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Editorial

Overburden: Reading/Imagining Extra-Canadian Ecologies

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In this special issue, we draw on the concept of *overburden* to question forms of excess, both material and metaphorical, that accumulate upon and within peoples, structures, and systems. Overburden is both a noun and a verb. As a noun, it can mean an excess load (on anything or anyone) that becomes a burden to carry. It is also a geological term that stands for what Radhakanta Koner and Debashish Chakravarty call "dump materials" in the mining sector (1311). These kinds of materials (e.g. topsoil, sedimentary rock, surface and groundwater) are "byproducts of [mining] operations over a number of years" that have "minimal or no economic value" (1312). As a verb, overburden turns our attention to the act of overloading something or someone with an extra tangible or intangible burden. It is a process of imposing an unbearable excess on a person or a structure. Overburden in both cases signifies an obstruction, a surplus layer that must be shed in the process of generating economic value or restoring efficiency. Overburden then signals a waste, an imposition, and a difficulty.

Recognizing these complex, overlapping and overwhelmingly negative connotations, we take up the rich generativity of *overburden* to explore the context of its signification within the production (ecological, cultural, political, technological, economic) of Canada as a settler colonial project. As Dene scholar Glen

Coulthard argues, settler states maintain colonial domination through capitalist structures of dispossession that "continue[] to frame Indigenous peoples' relationship with the state" (120). Decolonial environmental humanities scholar Macarena Gómez-Barris elaborates the "extractive view" that defines these structures, rendering "territories and peoples extractible… through a matrix of symbolic, physical, and representational violence" (5). This logic reorganizes Indigenous territories and communities, animals, plants, and other life "into extractible data and natural resources for material and immaterial accumulation" (5). In considering the centrality of extraction to the nation's identity, we extend the concept of overburden beyond its technical designation of the soil, sedimentary rock, surface water and groundwater that lie in the way of a mining site to consider the situation of all the beings—plants and animals and Indigenous/minority peoples—who are regarded alternatively as resources for the settler colonial Canadian project and obstructions to its realization.

These extractive frameworks help illuminate the contradictions that structure Canada's contemporary global image as a settler colonial society. Canada projects itself as a leader in environmental stewardship, humanitarian diplomacy, women and gender equality, and technological innovation. Yet these narratives disregard and erase the colonial-capitalist infrastructures that sustain Canada's resource extraction on Indigenous territories both within and outside its national borders, historically and into present times. The articles in this special issue explore how environmental discourse, technological development, and cultural production intersect in shaping Canada's global image. They examine how Canadian policies and infrastructure support settler logics of land extraction and violence both inside and outside of Canada. The issue also highlights Indigenous, artistic, and diasporic practices that challenge Canada's image as a benevolent, multicultural nation without a colonial past and present and represent alternative ethics of relationship and inhabitation.

Ishaan Selby traces how the fur trade transformed the beaver into a national figure in the economic and cultural formation of Canada. Through readings of *The Pump* by Sydney Hegele and *A Short History of the Blockade: Giant Beavers, Diplomacy, and Regeneration in Nishnaabewin* by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Selby demonstrates how contemporary literature unsettles the nostalgic symbolism of the beaver by exposing the colonial extraction and ecological violence embedded in Canada's national mythology. Specifically, through an analysis of Simpson's work, the beaver is centred as a relation within Indigenous resurgence, linking animal infrastructures, such as a beaver dam, to contemporary blockades against extractive industries. **Arielle Lavine** also unravels the nostalgic underpinnings of settler colonialism in their her analysis of the intertwined histories of summer camps and Indigenous residential schools.

By analyzing the architecture and design of both institutions, the article demonstrates how landscapes themselves become infrastructures of colonial governance in counterpoint with one another: the dispossession and disciplining of Indigenous children through residential schools worked in contrast but also in tandem with summer camps' mission of cultivating settler youth identities grounded in ideas of wilderness, *playing Indian*, and national stewardship. The article reveals the persisting entanglement of Canadian environmental imaginaries with colonial spatial practices and ongoing Indigenous dispossession. **Iheoma Joakin-Uzomba** challenges nationalist myths of Canada's green technological progress to explore how digital infrastructures reproduce settler colonial relations. The article introduces the concept of *techno-extractivism* to describe how digital systems extend extractive logics into new domains of governance and resource capture. Through a reading of *Moon of the Crusted Snow* by Waubgeshig Rice, Joakin-Uzomba contrasts the fragility of settler technologies with Indigenous practices of relational knowledge, language preservation, and land-based *survivance*. Drawing on Gerald Vizenor's concept of "survivance," the article argues that Indigenous cultural practices are an active continuance of Indigenous survival and resistance that form an *Indigenous techne* and challenge Canada's technological futurism. **Tamsyn Riddle** explores how Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) promotes a narrative of gender equality and humanitarian care while Canadian mining companies continue to generate gendered violence and ecological harm in the Global South. The article highlights the neoliberal and colonial underpinnings of Canada's feminist diplomacy that result in the mischaracterization of gender-based violence as variously an unavoidable natural phenomenon, a limited technical problem, and a symptom of *backwards* gender norms. This misreading, compounded by Canada's self-characterization as a benevolent actor, perpetuates the normalization of gender-based violence in the country's international mining industry. **Gideon Umezurike** assesses the concepts of transculturalism and multiculturalism against the complex relations of racialized immigrants and Indigenous peoples to the nation of Canada. His article uses Mark Sakamoto's memoir, *Forgiveness,* and Lisa Bird-Wilson's novel, *Probably Ruby*, to illuminate how histories of colonial violence and trauma shape contemporary Canadian society. While *Forgiveness* describes a qualified path to national belonging for Japanese Canadians, *Probably Ruby* illuminates the structural erasure of Indigenous identities that confounds the possibility of bidirectional settler-Indigenous cultural exchange that would fulfill the aspirational promise of transculturalism. **Susie O'Brien** explores the theme of borders and bordering in Mariam Pirbhai's short story collection, *Outside People*. The article focuses on the stories' illumination of the ways in which the selective domestication of the world outside Canadian borders, through practices ranging from the

Temporary Foreign Worker program to overseas adoptions, works to support the settler colonial good life. In addition to exposing the mechanisms of racial capitalism and environmental destruction that underpin myths of Canadianness, *Outside People* highlights possibilities for human/non-human alliances in support of alternative, undomesticated forms of inhabitation. Beginning with the discourses of racist hostility towards international students that arose in Canada throughout the 2020s, **Samuel Ikueze** uses Edward Said's contrapuntal theory to illuminate an artistic response to prevailing images of international students as an invasive species. The article focuses on *Òjà (The Talking Flute)*, a sculpture by Nigerian artist (and former international student) Roland Samuel, that highlights international students' complex ways of being and relating with Canada while critically raising awareness of the different ways that Canada and international students demonstrate fragility. **Zahra Tootonsab** shifts the focus to diasporic practices of sheltering within settler colonial society by drawing on Métis and Bakhtiari crafts. Tootonsab defines sheltering as the ongoing labour of sustaining ethical relationships with human and more-than-human beings through collective care and socio-ecological mutual orientation. By engaging with Métis and Bakhtiari textile traditions and artwork, the article traces points of contact and differentiation that, woven together, shape and reinforce what Tootonsab terms an *ab-be-ab* ("water-to-water") pedagogy. For Tootonsab, this is a diasporic pedagogy that unsettles Canadian notions of belonging within settler/extractive economies, guiding how she practices sustainable sheltering within watersheds.

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