Are a body I tear apart on my page.” (Adonis, 2021, p. 35)

In the next stanza of the poem, Adonis puts the elemental imagery into a subversive motion: the cloud becomes “a throat”, a singing organ, and the waters, traditionally used as the metaphor of fertility and life, are redirected into the context of flares and membranes that indicate casualty instead of liveliness (Newton, 2020). This image of “the sticky yellow thread” of history reminds me of the idea of “friction” introduced by Anna Tsing (2005), wherein she states that the colonial leftovers attach themselves to bodies as stubbornly as toxic pollen, poisoning them and changing them. “The hand of dolls and rags” is a grotesque and literal expression that isolates the loss of agency to the level of puppetry, of gestures produced and restrained in the colonial conditions (Newton, 2020, p. 66). He says:

“I could see: the clouds were a throat,
The water formed walls of flame.
I saw a sticky yellow thread,
A thread of the history that clings to me.
A hand mulls over my life, ties my days together
Time and again, a hand that was heir
To the race of dolls and the progeny of rags.” (Adonis, 2021, p. 35)

Later in the poem, arboreal imagery is introduced as a type of ecological archive. The colonial fantasy of the “virgin land” ready to be conquered is shattered by the “seduction” of trees, and the idea of “the rooms among branches” points to the theorization of Indigenous cosmograms. Kyle Whyte



(2017) describes it as the spatial and spiritual structures that are not subjected to the settler-imposed geometrical and Cartesian grids, as theorized. These symbols of nature work nearly as children taking in the “Suras of clouds and verses of stone” in which nonhuman things turn into interlocutors and teach readers a literacy of decolonial resistance (Whyte, 2017). The poet writes:

“I entered the rites of creation
In the waters’ womb and the trees’ virginity,

My sand, I read them
Suras of clouds and verses of stone,
I saw them journeying with me,
I saw pools of tears and the corpse of rain
Gleaming behind them.” (Adonis, 2021, p. 35)

The refrain “Our city fled” comes again in the fourth stanza, highlighting the destruction that the colonial forces had caused. The repetition of the word “died” makes a chilling gloom on the future of the homeland with the continuous colonization. The taxidermized carcass of the lark becomes a kind of suspended survivance of Tuck and Yang (2018) “the silent evidence” of Indigenous epistemologies enduring amid colonial epistemologies. Such a line as “Silence of the ice, I / Am the home of the exiled lark” (Adonis, 2021, p. 35), appears in harmony with the idea of Glen Coulthard about “the grounded normativity” and turns the grief into the process of the land and identity reclaiming (Tuck & Yang, 2018, p. 259). He says:

“Our city fled
What am I? A spike of grain
Weeping for a lark
That died beneath the snow and cold,
Died without revealing its messages,
Died without writing anyone.
I questioned it and saw its corpse
Discarded at the end of time,
And I cried out, “Silence of the ice, I
Am the home of the exiled lark.
Its grave is my home, and I’m an exile.” (Adonis, 2021, p. 35)

The poem intensifies the traumatic experience and compulsory displacement because of colonialism in the fifth stanza, and the refrain “Our



city fled” supports the theme of exile (Arabi, 2015, p. 20). The speaker reimagines his body as a “river filled to overflowing with blood”, and this image stands in for the long historical violence of conquest, slavery, and Indigenous erasure that pervades the land, as well as the body. Such reversal of the river, as the source of life to that of death and unrestrained pain, is a very strong reminder of the colonial past. The image of “ships growing distant, expanding” (Adonis, 2021, p. 35) illustrates colonial expansion’s reach and persistence, while “drowned shores seducing” conjures a natural world scarred and shaped by imperial violence.

Such visions reflect the theory of “hydraulic sovereignty” developed by Laura Pulido Goeman (2013), according to which bodies and waters are intertwined with the violence of colonial water management and dispossession. The image of “the ships growing distant” also reminds the reader of the colonialism discourse of discovery. The waves called “pelican” taunt the settlers by reminding them of their Hubert-romantic association with the sea (Goeman, 2013). He says:

“Our city fled,
And I saw my feet transform
Into a river overflowing with blood,
Into ships growing distant, expanding,
And I saw my drowned shores seducing ...
My waves were wind and pelicans.” (Adonis, 2021, p. 36)

The strategic refusals of Adonis are the instances of resistance in the poem. “The crushed pearl / Whose powder anchors my ships” (Adonis, 2021, p. 35) symbolically stands to indicate that any pieces of resistance are a hindrance to the colonial developments. According to Arabi (2015), the second refusal appears as “a woodcutter living on my face,” an intrusive force that “gathers me and sets me on fire” (p. 22)—a destructive yet transformative act that dismantles imposed identities and fuels rebellion (Césaire, 1990). The poet says:

“Our city fled,
And refusal is a crushed pearl
Whose powder anchors my ships,
And refusal is a woodcutter living
On my face—it gathers me and sets me on fire—
And refusal is the distance that disperses me.



I see my blood and I see my death

Beyond my blood:

It speaks to me and pursues me.” (Adonis, 2021, p. 36)

The last rejection,” the distance that disperses me”, sums up the way in which the diaspora separates the colonized societies, though it cannot be totally erased. The stanza ends with a bleak realization of death: “I see my blood and I see my death” (Adonis, 2021, p. 35). A compelling photograph, bloodline, ancestry and mortality are intertwined in this eerie legacy that, as Khatibi states, “speaks and pursues”, a dual responsibility and demand to act (Khatibi, 2019, p. 67).

This imagery dismantles and challenges the colonial structures and formulates the continuous challenges and strength of the anti-colonial fight. The river of blood, the crushed pearl and the burning woodcutter all represent an assertion of unrecognized pasts that are demanding to be seen in the present time.

The poem ends on an ambiguous tone: as much as there is continuous death and loss in the conditions of colonial subjugation, there is also the “glowing” light. The verb “illuminates” implies a twinkle of salvation -a brittle yet persistent light of consciousness within misery (Arabi, 2015). The poet says:

“Our city fled,

And I saw how my shroud illuminates me,

I saw ... If only death would grant me time.” (Adonis, 2021, p. 36)

The shroud, which may have been an imposition of colonial identities, accounts of insufficiency or oblivion, is now radiating as a visionary account of resistance instead of oppression. This photograph claims that the colonized people are full of life even though they are figuratively buried. The words speak of the decolonial requirement of mourning what cannot be mourned enough, how the process of grieving is constantly interrupted by violent disconnections. The poem focuses on the colonial erasure that has a tendency to assume that the native people are “already extinct” or that they are “out of time” demanding otherwise a legacy that is not resolved or completed but very much present.

Ultimately, *A Vision* emerges as a profound condemnation of colonial structures, contesting dominant discourses by reclaiming land, language, and memory.



Conclusion

This study makes comparative contribution to the fields of ecopoetics and postcolonial literary studies by focusing on the converging methods Indigenous and Arab poets employ to resist colonial violence. The findings suggest that ecopoetics can illuminate not only relationships between poetry and the environment but also the connections among land, cultural memory, history, and language.

The comparative analysis shows that both Diaz and Adonis transform land and language into interconnected sites of memory, identity and resistance, although they do so within substantially different historical and cultural contexts. Their poetry connects ecological destruction and cultural erasure in their works, which turns their poetry into the means of resistance against the colonial rule. Diaz's poetry depicts the Mojave Desert as a living archive of Native sovereignty and memory, using language to rekindle the inseparable relationship between identity and place. Her work links ecological destruction and linguistic loss head-on, emphasizing the indispensable role of Indigenous knowledge and relationship to land.

Adonis, by contrast, engages poetic form and imagery to represent representations of Arab lands, highlighting division while also gesturing toward regeneration. His poetry depicts the effects of political and historical turmoil, while also transforming inherited Arabic poetic traditions and cultural memory. Adonis demonstrates the process of decay and renewal dynamic in the poetry through fragmented and nonlinear images of nature. Read comparatively, their poems demonstrate how ecopoetics practices can function as forms of resistance to colonial occupation. Their poetry confirms the idea that the survival of the culture is closely connected to the control of the land, and that the process of decolonization should provide the renewal of the language and the renewal of the environment. What unites the two poets is their use of poetry to negotiate questions of memory, belonging and resistance. However, this comparison does not mean historical equivalence; Diaz's poetry is influenced by Indigenous relations with land and by the ongoing impacts of settler colonialism, while Adonis's poetry is produced in a different Arab and Syrian historical context of displacement, political change and cultural and linguistic negotiations.



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