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Canada and Beyond

A Journal of Canadian Literary and Cultural Studies

EARLY CAREER RESEARCHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE LITERATURES AND CULTURES OF CANADA / TURTLE ISLAND

Ediciones Universidad Salamanca

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Editorial

Canada and Beyond has recently moved to the University of Salamanca. To celebrate the journal's new home, we invited submissions of original research articles by emerging scholars working in the field of Canadian Studies. We were seeking contributions of scholarly interest that reflected current critical approaches to the literatures and cultures of Canada and showed the extent to which the field has evolved and transformed since its inception during the period known as Cultural Nationalism. In fact, in the last decades, a multiplicity of new perspectives has entered the field, not only highlighting the diversity of cultural productions created within the geopolitical bounds of the country, but also problematizing widely accepted constructions of Modernity—like citizenship, nationhood, or race—and often reinventing the textual foundations of the nation. The current interest in Indigenous studies, global and diasporic perspectives, or environmental analyses within the field, for instance, bespeaks the transcendence of national frameworks.

This special issue was designed to examine these changes, probing the present role of Canada's literary and cultural production and scrutinizing how the development of new critical perspectives may further our understanding of what we think of as *Canada*. As part of the work conducted within the funded project TransCanadian Networks: Excellence and Transversality from Spain about Canada Towards Europe, this issue also stemmed from the editors' perceived need to create a space for new scholarship in Canadian studies, to present innovative directions within the field, and to facilitate the inclusion of new researchers in networking projects for future collaborative work.

We encouraged participants to examine how their scholarship contributed to the advancement of the field, be it by adopting new theoretical perspectives to address the ongoing concerns of Canadian studies or by identifying and articulating new places of critical potential. The response was overwhelming both in the number of submissions and in the quality of the articles that we received. So was the scope of theme, theoretical framework, and primary sources generous and multifarious. The ten articles that follow attest to this richness, including a reading of graphic narratives through the lens of crip and

disability theories (Díaz Cano); a proposal of anarcha-Indigenism, decolonial animal ethic and artivism as emerging decolonial frameworks in Indigenous studies (Krásná); a feminist reading of the strategy of zombification of women characters in speculative fiction (Alegría Hernández); a culture-specific and human-centered approach to climate change in Inuit writing (Miller); an ecocritical analysis of the power of non-human agency and the political force of plant communities in a classic Canadian novel (Vis-Gitzel); a vindication of the vital role of black creative politics in Caribbean Canadian poetry (Cox); the proposal of a neo-cosmopolitan tidalectics as planetary poetics in recent poetry (Wagner); a deconstructive rereading of a classic Canadian novel through the focus on the signification of the Indigenous female body in it (Weiher); a hands-on proposal of how to use and take advantage of digital tools to re-read and re-signify literary texts (Cormier); and the identification and dismantling of orientalist discourses, and specifically the association of Islam and terrorism, in Canadian media representations (Patel). We hope you enjoy the reading of these articles as much as we have.

We would like to thank all the authors for their excellent contributions as well as the blind reviewers who have generously worked overtime to make this issue happen. Our gratitude also goes to Andrea Ruthven for her swift and efficient copy-editing work.

Eva Darias-Beautell and Ana M.ª Fraile-Marcos
General Editors

Early Career Researchers' Perspectives on the Literatures and Cultures of Canada/ Turtle Island Special issue

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Splitting Selves: Crip Time and the Temporalities of Disability in Georgia Webber's *Dumb: Living Without a Voice*

Coral Anaid Díaz Cano

cdiazcan@ull.edu.es
ORCID: 0000-0002-8350-0435

University of La Laguna, Spain

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ABSTRACT

In the graphic narrative *Dumb: Living Without a Voice* (2018), Canadian cartoonist Georgia Webber explores her acquired physical disability after a severe vocal injury leaves her voiceless. As a talkative, social young woman working as a café server, Georgia's life is interrupted when she is forced to adapt herself to a different way of navigating the world. Previous scholarly work has analyzed *Dumb* to articulate a connection between comics theory and disability rhetoric (Dolmage and Jacobs 2016) and explored its fruitful linkage between voice/voicelessness and identity (Venkatesan and Dastidar 2020). Building on the path opened by these scholars, the aim of this paper is to critically examine the representation of disability and its engagement with the concept of crip time in *Dumb* by drawing on the interdisciplinary fields of disability studies, crip theory, and comics theory. The first section of this paper will build on Alison Kafer's formulation of the strange temporalities of disability (2013) to investigate the ways in which Webber constructs non-conventional layouts where she incorporates different formal elements to present Georgia's lived experience of disability as a disruption of conventional temporalities. Special attention will be paid to the endless, frustrating routine of paperwork to apply for disability welfare that the protagonist faces when her condition renders her unable to work. In the second section, I will draw on the work of Ellen Samuels (2017) to examine how Webber negotiates her shifting identity by graphically splitting her embodied self on the page, composing a parallel timeline where she visualizes

her pre-disabled and disabled selves. The power of the pictorial is also extended to Webber's clever usage of color: while her cartoonish drawings appear in black and white, she employs red to draw Georgia's inner voice and her pain. Finally, my last section will employ the conception of crip time developed by Petra Kuppers (2014) to explore Georgia's reconnection with herself through her breathing exercises and her orientation towards artistic creativity. Overall, I will argue that *Dumb* does not present a narrative of recovery, as Georgia does not heal from her injury but engages instead with her disabled existence by turning inwards and depicting her voice (lessness).

Keywords
Georgia Webber; *Dumb*; Canadian Comics; Graphic Narrative; Disability Studies; Disability; Illness; Crip Time.

In the graphic narrative *Dumb: Living Without a Voice* (2018), Canadian cartoonist and editor Georgia Webber explores her acquired physical disability after a severe vocal injury damages her throat, leaving her voiceless. Composed of eight self-published paperback issues later compiled in the 2018 edition by Fantagraphics, *Dumb* portrays the author's struggles with the loss of her voice and its disconcerting aftermath. As a talkative young woman that works as a café server, volunteers at a bike co-op, and loves singing and going out with her friends, Georgia's[1] life comes to a halt when her injury leads her to a new way of navigating the world. Thus, confronted with her persistent throat pain and the uncertainty of her diagnosis, Georgia must deal with the loss of her job, the hardships of learning to communicate without her voice, and her new shifting identity.

Canadian comics have a productive history full of national and international successes, building on the culture of alternative comics that emerged in Toronto in the decades of 1970 and 1980 (Rifkind and Warley 3). Nowadays, the multiplicity of voices and backgrounds in Canadian comics has enhanced the power of the medium, with several generations of Canadian authors "earning places on best-of and bestseller lists" (Gray 69). *Dumb* is heir to this success, belonging also to the rich tradition of female cartoonists working in autobiographical accounts and representing their subjectivities in the hybrid medium of comics, composed of the interactions between the verbal and the visual (Chute, *Graphic Women* 5). More specifically, autobiographical comics that engage with disability and illness—written by women and men alike—take advantage of this boundless medium to closely engage with bodily and mental

1. Given the autobiographical nature of this text, I will employ the name "Georgia" to refer to the protagonist of the story, and the surname "Webber" to refer to the author that is drawing and writing the pages of this graphic narrative.

matters. According to Hillary Chute (2017), graphic narratives about disability and/or illness have multiplied in the last twenty years, owing to the capacity of comics to "make visible both external features of a condition, and internal, cognitive, and emotional features that are hard to communicate otherwise" (*Why Comics* 241-243). Similarly, Susan Squier (2008) states that due to their usage of verbal and gestural expression, "comics can convey the complex social impact of a physical or mental impairment, as well as the way the body registers social and institutional constraints" (74). Thus, the act of drawing and redrawing the body on the white surface of the page allows cartoonists to breathe life into their subjective life experiences and to probe issues related to normative standards of health, physical appearance, mental distress, or ability.

A central characteristic of this hybrid form is that the narrative moves "forward in time through the space of the page, through its progressive counter point of presence and absence: packed panels . . . alternating with gutters (empty space)" (Chute, "Comics" 452). In this manner, comics proves to be convenient for the articulation of the temporalities that spring from disability and illness. In fact, a crucial aspect of *Dumb* is its dynamic rendition of the passage of time, which the author exploits through her enthralling graphic style: Webber combines both orderly, clean panels and layouts with messy compositions, dark scratches, and a lack of gutter or division between panels. This interesting formal disparity allows her to inscribe—and play with—the different temporalities that spring from the process of becoming accustomed to living with an acquired disability. Moreover, the whiteness of the page is punctuated by her striking two-color palette: while she employs black as the main color of the book—to draw the characters and backgrounds, the frames or panel borders, and to write the text contained in captions and word balloons—red is used to convey Georgia's emotional and physical pain as well as her voice. The combination of these pictorial elements produces a valuable graphic narrative that exploits the verbal and the visual to convey the author's innermost reflections and feelings about the uncanny, frustrating experience of losing her voice.

Scholars such as Jay Dolmage and Dale Jacobs (2016) have analyzed *Dumb* to articulate a connection between comics theory and disability rhetoric, while Sathyaraj Venkatesan and Diptarup Ghosh Dastidar (2020) have explored its fruitful linkage between voice/voicelessness and identity, arguing that it "deepens the association between identity and voice" while accounting for the reality of living "in a state of perpetual pain and voicelessness for an indefinite period of time" (208). Building on the path opened by these scholars, the aim of this paper is to critically examine the representation of disability and its engagement with the concept of crip time in *Dumb* by drawing on the interdisciplinary fields of disability studies, crip theory, and comics theory. Born within the contestatory framework of crip theory, crip time has a strong connection with queer

ideas of temporality and entails an understanding of time and futurity that acknowledges that people with disabilities may not meet normative demands of time, pace, and scheduling in a world full of ableist barriers (Kafer, *Feminist* 26). The first section of this paper will build on Alison Kafer's formulation of the strange temporalities of disability (2013) to investigate the ways in which Webber constructs non-conventional layouts where she incorporates different formal elements to present Georgia's experience of disability as a disruption of conventional temporalities. Special attention will be paid to the endless, frustrating routine of paperwork to apply for disability welfare that the protagonist faces when her condition renders her unable to work. In the second section, I will draw on the work of Ellen Samuels (2017) to examine how Webber negotiates her shifting identity by graphically splitting her embodied self on the page, composing a parallel timeline where she visualizes her pre-disabled and disabled selves. Finally, my last section will employ the conception of crip time developed by Petra Kuppers (2014) to explore Georgia's reconnection with herself through her breathing exercises and her orientation towards artistic creativity. All in all, I will argue that *Dumb* does not present a narrative of recovery, as Georgia does not heal from her injury, but engages instead with her disabled existence by turning inwards and depicting her voice(lessness).

The Temporalities of Disability

Dumb begins in May 2012, with Georgia sitting on a bus, coming back home after attending the Toronto Comics Art Festival (TCAF). "Wow," she says to herself. "I know I had a good time when my throat hurts this much. Gotta rest up" (Webber 6). Even though this sharp pain is the earliest sign of her injury, it does not deter her from pursuing her active social life—hanging out with her friends, attending parties, and going to work at a loud café (see Webber 6-9). However, the intensity of the sting of pain in her throat and her coughing fits increase as months go by, until Georgia cannot ignore them anymore. In September, the young woman finally decides to get an appointment to see a doctor, an encounter that Webber narrates in the chapter titled "Diagnosis," shown in Fig. 1.[2] "It's a really strong, general pain, it's just there all the time," Georgia explains to her doctor while sitting at his office. "If I talk too much, it goes all over my head and neck" (Webber 17). The layout of the page is divided into a

2. All the images from *Dumb* used in this paper have been reproduced with the permission of the author and the publishing house Fantagraphics Books, who have also graciously sent me high quality versions of the pages analyzed here.

sequence of four frameless images, not encapsulated within panels nor divided into distinct rows. Six red-penciled word balloons are interspersed between them, containing the doctor's questions—"are you a singer? is the pain ever a burning sensation?" (17). Georgia's face is never seen on the page: instead, the reader first sees her nervous hands folded in her lap, then the doctor taking notes of her responses, Georgia's feet touching each other, and finally, a poster exhibiting anatomical depictions of the insides of a human mouth and throat, which occupies the lower part of the page.

Fig. 1. Georgia responds to her doctor's medical inquiry (Webber 17). From *Dumb: Living Without a Voice*, p. 17. By Georgia Webber, Fantagraphics, 2018.

It is no wonder that Webber dedicates the second chapter of her book to the medical setting, as it is the first place that Georgia turns to when trying to

find some clarity about her physical discomfort. By employing a composition in which the protagonist's face is never seen on the page, Webber reproduces the sanitized environment of the doctor's office, where Georgia occupies her role as a patient in need of medical care for her ailments, who only resorts to answering the questions she is asked, and who sits still while the medical professional inserts a bronchoscope down her nasal cavities and throat (Webber 18). Her troubles and pain are cleanly summarized in the replies to the doctor's direct questions about her health. In medical settings, disability tends to be conveyed and explained by doctors and other health professionals through scientific information that "often usurp[s] the voice or perspective of the narrator and overwrite[s] their identity in scientific and pathological terms" (Dolmage and Jacobs 17). The medical posters and the anatomical images in the doctor's office also reinforce this idea, showing "disabled bodies [that] are cropped, dissected, their 'defective' parts put on display for the education of the viewer, their subjectivity removed" (17). However, by including Georgia's folded hands and feet, the author conveys the young woman's emotional status and displays her nervousness and discomfort to the reader: in these moments, she returns to being "Georgia" and not the unnamed patient with a vocal injury. On the next pages, the doctor finally gives a diagnosis for Georgia's pain: "You're what we call a vocal abuser, especially since you like to sing. This is an injury, one that takes a long, long time to heal…" (Webber 19). His last recommendations are to "get lots of rest" and to "drink lots of liquids" (19), and then Georgia is left alone to grapple with an injury with no prospect of healing soon—and with the fact that she must stop using her voice.

As she leaves the doctor's office, Georgia's mind is full of doubts, fears, and uncertainty about her present situation and about a future that now appears unfamiliar. But she does not have long to ponder it, as she soon faces the first setbacks caused by the loss of her voice: she is forced to quit her remunerated job as a café server and, after many rejections at "quieter jobs," she resorts to applying for disability welfare, which becomes a personal odyssey. Webber narrates these struggles through a long sequence that extends over the course of seven pages, detailing the steps that the young woman needs to follow in order to complete the proper procedures of the lengthy application process: "Step one: deliver documents to welfare office," reads the first caption, located above a panel that shows Georgia waiting in front of a window as a social worker examines her paperwork. This first step is soon followed by a second—"wait for letter requesting documents"—and a third one—"gather and organize documents. Repeat" (see Webber 87).

Then, the sequence continues on the next pages, with framed panels that enumerate and describe the many documents and guides that Georgia follows, along with the verbal instructions in French provided by the officers that

continually send her back and forth to gather and fill out more paperwork (Webber 92-93). As shown in the double-spread in Fig. 2, several panels depict Georgia contemplating the many forms that she needs to write, making mental monetary calculations, receiving and sending emails, and making phone calls. It is also worth noting that the repetition of the different steps of the process are scattered through the two pages, not following a clear, orderly reading pattern: sequences of panels itemizing one of the steps are depicted within bigger sequences detailing other steps, recreating for the reader the excruciating efforts that these unending processes of application demand, as Georgia repeatedly visits the welfare office. The many detailed documents and forms that the protagonist sends also hold visual importance, occupying the lower part of the double-spread and overlapping with other panels.

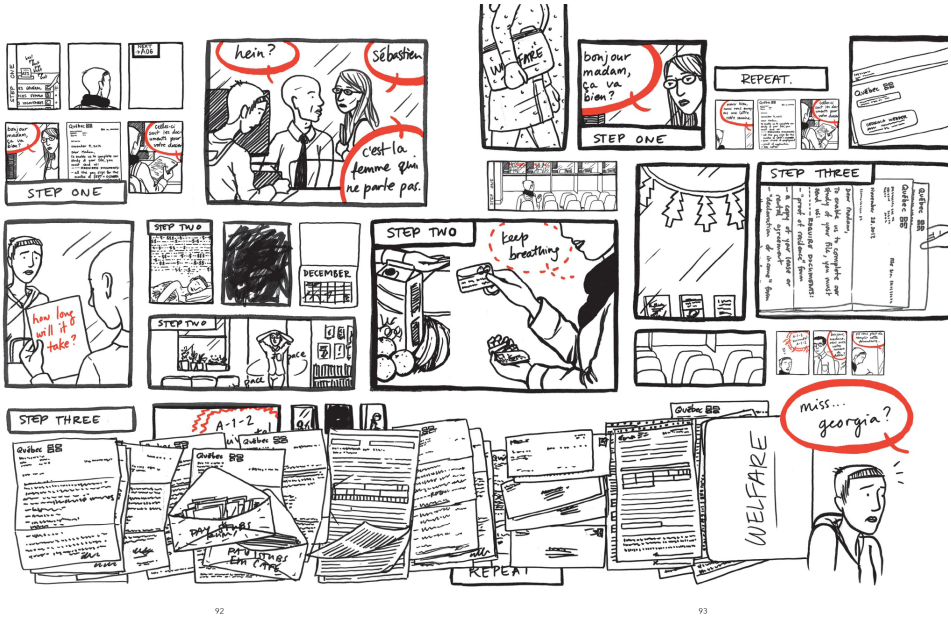

Fig. 2. Applying for disability welfare (Webber 92-93). From *Dumb: Living Without a Voice*, pp. 92-93. By Georgia Webber, Fantagraphics, 2018.

Since her vocal injury and her subsequent disability are not immediately perceived by others, Georgia suffers the disablement produced by external structures such as the welfare office: at the top of the first page of the spread, an officer comments to her colleague that Georgia is "la femme qui ne parle pas"—or "the woman who does not speak"—and proceeds to ignore Georgia as

she fills out her forms (Webber 92). Georgia is thus a victim of what Alison Kafer (2003) identifies as the "cultural presumption of able-bodiedness," in which individuals are always assumed to be able-bodied, unless they explicitly identify themselves as disabled or are "visually marked as disabled (for example, using a wheelchair or other mobility aid; carrying a white cane or accompanied by a service dog; or missing a limb or other body part)" ("Compulsory Bodies" 80). This presumption is extremely problematic for disabled people who, like Georgia, do not reproduce the cultural stereotype of disability, since it denies them medical and governmental help, "the support of friends and family, and hinders their inclusion within disability communities" (80).

The formal aspects of the previous figure also articulate the altered temporalities embedded in some experiences of illness and disability as theorized by scholars such as Kafer (2013), who acknowledges that disabled individuals may not meet normative understandings of time: for instance, "people with various impairments move or think at a slower (or faster) pace than culturally expected" (*Feminist* 34). Kafer draws on the work of queer theorist Jack Halberstam (2005), who observes that queer subcultures produce alternative temporalities by imagining their futures outside of "the paradigmatic markers of life experience—namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death" (2). Thus, queerness is understood a set of "strange temporalities" (1) that disrupt heteronormative expectations of time. Building on these ideas, Kafer suggests that disability, illness, and medical processes such as diagnosis and prognosis also entail the creation of strange temporalities. For some individuals, the process of inhabiting the world while ill and/or disabled may involve a sense of being hindered and "trapped" in a time that never seems to move forward: "The present takes on more urgency as the future shrinks; the past becomes a mix of potential causes of one's present illness or a succession of wasted time; the future is marked in increments of treatment and survival even as 'the future' becomes more tenuous" (Kafer, *Feminist* 37).

Subsequently, Kafer proposes the term "time of undiagnosis" to refer to the lost time spent in "the shuttling between specialists, the repeated refusal of care and services, the constant denial of one's experiences, the slow exacerbation of one's symptoms, the years without recognition or diagnosis, the waiting" (*Feminist* 37). Precisely, Georgia faces this refusal of care, being forced to repeat the many steps and procedures that governmental welfare requires. Moreover, while Georgia does already have a diagnosis and a prescribed medical treatment, I would suggest that the process of welfare application narrated in the previous figure is inscribed into Kafer's time of undiagnosis, since it becomes a draining, disabling labyrinth that renders Georgia invisible, a mere figure that moves between tasks and forms, her subjectivity and individuality removed. In order to recreate the taxing effects of Georgia's daily routine of

paperwork, calls, and emails, Webber connects "panels of the past and present to create a sense of eternal time, where a single page economizes events spanning across several earlier pages" (Venkatesan and Dastidar 213). By doing so, the composition of the double-spread collapses each of the steps to follow, reinforcing the continual cycle of welfare paperwork, the tedious amount of information that she must provide while being in a vulnerable situation, and her precarious economy—at the center, a framed panel shows Georgia paying for her groceries as she repeats to herself, "keep breathing." Georgia is graphically imprisoned in the many different sequences that cross the two pages—in the eternal loop of filling out forms and waiting for responses and then trying again, receiving no answer to the written questions she always shows to the officer: "how long will it take?" (Webber 92). Unable to find answers to her questions, she keeps waiting and waiting, her present—and future—uncertain.

"Who am I without it?": Georgia and Her Split Selves

Georgia soon learns that the weariness brought by the time-consuming procedures of disability welfare also extends to other areas of her life. Overwhelmed, the young woman sits down to write a "to-do list" of the tasks that she must carry out, such as "warn friends," "QUIT CAFÉ," "silent jobs?" and "credit card" (Webber 27). It is worth mentioning that Georgia's first instinct to adjust to her new reality is to split and organize her life into manageable tasks that she can carry out alone and that she can quickly visualize on a piece of paper. Most interestingly, this process of dividing and breaking down activities into blocks of time is also translated into the page—in a chapter that is precisely titled "Splitting."

Webber begins by setting a long sequence that takes place over the course of five double-spreads, each of them divided into two distinct sections. In the first section, Webber portrays Georgia's drawn self, split in two halves: first, she draws a version of Georgia delineated in the usual black ink used in the majority of *Dumb*. Then, when this black-lined Georgia breathes in, touching her shoulders with her eyes closed, she extracts an identical version of herself from her injured throat, completely penciled in bright red ink (Webber 28-29; see Fig. 3). When the black-penciled Georgia attempts to put the red-penciled Georgia—her "voice"—aside, ignoring her as she must avoid talking to heal from her injury, the red version of Georgia begins to retaliate, annoyed. The second section of the spread is presented right below this act of splitting, contained in framed, square panels where Georgia confronts her new life with an acquired disability: the horizontal sequence of six framed panels depicts Georgia riding a bike, quitting her job—"it's too loud in here. I'm so sorry, I can't work anymore,"

she explains to her manager (Webber 28)—crossing items off her to-do list and applying for a job at a video games company.

Fig. 3. The conflict between Georgia's split selves (Webber 28-29). From *Dumb: Living Without a Voice*, pp. 28-29. By Georgia Webber, Fantagraphics, 2018.

Dolmage and Jacobs point out that the upper part of the previous sequence visualizes the conflict between "two versions of Georgia in terms of silence (her new normal) versus sound (the voice that fights to be released, even though such release would be detrimental to physical recovery)" (21). By graphically splitting both her embodied self and the page layout in two halves, Webber reinforces the disruption that voicelessness brings to Georgia's sense of self, simultaneously showing her struggles to rest her throat and the different actions and tasks that she must perform in order to adapt herself to an abled world. In doing so, Webber takes "advantage of the affordances of the comics form in which time is always represented visually, spatially, and materially, in specific sequences, [and] in the comic as a whole" (Dolmage and Jacobs 21-22). I would further suggest that this conflict engages with the definition of crip time provided by Ellen Samuels (2017): "crip time is broken time," since "[i]t requires us to break in our bodies and minds to new rhythms, new patterns of thinking and feeling and moving through the world" (Samuels). Learning to navigate the world with her disability

entails the loss of her job and her personal relationships, and the search for other jobs and occupations that accommodate her needs. As her drawn self is "broken" in two halves in the double-spread, Georgia is forced to adapt herself to the "new rhythm" imposed by her vocal injury, which demands lots of liquids, quiet environments, and most of all, repose.

Another enthralling example of Webber's rendition of her split graphic selves takes place in the chapter titled "In effect," which shows the morning after a Halloween party that Georgia helps to organize. Once again, the surface of the page is divided into two parts, each corresponding to a different timeline (see Fig. 4). While the first part is covered by a rectangular, framed panel that depicts Georgia reading a book in her living room, the six square panels of the lower part show her venting to one of her closest friends: "I don't want to be anyone's novelty… or to attract someone who wants me to be silent," she confesses to her friend (Webber 75, emphasis in original). Besides, these panels interchange close-ups of her friend's worried face and Georgia's crying one along with the big, red-penciled word balloons that contain their spoken conversation.

Fig. 4. Splitting (Webber 75). From *Dumb: Living Without a Voice*, p. 75. By Georgia Webber, Fantagraphics, 2018.

The visual division of these pages accentuates Georgia's experience of disability, showing both her capacity to take care of herself while living alone, as well as her necessity to talk even when it can hurt her further. This demonstrates that Georgia has an active role when making daily decisions regarding the management of her health: while she needs to rest her throat in order to heal from her injury, she also weighs the pros and cons of talking and chooses to pour out her concerns and fears to her friend. Thus, Webber reveals the extent to which pain—both emotional and physical—is present in Georgia's daily life and how much she needs to take it into account every day—her every action bears that process of negotiation between feeling relief when using her voice and dealing with the physical pain of its strain. The previous figure is also one of the few examples in which Georgia actively seeks someone to vent to about her current situation: as observed in the lower part of the page, Georgia faces her new challenges completely alone—without the support of a partner, as her friend points out in the second panel. Fearing that she may only be desired because she is, at the moment, a "silent" woman, Georgia refuses to let new people into her life, and decides to avoid friendships and romantic connections at a stage in which she feels overwhelmed and vulnerable. However, in doing so, she refuses the company of people who may genuinely desire to have her as a partner, and also rejects relationships that can be beneficial for her. Throughout *Dumb*, Georgia never seems interested in reaching out to other disabled individuals who can help her to learn new strategies to cope in a speaking and hearing world, nor learns sign language, perhaps due to her hope that her injury may be temporary and will heal soon enough.

Georgia's split selves appear in other parts of *Dumb*, such as in the double-spread displayed in Fig. 5, where she complains to her doctor that she is receiving no help to manage her stress levels so as not to further damage her throat. First, the page on the left includes the doctor's instructions for Georgia—"you know your body is affected by stress, and I know it's hard, but there's not much I can do but tell you to relax" (Webber 126). The man sits still, with his hands on his knees. In the bottom left corner of the page, the top of Georgia's head can be seen, surrounded by the tiny stars that Webber employs to signal the young woman's throat pain. Then, the next page shows Georgia's voiced concerns: "if I can't talk, I… I have no job, no money, can't talk to my friends or anyone about my stress… what am I supposed to do? Nobody's helping me" (Webber 127). The protagonist is now portrayed through a frameless sequence at the center of the double-spread, in which her two selves—once again clearly demarcated through the usage of red and black inks—progressively merge and superpose each other, until both become undistinguishable, and until a dark stain is all that is left of Georgia. In the right corner—and diagonally opposed to the drawing of Georgia's head covered in stars—the figure of the doctor appears turned

towards the border of the page, which suggests that he is exiting the scene and leaving Georgia alone as she crumbles.

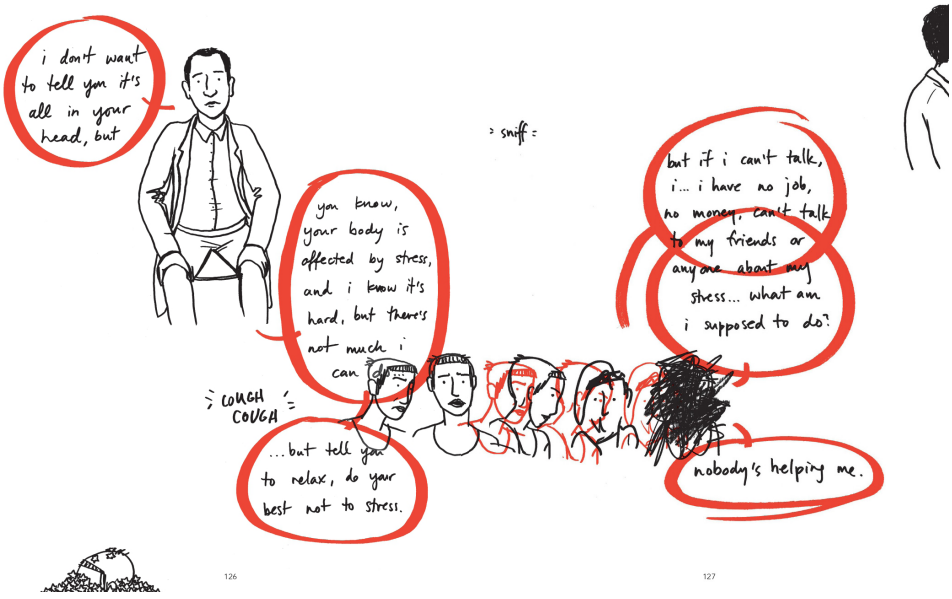

Fig. 5. "[N]obody's helping me" (Webber 126-127). From *Dumb: Living Without a Voice*, pp. 16-127. By Georgia Webber, Fantagraphics, 2018.

Webber takes advantage of the formal possibilities of comics to construct a layout comprised of frameless scenes through which the visual reinforces what Georgia is voicing in the last word balloon: that nobody is helping her, and that when she turns to the healthcare system for assistance, she finds no support, only indications that she must manage her stress levels to avoid physical pain—even when said stress levels are precisely caused by her pain and the dreadful uncertainty of her future. The composition also visualizes the wide distance between doctor and patient, stressing the idea that Georgia cannot find the relief she needs in the medical system. Whenever she asks them, the doctors and welfare officers that tend to her case always reply that it is impossible for them to know how long she is going to be injured: "… how long it'll be like this?" she urges another doctor, who shakes her head, "Just to make plans… any idea? Weeks? Months? You can't tell me" (Webber 145). Driven by the unknown duration of her injury and her overflowing anxiety, Georgia's anguish becomes the focal point of the double-spread, conveyed through Webber's trembling strokes and the dark, bold scratch that erases her face.

Torn between the requirement to rest her throat and her desire to talk and sing, Georgia's struggles to come to terms with her disabled identity become a notable pictorial motif throughout *Dumb*. As shown in Fig. 6, Webber cleverly employs her characteristic technique of breaking the graphic space of the page into two distinct sections to illustrate Georgia's innermost conflicts. On the top of the page, the author depicts a horizontal sequence that shows a swift transition from Georgia's childhood to her adult self. Drawn with longer hair and a skirt, this child version of Georgia appears next to her teenage and adult selves, each with different clothes and hairstyles. Except for the "present" Georgia, who is depicted with the usual black pen lines employed in the majority of *Dumb*, her past selves are drawn with thick crayon lines, all of them overlapping each other. Below, Webber replicates the image of her two split selves as shown in Fig. 3, but this time they are fighting against each other. Two big, red word balloons cross the page: "oh, it's so sad," reads the first one, containing the words that a close friend of Georgia utters. "[I]t's like you lost your superpower," the friend continues in the balloon located right below an exhausted, red-penciled Georgia (Webber 143). Different scratches and stains in both black and red cross the page, as if imitating the open, unfinished nature of a sketchbook that contains multiple scratches of rejected ideas and drafts.

Georgia's overlapping selves recall Samuels's understanding of crip time as "time travel": "Disability and illness have the power to extract us from linear, progressive time with its normative life stages and cast us into a wormhole of backward and forward acceleration, jerky stops and starts, tedious intervals and abrupt endings" (Samuels). Even though Georgia's selves are presented in a linear fashion from childhood to adulthood, the lack of panels and grids that contain the scene in a clean sequence suggests that Georgia is trapped in that "wormhole" in which she goes back and forth through different times of her life and through different selves—young and adult, voiced and voiceless, pre-disabled and disabled. Moreover, since the different drawings of Georgia overlap with one another, the visual quality of the previous figure seems to convey Georgia's difficulty to perceive herself as "whole" after her injury and the months of voicelessness completely changed the way she sees herself. No longer the chatty friend, the loud coworker, and the life of the party, Georgia cannot help but feel that she has lost an integral part of herself—her "superpower." Besides, this sense of loss is also motivated by the fact that, as time passes by, the chances of going back to the way she was before decrease, as she does not know whether her current situation is going to be permanent or not. As Webber reveals in an interview conducted by Kristi Valenti for *The Comics Journal* #305 (2020),

Fig. 6. "It's like you lost your superpower" (Webber 143). From *Dumb: Living Without a Voice*, p. 143. By Georgia Webber, Fantagraphics, 2018.

> There's a climax for me in the story—just in the passage of time and the realization of how deeply I felt my identity was linked to my voice. . . . It went from an immediate, acute situation that I was in that I thought would end soon . . . to something that felt like it was the new normal, the new permanent situation of my life. Then I was suddenly having to confront—and maybe let go of—all the things that I had felt were so strongly a part of my identity for so long. (Valenti 59-62)

These two elements mentioned by Webber—the passage of time and her voice as the core of her identity—are also transmitted in the previous figure through the interactions between the written word and the use of color. "Who am I without it?" reads the text directly written over Georgia's transition from childhood to adulthood, "I'm the same, I think?" (Webber 143). These questions are connected to other scattered lines of text, also inscribed on the faces of the different "Georgias": "but this but this is." The sentence finishes on the right side of the page, as a big, red dot surrounded by red question marks contains the word "ME" (143). Georgia can no longer dwell in the "fixed," stable identity that she has inhabited her whole life, since her acquired disability has forced her to negotiate and rework every aspect of her life.

"The slower you go, the more you'll feel": Creativity and Crip Time

Soon after diagnosis, Georgia understands that managing verbal conversations has become a taxing task. She first resorts to methods of trial and error by employing notepads and white boards to communicate with her friends, neighbors, and coworkers without using her voice: "My instinctual preference is for pen and paper. I crave a replacement for the tactile experience of voice" (Webber 45). As a cartoonist, she quickly gets used to the physicality of the page, and she readily grabs her old high school notebooks and pens to write down the words that she needs to say to others. However, this practice also presents its setbacks, since not everyone is willing to read her notebook, nor patient enough to wait for her to finish writing: for instance, she is forced to leave an extremely loud party, completely exhausted after trying to communicate with a friend through her writing—the other woman does not bother to read or understand what Georgia is trying to convey: "Why won't SHE LISTEN? Why won't she leave me alone??" the protagonist asks herself, completely distraught (Webber 120).

Another problem lies in the fact that Georgia cannot quickly explain her situation to others, which bears a threat to her social life: "My circumstances are rare and easily misunderstood, especially to an outsider," writes Webber in a sequence where Georgia worries that she is being rude when she cannot thank a stranger that opens a door for her, nor greet and talk to the friends that wave at her on the street (Webber 52). Georgia's concerns are visually reinforced in Fig. 7, which shows a vertical sequence of three panels in which she berates herself for not realizing that one of her friends could not see her signaling and gesturing at him. Her thoughts are conveyed by the dashed border of the red word balloons, different to the usual smooth border of the balloons that contain her talk. A black, small smear appears next to Georgia's back in the

first panel, and gradually increases its size in the next two panels—while Georgia knits her brows, frustrated with herself—until it occupies most of the space in the frameless panel next to the sequence. There, Georgia lies on the floor, completely submerged in her thoughts. The small scribble has now grown into a big, dark blotch composed of thick lines that emanate from Georgia's body, engulfing the page in darkness.

53

Fig. 7. Splashes of blank ink: Georgia's anxiety (Webber 53). From *Dumb: Living Without a Voice*, p. 53. By Georgia Webber, Fantagraphics, 2018.

While red is used throughout *Dumb* to convey Georgia's voice and sometimes her thoughts, black is employed in the previous figure to display her fears and anxieties. The taxing effects of avoiding speech to treat her injury are visualized in the dark shapes that crush Georgia's body and even erase her thoughts, as seen in the textual lines of the word balloons, which become unreadable—"how many people will I offend? Not again!! Old friends know, but new ones?" (53). Following medical advice and resting her throat lead Georgia to miss conversations and to offend abled friends and acquaintances who do not know about her injury and wait for her verbal responses. In addition, her struggles are exacerbated by the fact that she maintains no contact with other disabled individuals, as indicated in the previous section of this article. Thus, for the young woman, negotiating her voicelessness in a hearing and speaking world sometimes comes with frustration and anguish, which Webber shows by submerging her drawn self in darkness.

Georgia also wrestles with herself to represent her throat pain and her voice—and lack thereof—in her autobiographical work as a cartoonist. In the chapter titled "Contribution," she decides to take advantage of her need to stay at home to try and draw her experience of voicelessness and make herself the subject of her own work. "Right now, in this mess, the conditions are perfect," writes Webber in a sequence that depicts Georgia planning her comics work, "I have all this time, the need to be quiet, alone, something real and relevant to discuss" (162-163). However, the very act of grabbing her pens and sitting down to draw becomes another vast source of anxiety: "I remember a time in my life when drawing was relaxing" (Webber 160). Part of the creative block she suffers is due to the fact that, in order to narrate and share her story, she must draw herself on the page. Elisabeth El Refaie (2012) refers to the process through which cartoonists engage with their embodied identity as "pictorial embodiment" (51). Autobiographical comics have a special relationship with the physicality of the body and with body image, since cartoonists are required to "produce multiple drawn versions of one's self" (51) in order to draw and write their graphic memoirs. Thus, they produce many different self-portraits, drawing themselves "over again, often at different ages and stages of development and in many different situations" (El Refaie 62). As shown in the last part of *Dumb*, Georgia suffers the taxing procedures of drawing herself over and over: "… after a while, drawing yourself over and over and over gets really BORING. Then again, if I didn't show you the boredom, it would be less truthful" (Webber 168). To complement these words, Webber depicts her drawn self bent over her drawing board, surrounded by her art materials, and making drafts and sketches as she questions the validity of the creative process (see, for instance, Webber 158). Since Georgia's voice as a creator and cartoonist is affected—and informed—by her vocal injury, her struggles in the endless process of welfare

application, and her difficulty to communicate with others, she feels compelled to show the most boring and painful aspects of her life.

Yet Webber does not only show the negativity and the boredom of her reality of disability: the last part of *Dumb* introduces one of the most riveting articulations of Georgia's identity through the voice lessons that she attends with the hopes of managing her throat pain. Even though the protagonist is very skeptical of the goals of these sessions at first—she even wonders why she is learning to heal "from someone who has never healed?" (Webber 149)—these activities and techniques allow her to discern how to reconnect with her own self. Towards the end of the book, Webber reproduces the recordings of one of these sessions, with the voice of her teacher displayed in wide, red-framed word balloons (Webber 176). At the beginning, the teacher addresses Georgia's concerns and assures her that she can be of help, but Georgia feels distressed whenever she tries to practice her breathing and relaxing exercises. "I'm sorry," she complains to the professional, "I can't—I mean I WANT to, it's just too much information… when you ask me to feel my feet or my breath, I get flooded—gravity, balance, pain in my back, tightness in my throat…" (Webber 177). Then, as if to subvert the visual darkness of Fig. 7, Webber introduces a succession of unframed images composed of different shapes, scribbles, textures, and undistinguishable human figures and faces drawn with thick splashes of red ink. As shown in the example provided in Fig. 8, no word balloons or letters are present in these pages, and the vivid shade of red employed throughout *Dumb* to signal Georgia's voice takes the reader's full attention. I read this striking artistic choice as a visualization of Georgia's act of embracing her own self as she is in the present moment—voiceless. Rather than only esteeming a speaking, abled self that can verbalize her thoughts and feelings, Georgia chooses instead to accept and explore her current disabled reality through her breathing exercises and her artistic work. And rather than insisting on healing from her injury as fast as possible, Georgia finally takes the time to sit still and look inward to meet her hurting, injured self.

In her study of crip time, Petra Kuppers (2014) observes that some moments of the lived experience of disability are not inherently arduous and traumatic, but instead "expand in time" and merge "into soft slow time, not hard fast time. They shift into crip time—the time of the *and*, rather than the *or* time of choosing and ordering" (31). I would argue that the images shown in Fig. 8 are embedded in this more favorable conception of crip time: the previous page presents no panels, grids, or any other traditional element found in the comics form. Since these key devices are crucial to move the narrative forward in time through the space of the page, to recall Chute's words ("Comics" 452), their absence suggests a desired stillness of time, which turns out to be favorable for Georgia on this occasion: she must learn how to breathe deeply, how to relax

her body, and how to live away from the frenetic rhythms and routines of work and productivity—and from the exhausting cycle of welfare applications as well. Therefore, Georgia learns to exist "out of time, out of productive, forward-leaning, exciting time" (Kuppers 29). Grounded in this kinder, slower time, she is capable of turning inwards to reconnect with her voice and to explore her disabled identity at a slower pace and in her own terms. "I hope you'll share with us what you learn," says the voice teacher to Georgia at the end of one of their sessions (Webber 180). And Webber does share her findings with her readers through a remarkable graphic work that incorporates distinct elements, colors, and graphic splits in order to recreate both her voicelessness and her voice—and all the frustrations and hopes that come with them.

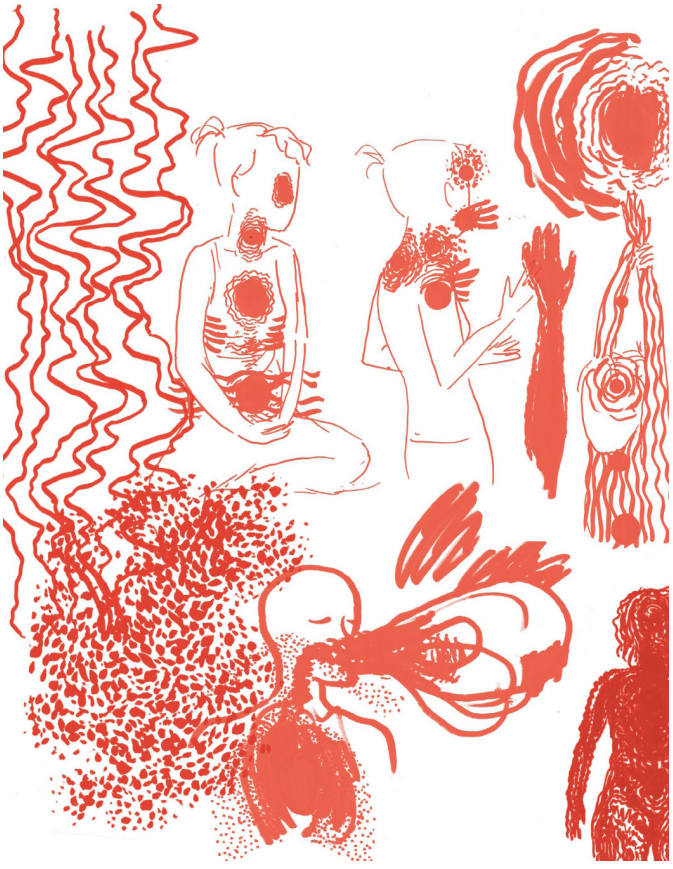

Fig. 8. Red shapes: Georgia's breathing exercises (Webber 181). From *Dumb: Living Without a Voice*, p. 181. By Georgia Webber, Fantagraphics, 2018.

Ultimately, *Dumb* does not present an "overcoming" of disability, as Georgia does not recover nor completely heal from her vocal injury—and the reader is never told whether she can finally use her voice after her lessons. Instead, the narrative engages with her disabled existence by showing what Georgia learns through her fruitful negotiation of the loss of her voice and her turn towards artistic communication. By doing so, this graphic narrative reveals the most painful, traumatizing aspects of Georgia's voicelessness, while also engaging with her reconnection with herself and her exploration of her disabled identity through a return to the physicality of her body and her art.

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Towards Horizontal Relationships: Anarcha Indigenism, Decolonial Animal Ethic, and Indigenous Veganism

Denisa Krásná

den.krasna@gmail.com
ORCID: O0000-002-4086-4917

Masaryk University, Czech Republic

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ABSTRACT
This paper introduces anarcha-Indigenism and a decolonial animal ethic as emerging decolonial frameworks. Anarcha-Indigenism represents an intersection between Indigeneity, anarchism, environmentalism, Indigenous feminism, and other liberation movements as a promising decolonial framework that could initiate transcultural cooperation of diverse justice groups that are committed to change that would ensure the peaceful co-existence of diverse species and ecosystems on Earth. The article introduces anarcha-Indigenism and its primary principles and roots, discusses its potential and analyses some major challenges that anarcha-Indigenism faces. It expands the discussion by introducing Billy-Ray Belcourt's decolonial animal ethic that connects (de) colonization of Indigenous peoples with (de)colonization of non-human animals. Special attention is paid to perspectives of some prominent Indigenous vegans. Finally, the role of artivism and imagination in decolonization is discussed. The article posits that anarcha-Indigenism needs to include human treatment of non-human animals in the discussion if it strives to establish non-hierarchical interrelations, and that decolonization has to always be at the movement's core.

Keywords
Anarcha-Indigenism; Decolonial Animal Ethic; Decolonization; Indigenous studies; Radical Politics; Interspecies Justice; Indigenous veganism.

Introduction

> Indigenous traditions are well stocked with warnings against human destructiveness and lessons for more respectful co-existence with our other-than-human relatives.
>
> Daniel Heath Justice (39)

Western humanist ontologies that treat other-than-human animals as objects for human use are at the root of much suffering. As violence begets more violence, it is essential to address all kinds of injustices perpetrated by the traditional Western philosophy, including human abuse of other animals. Billy-Ray Belcourt, a writer, poet, and scholar from the Driftpile Cree Nation, advocates for interspecies justice by applying a decolonial framework. Like Indigenous peoples, he posits, nonhuman animals are colonized subjects, and their liberation is thus crucial to decolonization (Belcourt 3). Belcourt's "decolonial animal ethic" highlights the connections between North American settlers' encroachment on Indigenous lands and agriculture by tracing the history of displacement of Indigenous populations due to factory farming. He applies "politics of space" to theorize how Indigenous and nonhuman animal bodies have been both physically and conceptually relocated within particular settler-colonial spaces (Belcourt 3). Centring "both indigeneity and animality as sites of anti-colonial possibility" is thus crucial to the dismantling of settler colonial spaces (Belcourt 4). Decolonial animal ethic can be traced in Indigenous cosmologies that offer alterNative human-animal relationships and through which non-speciesist decolonial futures can be re-imagined and reinvented.

Most Indigenous worldviews are intrinsically connected to land and the natural world in its entirety. The concept of interconnectedness, or better yet inter*related*ness, that forms the basis of these worldviews is grounded in the belief that the world revolves around reciprocal relationships, including human interactions "with the more-than-human world: the local plants, animals, and elements that give us life, the sun, moon, wind, fire, soil" (Nelson 53). Respecting this inter*related*ness translates into respect for the natural environment as all its elements are protected as relatives. Glen Coulthard, a Yellowknives Dene scholar, uses the term "place-based ethics of reciprocity" instead of interrelatedness and explains that the word "land" in his language (Yellowknives Dene dialect of Dogrib) includes all that is in relation to "land" (in its Western meaning), i.e. nonhuman animals, plants, lakes, rocks, other humans, etc. (80). Land and all its elements are considered a part of life to which people hold obligations.

Indigenous ontologies are essential in addressing the effects of environmental degradation. The Laguna Pueblo eco-feminist writer Paula Gunn Allen

asserts, in *The Sacred Hoop*, that Indigenous worldviews should be pivotal for all activists whose final goal is to inhibit environmental destruction and "increase [the] quality of life for all inhabitants of planet earth" as traditional Indigenous social systems closely resemble what most activist groups seek (17). As climate change became the most pressing issue of our lifetimes, environmentalism penetrated all spheres of social and political life and diverse activist groups have reframed their agendas and shifted their priorities to reflect this daunting reality. However, many activist groups perpetuate inequality by being anthropocentric, as well as racist and sexist. This paper presents anarcha-Indigenism—an intersection between Indigeneity, anarchism, environmentalism, Indigenous feminism, and other liberation movements—in combination with the decolonial animal ethic as a viable decolonial framework for transforming the increasingly fractured world.

Anarcha-Indigenism is grounded in an intersectional analysis and combines critical ideas of post-colonial and post-imperial futures that are "non-hierarchical, unsettling of state authorities, inclusive of multiple/plural ways of being in the world, and respectful of the autonomous agencies of collective personhood" (Lasky 4). Anarcha-Indigenism derives from traditional anarchist political philosophy and social movements that resists oppression and domination but differentiates itself by placing colonialism at the core of its analysis and by grounding itself in Indigenous feminism. Moreover, anarcha-Indigenism is rooted in the Indigenous concept of interconnectedness of all things in the world and respect for the natural environment, a worldview that is foreign to traditional anarchists (Lewis 145–186). The defining characteristic of anarcha-Indigenism is decolonization, i.e. "it calls for the destruction of the settler state and its associated modes of operability" (Belcourt 2).

This paper follows on from an existing scholarship on anarcha-Indigenism to foreground its primary principles and roots and contributes by expanding the discussion to include the question of interspecies justice, proposing Belcourt's decolonial animal ethic. The paper argues that the return to Indigenous respectful practices and foodways that do not require the subjugation of non-human animal bodies must be an essential aspect of any anarcha-Indigenist society. Veganism is proposed and analysed as a resistance strategy and perspectives of some prominent Indigenous vegans on traditional Indigenous hunting and fishing in the settler state are provided to enrich the conversation. Additionally, the role of artivism (art and activism) in decolonial movements is discussed. Finally, this paper foregrounds some challenges anarcha-Indigenism faces, with special attention being paid to environmentalists and animal rights activists and their often uninformed activism that perpetuates colonialism of both Indigenous people and non-human animals.

Anarcha-Indigenism: An Emerging Framework

As an emerging theoretical and activist approach, anarcha-Indigenism was first coined and theorized in 2005 by the Mohawk scholar and former professor of Indigenous governance at the University of Victoria, BC, Gerald Taiaiake Alfred in his book *Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* (2005). In *Wasáse* he formulates a political philosophy of "anarcho-Indigenism" that fuses the concept termed as "Indigenism," which evokes the Indigenous spiritual and cultural connectedness with the land and Native peoples' struggle for decolonial justice, and the anarchist movement and philosophy that is democratic, anti-capitalist, anti-institutional, anti-imperial and committed to radical action (45). Alfred challenges those Indigenous resistance movements that negotiate and co-operate with political and social institutions operating under capitalism and presents the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico, as an exemplary manifestation of powerful Indigenous resurgence. He critiques the Western cultural and intellectual tradition for reproducing colonialism and hence argues for the deconstruction of colonial mentality and society and for the decentralization of the normative subject, i.e. white heterosexual male (151).[1]

Although Alfred was the first scholar to coin and theorize anarcho-Indigenism, its early foundations can be traced in the writings by the anarchist political theorist, publisher, and writer Aragorn!. Jacqueline Lasky dives even deeper into history and identifies the first roots of anarcho-Indigenism in pre-colonial times when Indigenous societies were built on principles of egalitarianism, gender and sexual openness, and a celebration of diversity and difference. The obvious similarities between anarchism and Indigenism did not go unnoticed in early colonial times. Baron de Lahontan, the 17th century French ethnographer, used the word "anarchy" in its literal sense meaning "no ruler" when he characterized non-hierarchical collective-oriented Indigenous societies that lacked authority structures (Lasky 3). Anarchism and Indigenism constitute a natural alliance that finds unison in principles of "direct action, mutual aid, and voluntary cooperation" (Aragorn!. 3). Moreover, where Marxist and Indigenous

1. Ironically, Alfred resigned from UVic in 2019 following an investigation that found evidence that the Indigenous governance program established and chaired by Alfred perpetuated "discrimination" and "hyper-masculinity" and had "little tolerance for LGBTQ and two-spirited individuals" (Barrera). In his "Statement on Leaving Academia," Alfred self-reflected: "Even as an Indigenous man who has battled against racism and colonialism, I carry old and harmful ways of thinking … My former partner, friends, and mentors such as Lee Maracle and Graham Smith have helped me understand the ways I embodied toxic masculinity and how I did wrong and harmed people because of it" (qtd. in Dodd and Fagan).

understandings of oppression differ—exploitation is seen as the "time" lost by Marxists but as "dispossession," i.e. land control by Indigenous people (Coulthard 81)—anarchist and Indigenous thinking somewhat coalesce given anarchism's emphasis on freedom of movement and open borders. Nevertheless, traditional Western anarchism is insufficient on its own as it does not take colonialism into account.

Since the publication of Alfred's *Wasáse*, anarcho-Indigenism has been further developed by several activists and scholars, primarily Richard Day, Glen Coulthard, Jacqueline Lasky, Adam Lewis, Benjamin Pillet, and Erica Lagalisse, some of whom refined the concept by stressing the importance of inclusion of Indigenous feminism and hence started using the term "anarcha-Indigenism" (Lasky 4). In her study, Lagalisse asserts that anarcho-Indigenism could initiate "critically engaged conversation across difference" but highlights the importance of dialogue and constant redefinition of Indigenism and anarchism and their engagement with "a third universalism, feminism, which itself must constantly be reformulated" (674). Anarcha-Indigenism has the potential to provoke a systemic change as Indigenous feminism, environmentalism and anarchism can together oppose environmental destruction and colonization of Indigenous lands as well as combat violence against Indigenous women.

Since the 1970s, substantial evidence of a close relationship between the perpetuation of violence on (Indigenous) women and exploitation of (Native) lands has been documented by ecofeminist scholars so it is imperative to address these two issues as interconnected. Indigenous feminism can thus serve as a driving force of anarcha-Indigenism. Winona LaDuke, a renowned American Indian scholar and environmental activist, asserts that in their majority, Indigenous women perceive their struggle as "integrally related to the struggle of our nations for control of our land, resources, and destinies" ("An Indigenous Perspective"). She differentiates Indigenous feminism from mainstream feminism by highlighting its emphasis on Indigenous land claims and environmental justice. LaDuke argues for a total systemic change as she believes that Indigenous people cannot survive in a capitalist society that has conquest and colonization at its core. Therefore, she affirms, "Indigenous women embrace other social movements, embrace them to the extent that they are interested in systemic change" ("An Indigenous Perspective"). LaDuke's definition of Indigenous feminism echoes all working formulations of anarcha-Indigenism that could thus be also seen as an expanded form of Indigenous feminism.

Anarcha-Indigenism can be especially useful as a framework now that the world is becoming increasingly aware of climate change and its environmental impacts. Anarcha-Indigenism's universality and applicability to a great variety of global struggles is what makes it an inviting option. Lasky writes that anarcha-Indigenism "prioritizes locality while simultaneously linking with

globality" (5). The Zapatistas were among the first to realize the importance of international cooperation in facing "the racialized, gendered, and capitalist logic of neoliberal globalization" (Lagalisse 656). While they work towards local control of land within the Mexican state, they also encourage global alliances as oppression "transverses places and times" (Lasky 2). To spread their revolutionary ideas and share their experiences the Zapatistas sent delegations overseas to five continents in 2021. The first destination was Madrid, symbolically on a historic day of mourning, August 13, which marks the day when Spanish colonists conquered Mexico ("Germany").

One of the principal pillars of the Zapatista society is food sovereignty, as dependence on capitalist food production would undermine their autonomy as well as the primary principles of equality and justice. According to the data collected by the ETC Group and published in the book *Comer es Rebeldía II*, the industrial chain of food production uses 70% of the planet's agricultural resources and delivers only 30% of global food supplies. Paradoxically, peasant networks demand only 30% but produce 70% (CACAO 29). Additionally, the varieties that peasants grow are much more diverse, and their agricultural practices support a wide variety of species as well as diverse ecosystems. The renowned food sovereignty advocate and agro-ecological scholar Vandana Shiva explains how monocultural farming and corporate patents on seeds destroy variety and whole ecosystems as well as promote violence. In *Biopiracy*, Shiva contends that through modern agricultural techniques "life itself is being colonized" and the bodies of women, plants and nonhuman animals serve as the last frontiers (Ch. 2). In contrast to the industrial chain, peasant networks do not waste food nor devastate the environment, are less likely to cause suffering, and are designed to provide a healthy diet for the entire population, not just a small, privileged proportion (CACAO 29).

As capitalist industrial farming plays an essential role in sustaining the neoliberal capitalist order, a decentralized and a decolonized food system is key to its disruption. As the settler-colonial food system relies heavily on the exploitation of nonhuman animal bodies, the position of nonhuman animals has to be reified and re-imagined in a decolonial society. To this purpose, Billy Ray Belcourt proposes what he calls "decolonial animal ethic" (2015).

Decolonial Animal Ethic

The oppression of non-human animals is of a colonial and neoliberal nature and parallels that of colonized Indigenous people, bringing their struggle closer to the centre of anarcha-Indigenist analysis. In his paper "Animal Bodies, Colonial Subjects: (Re)Locating Animality in Decolonial Thought," Billy-Ray

Belcourt draws connections between the colonization of Indigenous peoples and animal oppression by showing how settler colonialism, white supremacy and neoliberal capitalism depend on "the simultaneous exploitation and/or erasure of animal and Indigenous bodies" (1). Belcourt posits that non-human animals are colonial subjects and thus argues that decolonization in its literal sense applies to both Indigenous peoples and nonhuman animals.

Belcourt employs a "politics of space" that evokes colonial concepts such as the frontier, westward expansion, and relocation that could be applied to both groups (3). Like "domesticated animals," Indigenous people have been relocated and confined to geographic spaces away from the settlers' eyes, hence rendered invisible. Both slaughterhouses and reserves are strategically located to hide the state-induced suffering from the settlers as the capitalist system is dependent on their passive acceptance of state-sanctioned violence. Thanks to the strategic positioning (both literal and conceptual) of non-human animals and Indigenous people, white settlers engage in this collective overlooking of oppression. Invisibilization of Indigeneity has been essential for the normalization of settler life-ways that include "domestication" of nonhuman animals and "politicization of animality [which] progresses the settler state" (Belcourt 3). Belcourt's emphasis on land and space in animal ethic is central to the understanding of animal and Indigenous peoples' oppression.

Similar to Belcourt, Dylan Powell reveals connections between settlers' encroachment on Indigenous lands and animal agriculture by tracing the history of displacement of Indigenous populations due to factory farming that "imposes a food system that is hierarchical and expansionist" (19). Today, he reveals, animal agriculture takes up "more land in North America than all remaining reserve land combined—and one third of all land mass globally" (19). Such large-scale farming has catastrophic implications for the environment, non-human animals, and people alike and "should be of concern to more than just animal advocates" (20). Hence, both Belcourt and Powell argue for a concurrent focus on decolonization and animal liberation as the return of land to Indigenous populations could also mean the return to pre-colonial food practices that did not involve the large-scale slaughter of non-human animals.

Furthermore, Belcourt writes that "anthropocentrism is the fourth logic of white supremacy [and] … therefore *the* anchor of speciesism, capitalism, *and* settler colonialism" (4, emphasis in original). As such, anarcha-Indigenism needs to address anthropocentrism if its aims are to be accomplished for "decolonization is only possible through an animal ethic that disrupts anthropocentrism" (5). Ignoring animal oppression would only bolster the capitalism and colonialism that anarcha-Indigenism wants to disrupt. Similarly, ignoring Indigenous peoples' struggle for decolonization would not undermine anthropocentric thinking since centring on whiteness instead of Indigeneity would "leave intact

the power relation that makes speciesism possible" (Belcourt 4, emphasis in original). Or, in Powell's words, it would mean "a continuation of the same line of thinking which first placed those animals here [in a subordinate position]" (20). Therefore, it is desirable for environmentalists and animal rights activists alike to prioritize decolonization.

Anthropocentric thinking is a colonial construct based on the existence of social hierarchies that are foreign to Indigenous mentality. Indigenous worldviews highlight the interrelation of, among other elements, human and non-human animals, and as such stand in sharp opposition to the anthropocentric perspective. Normalization of speciesism within Indigenous communities can be paralleled to the normalization of patriarchy among Indigenous people who have been forced to accept the colonial "assimilationist food system" that has deepened their dependency on the settler nation-state and has caused numerous health problems, such as obesity, diabetes, and the metabolic syndrome (Powell 20). Since both speciesism and patriarchy have been used to further colonize and marginalize Indigenous people, their dismantling is crucial to decolonization. Belcourt critiques decolonial politics for being anthropocentric and argues for the centring of animal ethic in decolonization as it would "be anthropocentric to ignore animality if our politics of decolonization is to disrupt all colonized spaces and liberate all colonized subjects" (4). Along the same lines of thinking, some Indigenous scholars and activists have proposed Indigenous veganism as decolonial resistance to the settler violence perpetrated against both Indigenous and nonhuman animal bodies.

Indigenous Veganism

> Rejecting animal experimentation, disrupting the commodification of animal bodies, and abolishing animal agriculture are gestures that can be deployed as anti-colonial gestures that reify decolonial futurities.
>
> Billy-Ray Belcourt (8)

Veganism, understood here as a "lifestyle that, for ethical reasons, eschews the use of animal products" (Robinson 189), has been marketed and widely represented as an invention and lifestyle for white middle-class people. However, it is a myth that animal liberation and veganism are white settler domains, irreconcilable with Indigeneity. Such assertions ignore the voices and hard work of Indigenous people involved in these movements and further marginalize them. By framing veganism as a white settler invention, Indigenous epistemologies

that imagine animals "as active agents … capable of creating kinship relations with other (human) animals" are further silenced and disregarded (Belcourt 8). In most Indigenous communities of North America, hunting and fishing were never the primary means of subsistence but only resorted to in times of scarcity, and the killing of non-human animals was otherwise avoided. While such tribes often use symbols of the animals they hunt or fish, their traditional diet consists primarily of crops. The Ojibway Nation member and professional artist and activist Linda Fisher stresses that carnism[2] is a Euro-Settler concept and Indigenous people in the Americas "had a much more varied diet" that included but was not limited to "berries, vegetables, nuts, beans, squash, roots, fruits, corn, and rice" ("On the 'Right to Hunt'"). She blames Hollywood for perpetuating the false portrayal of Indigenous people as, most prominently, buffalo hunters, while, in fact, meat began to be consumed more regularly only after contact with Europeans.

Fisher is an example of a prominent Indigenous animal rights activist who advocates for reconsidering the tradition of hunting and fishing. She argues that nowadays most Indigenous people can comfortably survive without these practices and that killing in the name of tradition goes against the most fundamental Indigenous principles. To support her stance, she recalls Chief Seattle who spoke of the need to protect the Earth and all living beings and highlighted that non-human animals "are our brothers, and we kill only to stay alive" (qtd. in Fisher, "On the 'Right to Hunt'"). Thus, she considers today's practice of hunting and fishing reactionary and certainly not necessary for cultural survival.

Fisher prioritizes stories, ancient teachings, and spirituality to physical manifestations of "Indianness": "It is not our dark hair, dark eyes, or Indian facial features that speak for who we are, but something much deeper, something not visually apparent: our commitment to the teachings of our ancient Ojibway ancestors" ("On the 'Right to Hunt'"). Here, she echoes many other Indigenous people's efforts to combat stereotypes and the widespread popular imagination that only considers "authentic Indians" those that dress as their ancestors. She criticizes the continuing practice of using animal products by Indigenous tribes for further perpetuating these associations and helping sustain the depiction of Indigenous people as people of the past. As she contends, "I assure you, even though I avoid hides and furs and choose a vegan diet, my Indianness is critical to who I am" ("On the 'Right to Hunt'").

Fisher names several traditions of the Mayans, the Maoris of New Zealand, and the tribes of New Guinea, that included cannibalism or the sacrifice of

2. Melanie Joy's term referring to the invisible "belief system in which eating certain animals is considered ethical and appropriate" (Joy 30).

women, but have been abandoned to demonstrate that cultures are fluid and evolving, which is exactly what makes them live and thrive. She believes that her "ancestors would tell us that it is time to stop the suffering and the killing" ("On the 'Right to Hunt'"), as we live in times when non-human animals are scarce and the return to Indigenous people's teachings is essential for the survival of both non-human animals and humans since, as Chief Seattle said, "whatever happens to the beasts happens to man, for we are all of one breath. All things are connected … Man did not weave the web of life; he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself" (qtd. in Fisher, "On the 'Right to Hunt'").

Fisher is not the only renowned Indigenous person advocating for reconsidering traditions that require the killing of non-human animals. Margaret Robinson, a Mi'kmaq ecofeminist scholar, proposes Indigenous veganism as an act of political resistance. She condemns colonial food production for being violent and at odds with Indigenous worldviews. In her paper "Veganism and Mik'maq Legends," Robinson recalls some important Mi'kmaq food traditions that were entirely vegetarian but does not conceal that the Mi'kmaq diet consisted traditionally primarily of meat. She explains that hunting was an important part of the Mik'maq culture, especially for men whose identity was tightly linked to hunting and fishing. Nevertheless, Robinson argues that the arrival of colonizers marked an abrupt change of context and since then "meat, as a symbol of patriarchy shared with colonizing forces, arguably binds us with white colonial culture to a greater degree than practices such as veganism" (191). In order to participate in the fur trade, fishing industry, and factory farming, Indigenous people had to adjust their practices and start viewing non-human animals as "the other" or an object rather than a sibling. This detachment from non-human animals also meant detachment from traditional spirituality to which Robinson, like Fisher, ascribes higher value than to cultural manifestations.

Belcourt also stresses the importance of a changed context and maintains that "hunting as a recreational activity" is incompatible with decolonization "because hunting has been weaponized *as* speciesism to normalize the killability of animals for human ends" (8, emphasis in original). Robinson parallels Fisher in her argument that killing non-human animals is only justifiable when human life is at stake. She traces Mi'kmaq legends that teach about "dependence, not dominion. Human survival is the justification for the death of … animal friends. The animals have independent life, their own purpose and their own relationship with the creator. They are not made for food" (192). She contrasts this view with that of white hunters who construct non-human animals as subordinate to men, and whose only purpose is to serve humans. Belcourt also explains that in most Indigenous traditions "animals occupy sacred ceremonial roles from which the Earth and its occupants are created and are thus not subject to

human domination" (8). Robinson's interpretation of Mi'kmaq legends implies that where people can survive on a vegan diet, "hunting and killing our animal brothers is no longer authorized" (193). Hunting as a recreational activity is bereft of any higher value and detached from Indigeneity.

Veganism, on the other hand, respects non-human animals as equals and is therefore much closer to the Indigenous concept of interrelatedness. Robinson contests the construction of veganism as a lifestyle for white people and joins the ranks of those Indigenous people and people of colour who perceive "veganism as ethically, spiritually and culturally compatible with our indigeneity" (190). She also defies those who accuse Indigenous vegans of "sacrificing our cultural authenticity" and, like Fisher, refuses to be dictated what it means to be an "authentic Indian," condemning the dominant colonial rhetoric that is responsible for the spread of stereotypes that portray Indigenous people and their culture as a thing of the past. By reinterpreting old traditions, Robinson argues, Indigenous people showcase that their culture is thriving and "responsive to changing social and environmental circumstances" (194). The adoption of a new practice that better suits the contemporary situation can be similarly empowering. Robinson proposes Indigenous veganism as a new tradition through which Indigenous people can "recall our connection with other animals, our shared connection to the Creator, and prefigure a time when we can live in harmony with the animals" (194). The daily practices of veganism "are in keeping with the values of our ancestors" and could potentially even reinforce one's Indigenous identity and sense of belonging (194).

Global Solidarity Network

But if veganism is to be an effective means of resistance to capitalism and settler colonialism, anarcha-Indigenist vegan practitioners will have to cut their support of companies that simultaneously profit from vegan consumers and the meat and dairy industry. All around the world, groups of people are organizing and starting food projects that are local and operate outside or on the fringe of the capitalist food system. The practice of guerilla gardening that uses public spaces to grow vegetables shows how a simple and peaceful act like gardening can spark an effective social revolution. By adopting this practice, people make a powerful political statement as they become self-sufficient and no longer dependent on the capitalist food system that causes and perpetuates climate change, environmental degradation and social inequality (Pietrowski).

The Zapatistas can be considered pioneers of this food revolution as they established food sovereignty in their territories. Food sovereignty means that a community can "exercise autonomy over their food systems while concurrently

ensuring that the production/distribution of food is carried out in socially just, culturally safe, and ecologically sustainable ways" (Gahman). Food is one of the five main pillars of the Zapatista society because co-dependency on the Western food system would also inevitably mean political co-dependency. Thus, the Zapatistas practice sustainable organic agriculture based on ancient ancestral Mayan ways, where all work is distributed equally among all members and the harvest is shared collectively throughout the community (Gahman).

The Zapatistas's ethical, highly egalitarian and productive food system inspired many in and outside of the country. One prominent example is the Kurds in Rojava, or the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), who established close relationships with the Zapatistas and started practicing sustainable agriculture that earned them such denominations as "radical eco-anarchist experiment" (Shilton). Around 5 million people of all backgrounds, genders, religions, classes, and nations united in 2012 in Rojava to create a multi-ethnic egalitarian, cooperative, and environmentally conscious society with decentralised self-governance and direct democracy that stands against capitalism and patriarchy. The Rojava social revolution was successful, and it became "an example to the world" (Allard et al.).

In 2019, Rojava was invaded by Turkey. As a reaction to this violent invasion, members of Indigenous Nations from across Turtle Island published an article in which they expressed solidarity with the Kurd community in Rojava, writing that a military intervention from a dominant power came in order "to eradicate what all fascist powers fear most, a free people daring to create brave and successful experiments outside the globalised, extractive system" (Allard et al.). The authors stress the importance of global united action and solidarity among local alternative social movements in order to stop the dominant powers from suppressing their voices, creating alternatives, and ultimately from stopping the inevitable transformation that is necessary to avoid environmental apocalypse (Allard et al.).[3]

The Zapatistas and the Kurds provide an exemplary case of such transcultural cooperation. The latest meeting between members of the two movements took place in September 2021 in Frankfurt, where a party of Zapatista women and a delegation of six Kurd women discussed their joined experiences as women fighting against colonial patriarchal oppression and creating decolonial societies. They "exchanged messages of international solidarity" and acknowledged

3. In February 2022, Turkey still occupies regions in North and East Syria and routinely violates human rights. Reports include unlawful arrests and unfounded accusations, brutal torture of detainees, gender violence, etc. Follow recent events at: https://rojavainformationcenter.com/.

that they are "soul sisters in their struggle for freedom" ("Germany"). The strong solidarity between the two movements on opposite sides of the world serves as strong evidence that the creation of "global network of solidarity" between anarcha-Indigenist non-hierarchical movements is possible (Yasar). The Kurd writer and activist Melike Yasar stresses the importance Indigenism plays in societal transformation: "we must recover traditional Indigenous cultures, histories and way of life, in other words, we must decolonize and always make a revolution *with* nature" (Yasar, emphasis in original). Or in yet other words, it is crucial to "listen to and learn from the living Earth as she continues to show us how to create societies which live in cooperation with all beings" (Allard et al.).

Figure 1: Zapatista artivist mural in Oventic expressing solidarity with the Kurds Source: Author

Artivism

> Imagination and curiosity are essential to the empathy required for healthy, respectful, and sustainable relationships with a whole host of beings and peoples.
>
> Daniel Heath Justice (77)

To spread and consolidate their ideas, anarcha-Indigenist movements all around the world use artivism (activist art) as a non-violent revolutionary tool. The Zapatistas can be considered pioneers of artivism as a clearly defined movement whose roots can be traced back to the meeting between the Zapatistas and Chicano artists from East Los Angeles in 1997 ("Artivism").[4] The Zapatista villages are decorated with artivist murals that both evoke Mayan traditions and raise awareness about gender equality, food justice, neoliberalism, the history of the Zapatista revolution, and solidarity with other anarcha-Indigenist movements.

Murals have become a very powerful tool of resistance as they are available to everyone and easily visible. Furthermore, through mural painting, Indigenous women artists are disputing their colonial patriarchal confinement to private spaces by reappropriating public spaces that have been rendered male-dominated by the settlers. This feminist intervention is applied in Oventic, one of the five Zapatista *caracoles*, where feminist murals dominate the space. The Zapatista artivist mural expressing solidarity with the Kurds (see Fig. 1) is one such example of an anarcha-Indigenist artivist piece that highlights the major role of Indigenous women in both societies.

Artivism empowers those who depict and those who are depicted. Artivism is also impactful because unlike many other forms of resistance, art touches people emotionally (creativism). In his poignant work *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter,* the Cherokee Nation scholar of Indigenous literary and cultural studies Daniel Heath Justice makes a case for Indigenous art and literature by highlighting their ability to re-imagine human kinship relations with the other-than-human world. As he states, "imagination and curiosity are essential to the empathy required for healthy, respectful, and sustainable relationships with a whole host of beings and peoples" (Justice 77).

4. Art being used as a resistance tool dates far back in history but the word "artivism" and the articulation of the artivist movement is only a fairly recent phenomenon. The Zapatistas turned artivism into one of the main pillars of their society, adding an extra value to the meaning and role of art in decolonial movements.

Justice accents the importance of horizontality in these relationships that need to be void of any hierarchies. In the settler-colonial context nonhuman animals are exploited as "resources" because they are rendered as unworthy of consideration in the socially constructed vertical hierarchy of relations. In contrast, a horizontal model of relationship reifies nonhuman animals into beings deserving the same respect we grant to other humans. In such a context, "monolithic settler colonial authority is difficult if not impossible to maintain or justify, and widespread exploitation of land, plants, and animals, as well as humans, is difficult to fully realize" (Justice 90). By imagining horizontal kinship relations to the other-than-human world, Indigenous art and literature assume an active role in decolonization.

Belcourt also believes in the transformative power of Indigenous cosmologies that can be transmitted via the medium of literature or other art forms. As nonhuman animals "must first be excised from their colonized subjectivities" (Belcourt 9), their decolonization needs to be imagined before it is implemented. This can be done by "recalling the representation of animals in Indigenous cosmologies/oral traditions and unsettling speciesism as a 'colonial mentality'" (Belcourt 9). Many Indigenous artists and writers across Turtle Island are evoking these alterNative kinships with the other-than-human world. In doing so, they are also imagining and creating foundations for anarcha-Indigenist non-hierarchical decolonized societies.

For example, the aforementioned Ojibway vegan artist Linda Fisher uses her art to evoke the interrelatedness of the world by depicting Indigenous women in unity with other animals, plants, and water, among other elements. She names these works "visionary paintings," invoking their power of imagining alterNative futurities that reflect Indigenous cosmologies (see https://www.lindagfisher.com). It is beyond the scope of this paper to present more Indigenous creators who deserve far more extensive consideration than they can be given here. For better reference, see Daniel Heath Justice's book in which he provides an overview of some contemporary Indigenous artists and an in-depth analysis of some of their works.

Anarcha-Indigenism: Challenges

Despite their common goal—eradicating oppression—activist movements' varying priorities often cause misunderstandings and result in disagreements that can lead to estrangement and cutting off ties, hence ultimately weakening the larger anarcha-Indigenist movement. What could be called the major "umbrella" risk is the danger of anarcha-Indigenism falling into the trap of perpetuating the hierarchies it strives to eradicate. Decolonization has to define the

movement which, in Pillet's words, needs to "assume the priority of indigenous sovereignty" (Pillet). His analysis of Canada's colonial history reveals several layers of colonial racism that he claims are actively overlooked and treated as taboo. He considers this "official denial of colonialism an integral part of Canadian identity and rule of law" (Pillet 3). Arguably, what Michael Taussig calls "public secrets" and Margot Francis "active 'not seeing'" is characteristic of all nations where any form of marginalization takes place (qtd. in Pillet 5). Disregarding oppression and racism is what connects dominant group members and likely translates into their identity. Recognizing this inherent white privilege must be integral to anarcha-Indigenism.

In his critique of anarchists' failure to compromise, Aragorn! asserts that "anarchists do not expect to deal with anyone outside of their understanding of reality" (6). Lagalisse shows that Aragorn!'s contention is legitimate in her illustration from a lecture tour of two Mexican anarchists, Juan and Magdalena, in Canada in 2006. In her speeches, Magdalena evoked God and used catholic references that were, however, often omitted in English translation. Gradually, Juan, whose speech was secular, was given more space than Magdalena, resulting in the anarchists "marginalizing Magdalena's subjectivity and voice" (659–662). Lagalisse unmasks traditional anarchists' prejudice against religion and their inability to accept differing worldviews which also echoes Aragorn!. In her analysis, Lagalisse argues that secularism "impedes anticapitalist and anti-imperialist resistance" as it obstructs transcultural solidarity work (663). She goes even further and calls secularism "a form of racism" as its fervent proponents often marginalize those who subscribe to a religious faith, as shown in the example of Magdalena (654).

Lagalisse's article does not extol religious institutions nor argue against anarchist critique of the church. On the contrary, it acknowledges the wrongful assimilative practices of the church during the residential school era while emphasizing the distinction between institutionalized religion and sacred belief. Moreover, traditional anarchists' secular prejudice not only hinders cooperation but also entails the rejection of Indigenous worldviews of interrelatedness which, as was established earlier, need to form the basis of anarcha-Indigenism. Alas, as Aragorn! writes, "a secular person may not see the Great Spirit in things that [Indigenous people] are capable of seeing life in" (4). Similarly, Paula Gunn Allen highlights that what has been missing in various activist groups as opposed to Indigenous societies is a "ritual, spirit-centered, woman-focused world-view" (17). Erasing what Anzaldúa calls "the dichotomy of spirit and matter" could be the steppingstone to a decolonized mindset and to successful transcultural alliances (qtd. in. Lagalisse 664).

But accepting and adopting Indigenous worldviews also comes with challenges. While anarcha-Indigenism necessarily involves cultural exchange,

it is important to avoid disrespectful cultural and spiritual appropriation that perpetuates colonialism. It has become common practice of many non-Native environmental groups to appropriate Indigenous knowledge, voice, and identity to convey their environmental message. Gunn Allen warns that while progressive environmentalists may "allow the noble savage" to act as inherently environmental beings that are connected to nature, in the end they still treat Indigenous cultures as inferior (20). But the Indigenous environmental movement fits in anarcha-Indigenism as it "confronts both corporations and the state" and stands in opposition to "the dominant society organized around the operations of the capitalist system" (410). Their sovereignty struggle makes Indigenous people "one of the most powerful and effective groups for protecting the environment" (Clark). Indeed, gaining sovereignty for Indigenous tribes is in direct relation to achieving environmental justice for all, and should thus be at the centre of any environmental movement. It is thus yet again evident that Indigenism has to be at the forefront of the movement.

Indigenous peoples' difficult relationship with environmentalists extends to animal rights groups. The reasons are essentially the same and have to do primarily with animal rights activists disrespecting Indigenous peoples, ignoring their sovereignty struggle, and perpetuating colonialism as a consequence. Naturally, this generalisation overlooks the genuine efforts of many animal liberation groups to simultaneously address other types of social injustice and to highlight the various intersections at play. That being said, many of these groups still fail to incorporate decolonization into their rhetoric and action plan. By co-operating with the State and assisting it with its colonial enterprise, animal rights activists are inadvertently approving its speciecist practices and further inhibiting their termination. On the other hand, decolonization goes hand in hand with animal liberation as it constitutes a direct "threat to Euro-Settler animal agriculture" (Powell 23).

Powell's article explains how the disrespectful and uninformed activism of mainstream animal rights groups perpetuates colonialism and unwittingly enhances factory farming. Protesting Indigenous hunts is often done with the State's assistance which creates a false dichotomy that posits the State as the ally and Indigenous people as the enemy. Moreover, the ally is then naturally framed as non-violent while the latter is seen as cruel and savage which not only perpetuates the worst colonial stereotypes but also justifies settler colonialism and its assimilative practices (Powell 20). Justin Kay explains that framing Indigenous people as "uncivilized" means "utilizing the logics of animalization and racialization that harm both people of color and nonhuman animals" as such rhetoric is used to justify hierarchical relationship and subjugation of those perceived as inferior (19).

Furthermore, Powell asserts that animal rights groups often fail to recognize the significant work Indigenous people have been doing in conservation and animal species protection that far outweighs that of the State that continues to extensively destroy land and natural habitats (23). The State willingly supports animal rights groups' protests against traditional hunts because they help further its colonial agenda as well as divert attention from its own large-scale violent practices. Thus, animal rights advocates need to start regarding Indigenous peoples as their allies and guides if they want any real change for both non-human animals and people. Such cooperation might require some introspection and compromise, nevertheless, refraining from actions that "reproduce the very structures that render animal enterprise visible, material, and profitable" is fundamental to animal liberation (Kay 3). If colonization is the primary cause for the continual animal oppression, decolonization needs to be at the heart of the animal liberation movement.

Conclusion

> And why do we even ask why animals aren't more like humans?
>
> …
>
> The only thing that really seems to be unique about humans as a species is our capacity for wilful, self-deluding destruction.
>
> Daniel Heath Justice (38)

The new century has been increasingly defined by environmental concerns as people around the globe face the impacts of climate change. Scientists speak of the "anthropocene," a unit of geologic time characterized by an accelerated shift in the Earth's climate and ecosystems generated by human activity. The era of industrialization and capitalism has been highly destructive, causing harm to the planet and its inhabitants, both human and non-human. This paper has proposed anarcha-Indigenism as a promising framework that could initiate transcultural cooperation of groups with diverse interests that are, however, committed to change that would ensure the peaceful co-existence of all species and ecosystems on Earth. Anarcha-Indigenism strives to establish non-hierarchical relationships "that sustain differences, rather than try to deny or eliminate them" (Lasky 4). Finding common ground and learning to co-operate despite differences is essential for "strategic reasons" as the dominant colonial, capitalist, patriarchal, anthropocentric system would

be impossible to change "without fostering alliances with outsider and larger groups" (Pillet 14).

Cherishing difference is essential if non-hierarchical order is to be created and preserved. Liberation movements themselves often perpetuate the hierarchies they strive to eradicate, be they hierarchies of gender, religion, class, race, or species. The goal needs to be to create a world where difference can thrive or, in the words of Zapatista Subcomandante Marcos, "one world with many worlds in it" (qtd. in Lasky 5). As the Western anthropocentric humanist ontologies are speciesist and thus hierarchical, Billy-Ray Belcourt's decolonial animal ethic needs to inform anarcha-Indigenism. Nevertheless, as Belcourt says, "decolonial thought has yet to engage with a politics of animality" (8), and as this conversation is still in its beginnings and often disregarded for the controversies it entails, it may likely constitute anarcha-Indigenism's most challenging aspect.

Ultimately, in the settler state context, decolonization has to be at the core of any social justice movement as colonialism characterizes every aspect of society and is the driving force of neoliberal capitalism. Returning the stolen land to Indigenous people is not only just but also desirable for any liberation movement, as Indigenous worldviews and the concept of interrelatedness are essential to the restoration of a natural balance on the planet. If it overcomes its major challenges, anarcha-Indigenism has the potential to provoke global change and can function as "an engaged universal" and be constantly reinterpreted as it "travels across difference" (Lagalisse 673). It is however important that Indigeneity remains the defining aspect of anarcha-Indigenism and decolonization its principal aim.

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"Catherine Tekakwitha, who are you?" – The Indigenous Female Body in the Colonial and Post-Colonial Imagination of Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*

Emma Charlotte Weiher

emma.live@online.de

Erfurt University, Germany

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ABSTRACT

In 2012, the Mohawk saint Catherine Tekakwitha was finally canonized by the Catholic church. She has been the subject of many accounts and narratives –both historical and fictional–and figures as the main subject of Leonard Cohen's 1966 novel *Beautiful Losers*. While having been lauded for its post-modernist and presumably postcolonialism stance on Tekakwitha's figure, Cohen's novel remains controversial in its depiction and appropriation of Indigenous womanhood. *Beautiful Losers* relies heavily on missionaries' accounts of Tekakwitha and is entrenched in the male protagonist's sexual claim and fixation on her character. Given the significant status of women in Indigenous communities, I argue that Cohen's novel not only participates in an ongoing violation of the Indigenous female body but also denies the integrity of Indigenous family structures and their social as well as narrative authority. It hinders, rather than encourages, a shift in narrative authority pertaining to Canada's colonial heritage. While Cohen's text remains a necessary testament to the shortcomings and failures of history and its criticism, what is required in forthcoming scholarship and narratives dealing with Tekakwitha and figures similar to her is a narration originating in Indigenous communities. An emergence of such narratives requires a definite reckoning with Canada's violent history of mistreating Indigenous womanhood that continues to this day.

Keywords
Leonard Cohen; Catherine Tekakwitha; *Beautiful Losers* (novel); Indigenous studies; post-colonialism; post-modernism; Canadian literature.

Introduction

In his 1966 novel *Beautiful Losers,* the Canadian author Leonard Cohen joins the ranks of writers exploring the short life of the Mohawk saint Catherine Tekakwitha. Tekakwitha (called Kateri before her baptism) is the first Indigenous saint and was canonized as recently as 2012 after a long process of petition (Hogue 26). After an illness had left her scarred and half-blind, she came into contact with Catholic missionaries who were allowed to live in close proximity to the Native communities. Her conversion to Catholicism and subsequent actions performed in the name of spiritual enlightenment left her physical state severely weakened and ultimately caused her death at age 24.

Tekakwitha's life and fate have inspired both veneration and scholarly interest: texts dealing with her person range from the original witness accounts written by the Jesuits Claude Chauchetière and P. Cholenec, categorized as hagiographies, to critical approaches on her life and conversion, formulated by later theologians and historians. Tekakwitha's initial historical presence is thus marked by her encounter with Catholicism and immersed in the colonial imagination and rhetoric prevalent in 17th century French Canada. Her figure emerges first as a colonial subject, secondly, as an Indigenous woman, and lastly, as a revered saint. Hence, all of the Native women depicted in Cohen's novel are subjected to projections made by missionaries, a process of Othering, religious conversion and/or fetishism. Thus, they cannot speak of a narrative authority of their own and can only achieve partial ownership of their own fate through death.

All of these criticisms help inform Tekakwitha's role in the colonial imagination and remain the focus of scholarly interest that has evolved at the hands of historians such as Nancy Shoemaker and Allan Greer (cf. Shoemaker 15). Tekakwitha's rendering by Leonard Cohen, specifically, remains a controversial topic in both academic and popular literature. While articles such as Hogue's "A Saint of Their Own: Native Petitions Supporting the Canonization of Kateria Tekakwitha, 1884-1885," in part based on her doctoral project, have exposed the involvement of Native voices in the process of Tekakwitha's canonization; more recent criticism re-considers Cohen's engagement with colonial texts and representations of Indigenous women in the context of contemporary social

movements such as #MeToo and the increasingly topical issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Girls and Women (MMIGW).[1]

Besides this, representations of Tekakwitha that lie beyond history-writing have varied. While early imitations framed her Christian self-image as the core of her character in an attempt to justify the missionaries' practice, her Indigenous identity has become the focus of post-colonial studies that aim to re-formulate Tekakwitha beyond a strictly Catholic and colonial imagination (Luber 129). On the surface, Cohen's novel appears to continue this very approach. However, as Native writer Thomas King has emphasized in his writings on Native literature, what is required in Indigenous studies is a perspective that leans towards a decidedly anti-colonialist criticism. King formulates the desired approach to Native literature as "associational" (King 185). With this approach, an anti-colonial reading of Tekakwitha's history and corporeality specifically would attempt to locate her expression of womanhood within the Mohawk and Algonquin traditions. And yet, Cohen's novel presents the narrators I. and F. (merging into IF in critical writings on the novel) as explorers of the female figure of Catherine Tekakwitha in their quest for their own spiritual and sexual growth and release.[2] What Cohen misses, in his attempt to "rescue" Tekakwitha from the Jesuits, is the necessity of allowing her and the other Indigenous women featured in his novel to express themselves and their own corporeality—beyond a colonialist, Christian or Eurocentric perspective and ideology.

The stance that *Beautiful Losers* appears to take has been described as "subversive" in its disruption of sexual norms (Lesk 56). I would argue that that very disruption is simply a continuation of the male- and Euro-centric gaze on Indigenous women in North America. Equally, the novel at times claims to critique history's colonial record which has obscured, obliterated and defamed less privileged groups who have been historically neglected and oppressed. While this criticism informs the novel's post-modern view on the transformation of history and does indeed expose the repressive and oppressive paradigms of (colonial) history-writing, the novel is not immune to that very accusation. Just as the narrators appear complicit in the rendering of their female subject

1. See more recent popular articles by Simon Lewsen ("How Do We Come to Terms with Leonard Cohen's Legacy in the #Metoo Era?" *Sharp Magazine*, November 6, 2018) and Myra Bloom ("The Darker Side of Leonard Cohen." *The Walrus*. April 9, 2018) as well as the homepage of the social movement in Canada: https://mmiwg-ffada.ca/. Last Accessed 19 March 2022.

2. See Frank Davey. "Beautiful Losers: Leonard Cohen's Postcolonial Novel." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 69 (January 1999): 12-23 and Linda Hutcheon. "Caveat Lector: The Early Postmodernism of Leonard Cohen." *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English Canadian Fiction*, ed. Linda Hutcheon. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1988. 26-44.

as the racialized Other, they perpetuate a decidedly colonialist perspective on the history of Catherine Tekakwitha and her symbolic ancestors in today's Canada in the form of sexual projection and fantasies (Lesk 64). Ultimately, the difficulty lies in expressing Tekakwitha's story apart from her Catholic and colonial narrative. The *Jesuit Relations*, which comprises the only statements written during her lifetime, are fraught with the imperialist ideologies of the Jesuit missionaries and the endeavour to justify the Christian mission in the New World (cf. Holmes 90). Cohen's overt focus on these texts ultimately reveals a state in which the novel criticizes the partiality of imperialist historical writing at the same time that it perpetuates that very phenomenon.

This paper will first focus on the historical accounts mentioned in the novel pertaining to the records of Catherine Tekakwitha's life. *Beautiful Losers*, in its rendition of its main Mohawk female character, relies on accounts written by Jesuit missionaries who claim historical accuracy based on their own personal experience as eyewitnesses. In line with its decidedly Catholic origin, the first chapters will delineate the presentation of these accounts in terms of their religious, as well as imperialist, context and examine the ways in which the novel responds to them. Subsequently, the presumably post-colonial stance of Cohen's narrators will be further questioned in the last chapters, with an added focus on Tekakwitha's corporeality as introduced in the preceding chapters, after having been appropriated to entertain male heterosexuality in Cohen's novel. Given the significant status of women in Indigenous communities, I argue that Cohen's novel not only participates in an ongoing violation of the Indigenous female body but also denies the integrity of Indigenous family structures and social as well as narrative authority. It hinders, rather than encourages, a shift in narrative authority pertaining to Canada's colonial heritage. While Cohen's text remains a necessary testament to the shortcomings and failures of history and its criticism, what is required in forthcoming scholarship and narratives dealing with Tekakwitha and figures similar to her is a narration originating in Indigenous communities. Finally, it would require a definite reckoning with Canada's violent history of mistreating Indigenous womanhood that continues to this day.

The Colonial Gaze of the Indigenous Woman

When tracing the colonial gaze towards Native women, one must consider their position within the Algonquin and Mohawk tribes as opposed to 17th century European ideas of ideal womanhood and its role within the community. As such, Algonquin women are valued as harvesters and provide essential goods and services to the community—and are respected in an appropriate

manner.[3] Shoemaker remarks that the arrival of the Europeans and their subsequent encounter with the Natives of the St. Lawrence region brought "these differing conceptions of womanhood" to light and would at times lead to conflict (Shoemaker 15). One such difference lies in the French patriarchal system that historically opposes the Huron and Iroquois tradition of reckoning "descent matrilineally," a tradition that further solidifies women's influence in the latters' culture (Shoemaker 15). Any encounters between these mindsets would then be coloured by the attempt to "realign the status of First Nations women" to that of European patriarchy (Shoemaker 15).

The highly valued status of women within Iroquois and Huron society becomes apparent in the distribution of their responsibilities for the community (Cohen 45). Their roles appear at binary ends but the nature of womanhood in Iroquois culture is not solely bound to reproductive or domestic duties. Both accounts of First Nations' practices by the Jesuits are products of colonial perspectives, most acutely seen in Cohen's reproduction of Tekakwitha's history in his novel *Beautiful Losers*. His re-telling responds directly to first-hand accounts written by French Jesuits which often vilify the Native population, among them the report that "Le P. Jogues fell under the 'hatchet of the barbarian'" and I.'s pithy response that "the Church loves such details" (Cohen 15). In this, Cohen's narrators cite and contextualize the historical texts in an attempt at criticism through dry iteration, while completely foregoing their own complicity in the colonial framework established by the Jesuits and non-Native sources surrounding Tekakwitha. What is missing in Cohen's historiography of Tekakwitha, essentially, is the inclusion of specifically Native participation and presence within her story. This issue has been considered in part by Hogue and Holmes who each opt for different historical venues in which Tekakwitha has been re-discovered in the name of Native identity. Both critics formulate the Native saint as a positive inspiration and figure of identification and thereby establish a perspective in which Tekakwitha can exist and be partially understood beyond the imperialist paradigms in which Cohen chooses to constrict her. The following article aims to expose the colonial rhetoric of both the historical sources Cohen chose as a basis for *Beautiful Losers* as they represent Native womanhood from a decidedly Eurocentric perspective, and its echoes

3. Many documentaries about the violence enacted towards Indigenous women consciously give Native families the opportunity to speak of the roles of women in their respective communities (see Nick Printup, *Our Sisters in Spirit,* Canada 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=zdzM6krfaKY&t=572s). Through this medium and form of narrative, they are allowed and asked to express their grief, trauma and daily struggles with discrimination (see Gwenlaouen Le Gouil *Killing the Indian in the Child,* France 2021).

within I.'s and F.'s own appropriation of the imperialist position with regards to the Native community. This reveals the disproportionate narrative dynamic and authority of all of the texts involved in Cohen's novel, including his own.

"Naturellement chrétienne"—The Savage Saint[4]

Just as the characterization and inclusion of Catherine Tekakwitha in the accounts of the Jesuits transpires on the grounds of her sainthood, Cohen frames her exclusively in the context of her spiritual enlightenment. It is therefore necessary to note that most writings dealing with her person revolve around the gradual Christianization of Tekakwitha. Accordingly, Catholic rhetoric of sanctified and virginal womanhood dominates the accounts; focusing on a vilification of Native tradition, the Jesuits' endeavour to spread Christianity through imperialist measures (Shoemaker 17). Tekakwitha's first contact with the French Jesuit missionaries transpired in the early 1670s, before her eventual baptism in 1676 (Luber 126).

When dealing with the act of religious assimilation and conversion, Cohen's narrator I. poses as the judge of the Church's history of oppression and religious re-enforcement. In this antagonistic position towards religious institutions, he accuses "the Church of killing Indians…of refusing to let Edith go down on me properly" (Cohen 47). While his stance is decidedly anti-Catholic, his position towards both Edith and Catherine, two Native women, depends on their sexual availability to him. The previous statement, among many others, marks him as an ambiguously situated voyeur, not entirely unlike that of the 17th century Jesuit missionaries. Furthermore, it denies a form of storytelling situated within and originating from Iroquois communities.

I. positions Catherine Tekakwitha within the view of Christianity as a tradition rooted in Western, patriarchal norms aimed to conquer America (Shoemaker 18). One would thus assume a symbolic binary between Natives and Christians, especially between their respective worldviews and religious philosophies. Luber, however, argues that one should assume "hybrid relations" between the two, as any religious principles formulated by the missionaries would have been interpreted according to the "cultural filters" of the Native tribe (Luber 131). Essentially, one should speak of a process of "adaption and assimilation, as well as appropriation," rather than strict conversion (Luber 131). In his attempt to conceive of religious conversion as an almost positive process of

4. With pride, Le P. Lecompte remarks that "Dieu lui avait donné une âme que Tertullien dirait 'naturellement chrétienne'" (qtd. in Cohen 53).

adaption, Luber here runs the risk of sugar-coating the very real and antagonistic violence exerted on the Native communities. Faced with the threat of near extinction or the compromise of capitulation and assimilation, the Indigenous tribes hardly had a choice in this matter.

Tekakwitha's active and most complete adaption transpired after her relocation to Kahnawake, where she hoped to practise her Christian faith more freely. Shortly after this move, she begins to imitate the lives of Christian virgins, often in the presence of female company (Luber 126). It is this vision of female companionship, formed as an enclave of mutual devotion, which inspires F.'s fantasies in his letter. There, the future saint would build a close friendship with Marie Thérèse, practicing their faith through dedication to Christianity (Shoemaker 20). Despite this intimacy, Tekakwitha's existence is still defined by seclusion and social isolation. The reputation of her holiness, for both I. and F., is based on her chosen solitude. Moving beyond the spiritual connotation and meaning of a secluded emotional and social life, *Beautiful Losers* paints Tekakwitha as firmly uprooted from familial ties, most notably marital ones. This would eventually alienate her from traditional Algonquin womanhood and their value in the community—her figure is thus construed entirely at odds with her Native origin, at once through narrative and corporeal appropriation.

The only resemblance of interpersonal ties is to be found in her relation to Marie Thérèse, who is again framed only in fetishizing terms by F. (Cohen 197). Their conversations are centred solely on the subject of God "and things pertaining to God" (Cohen 197). This initially spiritually minded connection is expanded by F. through a voyeuristic assessment of her body through the eyes of Catherine herself (Cohen 198). Thus, in *Beautiful Losers*, the corporeality of the Indigenous women is intricately linked to their faith. It is crucial to note here that Tekakwitha's sainthood primarily manifests itself through her virginity and the physical abuse of her own body—her means of spiritual elation are thus entirely based on her own corporeality (Shoemaker 21). In the case of Tekakwitha, symbolically representative of Catholic womanhood, the quest for saintliness and earthly holiness must therefore be formulated as a direct attack against the female body. Through burning herself with hot coals, for instance, "she brand[s] herself a slave to Jesus" (Cohen 194). And yet, F. entertains the notion that all of this physical torture and penance in the name of potential sin is undertaken by Tekakwitha "in a poverty of spirit" (Cohen 195). While Luber's argument of assimilation and adoption is perhaps strengthened by Tekakwitha's presumably active choice of self-torture, her true motivation behind this form of flagellation remains unknown.

This focus on corporeality goes well beyond the death of the saint's body and is continued in the accumulation and collection of relics. Shoemaker remarks that it is customary to venerate the saint through relics which range from

any bodily remains of the sanctified person to materials that are believed to have been touched by them (21). I. asks for his own possible saintliness, appearing jealous of his female subject's saintly superiority. In his consideration of her holiness, he ponders if he "should…save [his] fingernails… [and if] matter [is] holy," aware that Tekakwitha's presumed influence is already affecting him (Cohen 6). In his mind, she is not entirely without power or authority. This authority, however, is still limited to his imagination and does not move beyond the confines of his narrative.

The question remains as to what extent she can claim authority within her religious adaption, assimilation and eventual sainthood. Achieving authority would require a manifestation of her faith not only through bodily means but rather through concrete acts and (spiritual) services given to the community so as to avoid a fixation on the corporeal in her religious conversion. In general, women's positions within Catholicism are undermined in their status and authority, given the exclusivity of Catholic priesthood. While sainthood and corresponding spiritual authority has been granted to a number of historical female figures, practices of self-mortification, insistence on virginity and fasting dominate the hagiographies of female saints especially. While this abuse against one's own body has been viewed as an argument for women's self-hatred, historians Rudolph Bell and Caroline Walker Bynum, in their *Holy Anorexia* and *Holy Feast and Holy Famine,* argue that it expresses a form of identity-seeking and "self-assertion" (qtd. in Shoemaker 26). The discipline exerted on their own bodies supposedly represents the only available means of control.

Yet even this assumption of self-assertion or control through bodily means is negated by the narrators of *Beautiful Losers:* any acts performed by Tekakwitha against her own body are viewed through the lens of secondary voyeurs. Even if one were to conceive of her self-abuse as a means of taking back control over her body, it is perpetually framed through the gaze of her historicizing male onlookers. In a striking example, F. likens the image of her body wrapped inside a blanket sewn with thorns to a painting: F. compares this image to "those paintings that bleed.—Like one of those icons that weep" (Cohen 204). Tekakwitha achieves iconic status even when still alive; even on the verge of death, she appears within the spiritual frame imposed by her onlookers. At all times, her figure is aestheticized for the sake of external consumption. This image would thus reject Bell and Bynum's ideas of self-assertion. Furthermore, Tekakwitha's moment of bodily recognition, knowing "for the first time…that she lived in a body, a female body!" coincides with her apprehension over its belonging (Cohen 50). At the same time, she realizes that "it did not belong to her! It was not hers to offer!" (50). While this first appears as an empathetic observance made by I., her self-recognition is quickly formulated in sexual terms. Tekakwitha's flesh is not owned by her, despite her control over it, but is primarily defined

as "Virgin" (Cohen 51). In the end, she controls the degree and manner of violence acted upon her own body but cannot authorize the manner in which it is viewed, appropriated and aestheticized by others.

Her virginity, in this context, both belongs and does not belong to herself. Paradoxically, she does not own her body but is offered freedom through this knowledge. Her only means of imagined control presents itself through fasting and abstinence (Shoemaker 27). F. and I.'s fantasies surrounding Tekakwitha are thus rooted in her deliberate abstinence from sensual and sexual pleasures. During her fasting, she asks if "our bodies [must] depend on" physical nourishment (Cohen 195-6). F. poses the argument that Edith is also a direct echo of this fasting when he asks I. if he can "remember Edith ever eating?" (Cohen 200). The woman that is to be venerated and worshipped, both by Catholics and apparently male folklorists, is not allowed to seek any pleasure for herself. In short, a holy woman must not consume but only ever be consumed.

In addition to this external appropriation of both her body and sexuality, Tekakwitha is also subjected to the process of racialized Othering by Cohen's narrators. This is most acutely expressed in the image of a wine stain that is spilled by Tekakwitha in the company of the Marquis and other Europeans. She is "frozen with shame" at the sight of this mishap which spreads as far as to stain "a beautiful lady's" (presumably white) hand (Cohen 97, 98). The spreading stain stands both for her Native Otherness in contrast to the white European company and the bloody hue and violence of imperialism (Cohen 98). In this scene, her presence as the Other is heightened through this intrusion and visual dichotomy between the unblemished tablecloth and the colour of the wine. This Othering is further strengthened by the novel's overall (dis)regard of Native women's sexuality and consent—another violation of their bodily autonomy and authority. In the eyes of her rapists, Edith's Indigenous origin is fetishized due to the very fact of her racialization as exotic Other (Cohen 60).[5]

The only two named women in the novel, Tekakwitha and I.'s deceased wife, are both women of Native origins. Edith's tribe, the unidentified "A–," belongs to the "most abjected of North American Native people" (Davey n.p.).[6] They are inadvertently history's beautiful (or beautified, even beatified) losers. Within

5. The fetishization of Native womanhood remains an ongoing issue not only in literary or historical depictions. It has seeped through and dominates visual representations of tribal communities (cf. Disney's *Pocahontas*, 1995) and ultimately contextualizes and partly explains the criminal acts done against Native American and First Nations women in the US and Canada (cf. MMIGW, *The Red Justice Project*).

6. Possibly identifiable as the Algonquian-speaking tribe, which forms the focus of studies by Eleanor Leacock and Carol Devens, or the Angiers, called Mohawks by the English settlers (cf Shoemaker 17 and Cohen 13).

the context of religious assimilation, they are the ones to lose their Native spirituality and adopt the practices introduced by the missionaries. The one who presents himself as being highly aware of history's continuation of enforced conversion is F. In his lengthy letter, he aims to expose a cyclical conception of history in which he sees himself as part of the long line of historical victims and losers: "[T]he English did to us what we did to the Indians, and the Americans did to the English what the English did to us" (Cohen 186). In F's eyes, the colonization and partial destruction of Native communities stands equal with other comparatively milder forms of discrimination. This, again, highlights the narrators' ignorance of their own historical status and privileged standing.

Similarly, these assumed victims must suffer the losses of history, as the history-books accumulated and formulated by the Church neglect to record Mohawk dances and other practices (Cohen 47). Within the *grands récits*, Mohawk traditions largely remain silent or, more accurately, are rendered mute. The early narrative written by Cholenec exposes the two-fold perspective of Tekakwitha's life, first as a construction steeped in Jesuit faith, and second as a hagiography (Shoemaker 20). Through her canonization, Tekakwitha changes sides in the conflicts of history and is at once a loser in the colonial conquest and a winner in the context of veneration. Viewed as such, her narrative history gains in complexity and paradoxical quality which mirrors the dimensions of control and authority as outlined above.

"Like a well-raised French girl!"—The History of Tekakwitha[7]

In the historical writings about Tekakwitha by Chauchetière and Cholenec, Tekakwitha figures as an Indigenous representation of the standards of womanhood in the French colonial imagination. Prior to her contact with the mission, she is pictured "grinding, hauling water, gathering firewood, preparing the pelts for trade—all done in a remarkable spirit of willingness" and productivity (Cohen 45). Her qualities are seen through the lens of industrious and selfless womanhood; someone who is willing to undertake tasks for her community. In a similar vein, Tekakwitha's characterization is written from the perspective of French colonialists who encounter, define and name their focus of interest—namely, the Iroquois tribe. What is missing from these accounts—which form the basis of Cohen's novel—is the importance of Native people and traditions in Tekakwitha's life as well as their significant involvement in the process of

7. Chauchetière characterizes her as being "douce, patiente, chaste, et innocente… Sage comme une fille française bien élevée'" (Cohen 45).

her canonisation and contemporary veneration (cf. Hogue, Hebblethwaite). Cohen's narrator is aware of this act of ownership, declaring that "naming food is one thing, naming a people is another" (Cohen 6). He is aware of the most resistant aspects of colonial heritage, which is language. Yet the narrators fail to consider the very language spoken by their scholarly fascination.

In his discussion of colonial texts, he questions Tekakwitha's written origins and definition at the hands of Jesuit writers: can she only be reduced to her life as defined by Chauchetière and others? Is she identifiable only through the records written and kept by those writing her history (Cohen 3)? This questioning marks the narrator as a critic of colonial writing but does not necessarily absolve him of partaking in such a writing himself. In this one instance, I. showcases the one-sidedness of Tekakwitha's written story but does not include the possibility of an oral story transmitted through generations. There are instances in which the writing of history is forcefully critiqued: I., for one, notes that "French Canadian schoolbooks do not encourage respect for the Indians" (Cohen 58). The Jesuits of 17th century New France, in the eyes of I., partake of Canada's Native population in order to reinstate and justify their presumably God-given institution. In this, they feel obligated both to "history…[and] Miracle" –exposing the hypocrisy inherent in their attempt to convert: It is justified both in the name of Christianity and the endeavour of colonialism (Cohen 207). This ambiguity becomes most apparent at the moment of Tekakwitha's death, which exposes the Native's lethal contact with the Jesuits. I. is apt at seeing this two-fold mortality, even in the case of assimilation, when "the French [are] murdering their brethren in the forests, but this dying girl would somehow certify the difficult choices they had made" (Cohen 207). The death of Tekakwitha is formulated as the Jesuits' own absolution when they file "by her mat with their burdens" (Cohen 208). Her life, spent in the name of and in devotion to Christ, is now a vessel for the missionaries' confessions.[8]

In his research, I. develops an emotional tie to "the Mohawk Christian mystic," whose figure presents the core of his scholarly interest" (qtd. in Davey n.p.). The scholarly pursuit done by I. naturally revolves less around qualitative research, such as that by Allan Greer, for example, but rather aims to position himself within the history of the Indigenous saint and thereby create less of an objective history about her but rather a projection of his own desires. Beyond his primarily emotional fascination, the narrator mingles his egregious sexual

8. The confessional and redeeming character of the historical texts is especially apparent in the number of chapters dedicated to Tekakwitha's dying and the tone of veneration (cf. Chauchetière 157-179, "Dieu la retire de ce monde" until the concluding "Les Principales Vertus de Catherine Tegakwita Sa Foi").

and erotic fixations with his research. While his discussion of 17th century missions bears criticism of the "oppressive regulation of institutions and systems" within the historical canon and hegemony, I. (and in later chapters, F.) also positions himself as one of the narrative's authorities (Lesk 57). In this position, they are both possessive of their characters and presume ownership "of all words and meanings" through the very act of writing (Lesk 58). In their treatment of Native women, the use of Aboriginal language is ignored, but instead represented in English (Davey n.p.). Thus, by the very nature of language, any accounts on both Tekakwitha and Edith can only ever exist as a superimposed representation, and not as a version authorized or even formulated by the Native female speaker. Recalling King's anti-colonial framing of Native literature, a more generous and "associational" account of Tekakwitha would be formulated mostly or entirely by Native people who only then can achieve and reclaim a degree of authority and ownership of her history and their ancestry.

The language Tekakwitha learns to speak in the mission with P. Jacques de Lamberville, as well as that of the accounts written down by her contemporaries, Jesuit Fathers Pierre Cholenec and Claude Chauchetière, is French.[9] Cohen's narrators specifically attack the French heritage passed down through these accounts and the policies exposed therein. In a tone of superficial critique, I. pays "homage to the Jesuit" before he lists their moral hypocrisies (Cohen 99). What follows is a long-winded homage to the history of Catholic priests, with their "soiled books" (100). On the surface, the Catholic, and Jesuit narratives are put on trial by the narrator —a narrator who nevertheless relies on them in his own presentation and visualization of the historical figure of Tekakwitha.

In the tradition of hagiography, these narratives look for miracles and are written with a decided focus on Tekakwitha's chastity and virginity, all bearing traits that justify their inclusion in the list of Catholic female saints (Luber 128). Tekakwitha's history must therefore always be read as conforming to the established typology of Catholic female sainthood. Among these qualities and traits are her "rejection of forced marriage," material wealth and a tendency to isolate—all done in the name of faith (Luber 128, my translation). Cohen's narrators are not the first to question this ideologically charged narrative, of course. As such, their accounts are highlighted in their "paternalistic, Eurocentric and repressive traits" in the novel, yet appear in exuberant number and detail (Luber 143).

9. *Vie de Catherine Tekakwitha, Première Vierge Irokoise* and *La Vie de la b. Catherine Tegakoüita, dite à présent la Saincte Sauvegesse* are both manuscripts that continuously stress Tekakwitha's virginal state for their depiction of her as a virtuous and unblemished woman.

Even then, the presumably rescuing accounts emerging from *Beautiful Losers* are not entirely devoid of these traits, despite the narrators' supposedly lucid understanding of history. Both I. and F. are more aware of history's cyclical nature and its power-distribution in favour of more dominant groups and hegemonies, as seen in their assessment that "history decrees that there are Losers and Winners" (Cohen 119). The protesting crowd which on the preceding page was described as "beautiful" figures as the symbolic continuation of a people dispossessed by history and bereft of national identity (Cohen 118). Thus, the narrators I. and F. position themselves amongst the ranks of history's Losers.

Their relation to history is seen most explicitly in the process of naming and the power imbalance that prevails in it. Language, and naming as an extension and expression of it, remains the primary factor which "bind[s] us to the past" (Cohen 40). In his research, I. attempts to unearth the true and exact meaning of Catherine's name, as the one passed down through history is a necessary relic of colonialism's appropriation of Native names (Cohen 44). This loss of language is further marked by I.'s uses of her various names, one of which is "Kateri…resulting from transpositions of an oral name into a culture that relies on writing" (Siemerling 420). But her name is not the only one subject to misuse or mispronunciation. Even if it transpires on a considerably less consequential level, Tekakwitha mispronounces and stumbles over the names of Jesus and Holy Mary in the last hours of her life. It is emblematic of the colonial narrative's power to subdue and suppress that F. can (imaginatively) pinpoint the only moment of her "talkative" state that would have seen her "ready to undo the world" (Cohen 210). Any possible instance of the Native woman herself appropriating a dominant culture is, therefore, left merely to conjecture, and history denies her a moment of autonomy.

In their characterization within the novel Tekakwitha and other (mostly Native) female characters are hardly distinguishable from one another. As history is perceived as omnipresent and cyclical in nature, characters appear as foils and reliefs, "rather than individual, teleological histories" (Davey n.p.). This forms a striking contrast to Tekakwitha's role amongst contemporary North American Catholics that still venerate her figure and memory. For them, she is listed among a number of Native saints such as Antonio Cuipa, a Native American, and performs a vital role of identification. Today, her figure is venerated by Native American Catholics and her memorable status is kept alive in the area where she lived (cf. Hogue and the *Tekakwitha Conference*, Holmes 89). Here, her history is used as a positive identification that encourages imitation of faith and devoutness (but is still not without ambivalence). This is far from Cohen's narrating I., who presents her religious devotion and spiritually charged acts in terms of its sensationalist attributes, never worthy of imitation or as an exemplary, even empowering, way of living. Ultimately, *Beautiful Losers* chooses to

view Tekakwitha only in relation to sexual projection and fantasy, rather than her far more significant relation to contemporary Indigenous communities.

Within the continuation of representing Tekakwitha solely in relation to her missionary existence, *Beautiful Losers* does not reject the position of a white male narrator imposing a narrative of exploitation onto a Native woman. Even his wife, Edith, does not seem to be exempt from this as she is raped by four Quebecois men as a child (Cohen 57). It is further implied, through the mention of French-Canadian schoolbooks, that it is very much the colonial heritage within history-writing that furthers contemporary discrimination and violence against ethnic minorities (Davey n.p.). This is of course most striking and tangible in ongoing conversations surrounding the violence performed against contemporary Indigenous women in Canada and the US, as made evident in the staggering numbers of murder and rape cases of Indigenous women (*The Red Justice Project*, #MMIW on Twitter). This point is exacerbated by the very fact that these issues have not yet been fully addressed and redressed by the Canadian government.

In a similar vein, while the Canadian Catholic mind is being historically vilified, F. still wishes to be in the same position as the colonizing missionaries (Davey n.p.). Envisioned outside of time's limitations, he desires "to be Jesuit in the cities of the Iroquois," as he is not too radically minded to completely forego the past and still wants the "miracles to demonstrate that the past was joyously prophetic" (Cohen 215). Both I. and F. share a desire for the Catholic past to be justified and justifiable in its future potency and influence. Accordingly, I., in his invocation of various alternating muses and authorities, addresses figures of the Catholic tradition: he cries both for "Mother Mary!" and "Saint Kateri!" (Cohen 60, 61). His use of Catholic rhetoric, even at points of sarcasm, legitimizes its overriding presence and influence.

Catherine Tekakwitha as Muse

In its assumed post-modern, and by extension post-colonial stance, the novel aims to transgress categories of race, sexuality, class and nationality (Davey n.p.). Various critics, however, have exposed its pointed misrepresentation as well as the complicity in perpetuating a decidedly male, white perspective of history—even if a post-colonial viewpoint is given (Lesk 57). What is required, ultimately, is an anti-colonial assessment in which the Eurocentric and imperialist position is absent, ideally. As such, the assessment of Tekakwitha in *Beautiful Losers* relies, still, on the representation of her through the eyes of a Eurocentric and male figure. She becomes the narrator's inspiration and muse, his foil and blank slate upon which I. and F. can both project their own personal and historical misgivings, failures, and emotions.

The novel's central focus can be found in the figure of Tekakwitha. It is I.'s personal address to her which establishes the novel's focal point. From the beginning, the inscrutability of the historical saint is evoked through I.'s question of who she is (Cohen 3). This speaks both to the lack of historical accounts written by her, potentially revealing who she is, and the far more obscuring testimonies created by her Jesuit contemporaries. Cohen's narrator, throughout the novel, adds another layer to this inscrutability, which renders it less historical, but more precisely a fictional creation (Siemerling 419).

The very first page reveals the split between "la fiction" of *Beautiful Losers* and "les faits historiques" which constitute the novel's recurring themes and characters. In these first lines, the novel establishes the reader and writer's mode of communication with its subject matter. It is reverent in style and can be read more as "une parole de vénération à l'égard de Catherine Tekakwitha," much in line with Christian prayer (Cardinal 116). I.'s address has been likened, due to its effective repetitions and litanies, to "une plainte et d'un appel" (Cardinal 116). I would like to extend this stylistic reference to include the presence of the muse as well, thereby positioning Tekakwitha within a decidedly spiritual, but also symbolic and projective discourse. More accurately, the depiction of her as seen in *Beautiful Losers* relies on her status as an iconic symbol of Indigenous womanhood, as it is viewed by I. and F., and projected onto her. In their eyes, her historical identity remains vulnerable enough to be exposed to projection and appropriation as a muse-like figure.

Within this one-sided dialogue, I. directly pleads with Tekakwitha to imbue him with her sainthood and holiness, asking if she is listening to his invocation. In his first lines, I. expects to be transformed through the very act of musing upon her person, asking for her guidance and imagined presence in his imaginative and academic endeavour. The deliberate lack of her own voice, obscured by the omnipresent narrator, defines her character as only ever existing in his reading, which in itself is an act of creation. This is coupled with her profound silence to his questions and pleas—the only reaction from, or instance of recognising I. appears in the form of yet another imagined dialogue, formally marking her voice through italics at the end of Book One (Cohen 137-142). Her sentences are introduced by the recurring expression of her "lovely italics" and followed by conversational phrases that feature her as a naïve character struggling with every-day errands in various stores in modern Quebec (137). I. consciously imagines her as a helpless girl who is overwhelmed by modern structures and remains vulnerable to his authority and power. Irrespective of her position as a colonial subject, this rendition of Tekakwitha as a passive and vulnerable fantasy solidifies her status as a muse in the imagination of the narrators. Tekakwitha-as-muse remains constricted in a problematic literary trope that sees a woman figure as a catalyst to male

creativity and reduces her to an immobile blank slate that is exposed and vulnerable to projection.

The narrating I. partakes of a deliberate blurring of the three named female characters, namely Catherine Tekakwitha, Edith, and Mary Voolnd (Davey n.p.). Through this, the characters appear less defined and individual in their appearance and characterization, merging into what constitutes as I.'s imaginative idea of muse-womanhood. All of these characters remain exclusively defined by I.'s perceived attraction towards them. In his fantasies of desired womanhood, their profane qualities, habits and appearance must at the same time symbolize an attribute beyond the physical experience. Their existence must be explained outside of themselves and can never merely exist on its own—it must be iconic in the most limiting sense of the word; a woman can never just be a woman but must figure as an embodied idea imagined by the male narrator.

I.'s manner of address towards Tekakwitha is crucial when considering the novel's apparent post-colonial position. It reveals his tendency to liken her to an external image rather than to unearth and define her true nature. She is exclusively set against his own memory, identity and vision, to which F. partly contributes. But F., who at various points is also positioned as the addressee, is allowed his very own chapter. As seen in the beginning of his account, his muse-imagining does not see I. in the position of the artist, but as the writing, even loving, scholar who is "courting with research" (Cohen 35). He addresses his lovers (both real and imagined) in terms of discovery and in search of an underlying "truth about Canada" supposedly embodied by his focus of research (Cohen 35). Cohen's novel from 1966 reveals its initial post-colonial components insofar that it recognises the need to unearth a hidden truth about Canadian history that has largely obscured the nature and histories of oppressed groups.

Similar to a female muse and the colonial subject, Tekakwitha is muted by her death, much like Edith's history is solely mediated through the narrator(s). I. here bemoans the inherent fallacy of history-writing as it aims to document a story whose characters are dead (Cohen 96). In addition, the writing of history in general has always been overwhelmingly masculine in nature and has often denied the authority of female narratives by way of omission. The innate inscrutability and subjectivity of history only further recalls the endeavour of Cohen's researcher who sets out to record a true history of Canadian colonialism. The only instance of a deliberate un-muting can exist in form of retrospective and imaginary dialogue with the historical subject. Thus, the last pages of the first part of *Beautiful Losers* are written as a direct address to "Kateri Tekakwitha" who is being called upon by the narrating I. Throughout these pages, she appears in various imaginary scenes that depict potential encounters between her and I. (Cohen 137).

These pages also constitute what Cardinal has named the "heterogeneity of the (novel's) discourses," ranging in genre, style and language (110). In accordance with Bakhtinian terms, the post-modern novel partakes of a conscious "dialogisme et de polyphonie" with history, thereby revealing the plurality of historical voices (Cardinal 111). I. figures as one of these self-aware voices in history and ponders what his own position within it amounts to. One key identification appears in his writing of a chapter on Indigenous tribes, supposedly characterizing himself as non-francophone (Davey n.p.). According to his own self-identification, he takes his stand on the opposite side of the oppressor, actively distancing himself from the colonizing (French and European) powers that be. He may then stand on the side of the colonized in historical terms, and yet, as the following chapter aims to unravel, follow a decidedly colonising style in his treatment of Native womanhood that is germane to their muse-like and sexualized position.

"Do I have any right?" – Sexualizing the Indigenous Woman[10]

The position of the narrating I. in Leonard Cohen's novel is one of decidedly "male (heterosexual) subjectivity" (Lesk 56). As such, his stance is similar to that of the French Jesuit missionaries writing about First Nations people insofar that he seeks to derive meaning from their respective cultures in order to further his own spiritual growth or mission. In this sense, one could speak of the appropriation of a historically disadvantaged group, as the characters of Tekakwitha and Edith are both "racially marked Aboriginal women" and thus racially set apart from the white, male company of IF and therefore victims of imperialism (Davey n.p.). In terms of the respective positions of narrator and subject matter, *Beautiful Losers*, with its narration from the vantage point of a historical oppressor, could be positioned within the category of colonial history as it continues throughout the centuries. Recent conversation in scholarly and popular articles, namely by Linda Hutcheon, Bloom, Lewsen and Greer have foregrounded the voices of Indigenous women and Tekakwitha's tribal origins and context. Despite such an attempted scholarly shift in narrative authority with regards to Tekakwitha's story, there is still ample space to rectify the records of history and storytelling. For one, it is still a rarity to find records of Native voices directly responding to the life of Kateri Tekakwitha and male-centred and Eurocentric perspectives such as the one maintained in *Beautiful Losers* remain the norm

10. "I want to know what goes on under that rosy blanket. Do I have any right? I fell in love with a religious picture of you" (Cohen 3).

in depictions of Indigenous characters in popular media (see also *The New World*, US/UK 2005).

What stands out in Cohen's novel, and could partly qualify as a post-colonial reading, is I.'s particular awareness of his position: he knows that, predator-like, he has "come after you, Catherine Tekakwitha" and asks if he has "any right?" (Cohen 3). He has none, essentially. The only right way of "coming after" her would be to allow her community to speak in her name and recognize the ongoing crisis of Indigenous womanhood. More specifically, this passage already exposes his decidedly sexual fixation on her Native, and saintly, femininity. It marks him as a predator and quasi-rapist who desires to know "what goes on under that rosy blanket" (Cohen 3). This very first paragraph unearths his violation of her chosen virginity and exposes his disrespect towards the founding principles of sainthood, namely asexuality or celibacy (Siemerling 422). His romantic and sexual fantasies, from the beginning, are linked to her religious status and thus constitute a violation of her sainthood and personhood (Siemerling 422).

This violation is further explicated in his endeavour to lift her veil and violate her privacy in order to unearth the unseen, unknown and unrecorded (Cohen 99). While he remains aware of his position as "a well-known folklorist" and a self-proclaimed "authority on the A–s," I. is also concerned with F.'s abuse of his anthropological status in order to explore the women sexually (Cohen 4). Here, he reveals the status of the anthropologist as inherently advantageous and as a (self-imposed) authority, marking them as the wielder of power in the records of history.

And yet, he aims to "rescue [Tekakwitha] from the Jesuits" just as my criticism of Cohen's novel aims to expose his equally possessive tendencies (Cohen 5). He stands in opposition to the colonial records yet perpetuates the tradition "of male subjectivity" (Lesk 58). Essentially, he positions himself directly into the narrative whereas an anti-colonial reading would free the character of Tekakwitha from both the Jesuits and the anthropologist. It is precisely this alleged rescue mission, his stance against imperialism, defined as the motivation of I.'s narrative, which needs to be questioned. For one, his treatment of Tekakwitha is tinged with underlying judgement and comparison. He is "proud that C.T. was or is a Mohawk," thus imposing a value system onto his anthropological research which he categorizes in terms of superiority and inferiority (Cohen 14). This system also supposes that her origin would bear any meaning on his own perceived superiority. Tekakwitha's nature and appearance must be judged and measured according to I.'s own sense of self-worth—which exposes a failure of his academic standards.

This judgement transpires in direct connection with her (desired) appearance. I. hopes that she is "very dark," perpetuating the aestheticization and

sexualisation of her imaged body (Cohen 14). He measures her according to his own attraction, asking if she "is… [his] kind of woman?" (45). This is further strengthened by the disfigurement of her facial features as a result of the Plague in 1660. It appears relevant to I. to note that Tekakwitha "is not pretty" (Cohen 23). Even in her suffering, she is always viewed to the degree of her sexual potential.

This trend also explains F.'s uncontrollable stream of sexual fantasies. In order to comprehend their own worldview, he proposes simply to "Fuck a saint… and…get right into her plastic altar" (Cohen 12). This explicit passage reads like a violent, blasphemous rape of the Native body and history. Similarly, he fixates on the sexual repression of the four teenage members of the A–s, thereby foregrounding the phallic nature of his judgement (Lesk 63).

I.'s projections continue in his presentation of the living arrangements of the Iroquois as seen in their long house. As his historical foundation he uses the description by Le P. Edouard Lecompte, who "whet[s] our sexual appetite" when he writes about "la manière dont les familles se groupent…n'est pas pour entraver le libertinage" (Cohen 21). Their habitual livelihood is sexualized to the point of projecting sexual implications onto documents writing about this historical fact. The narrator I.'s historical lens is already imbued with eroticized fixations. In this particular paragraph, this fixation is directly linked to I.'s first meeting with Edith. Her appearance, particularly her hair texture and colour, is highly racialized and exoticized: "Her hair was black, long and smooth, the softness of cotton rather than silk. Her eyes were black, a solid depthless black that gave nothing away" (Cohen 23). Tekakwitha's envisioned ugliness aims to be surpassed by Edith's remembered Native beauty.

In the midst of the novel's historicizing perspective stands the racialized Other, most importantly the Native woman, saint and wife. The language that surrounds depictions of violence or oppression towards this marked Other partakes in decidedly referential terms of colonial style, such as Edith's rapists who "laughed and called her *sauvagesse*" (Cohen 60). Edith's cries are described as "the pure sound of impregnable nature," actively linking the (ravaged) Indigenous female body to its inextricable ties to the natural world (Cohen 61).

Indeed, the most explicit expression of the violation of the two women's femininity and sexuality appears in the form of Edith's rape, originally told by the character herself, but transmitted through the narrator. In his remembrance of the event, I. positions himself in the role of the rapists and, like them, pursues "her little body through the forest," admitting that "it was the thirteen-year-old victim [he] always fucked" (Cohen 57). In this case, his status is decidedly colonial and complicit in the violation and oppression of the bodies of Native women. Strikingly, such an intrusion into the imagined Otherness of the Native woman, at least in the eyes of the rapists, renders her closer to them

and unmakes her foreignness, becoming "indeed, Sister" (Cohen 61). In the context of her relation to I. and F. and as a consequence of her Native origin, she remains vulnerable and exposed to sexual and narrative colonization. Even the story of her own rape is not allowed to be written in her own words but is again appropriated by the narrator. This active silencing is imposed on both main Indigenous characters, heightened at the moment of their early deaths which ultimately transpire as acts of self-violation. Sadly, this literary motif in Cohen is continued in today's reality in which the Indigenous body and voice is forcefully silenced and appropriated through active violation and suppression. Few and ongoing attempts at reclamation can be found in projects such as *The Red Justice Podcast*. As long as their voices continue to be silenced—both in the literary and real world—Native communities and their history will be told and formulated by the hands of others.

Yet even in their death-state, their bodies and spirits remain "a site of imperialist contentions" (Davey n.p.). While I. and F. vie over the memory of Edith's sex-life, I. can only formulate the circumstances of Tekakwitha's death in the terms of Jesuit writing. Even in her death, Tekakwitha remains an object to be judged, measured by the writer's own preference. This judgement begins in the Jesuits' historical account, writing about the morning of her death: shortly after her demise, "the face of C.T. had turned white," thus shedding her perceived foreignness once she is accepted into heaven (Cohen 210). She attains more beauty after her death once her face is relieved of her scars—what Chauchetière recalls as a sign of her devotion that is revealed once her soul had left her body and became more beautiful in death than when still alive (167). At this point, when she "became so beautiful and so white," the narrator F. concedes to criticism of the Church, actively calling out their reverence of "the White Race" and their love of "pure flags" (Cohen 211). Strikingly, the holy Native female body can only achieve absolute purity in spiritual salvation after death and is then rid of her perceived Otherness due to the whitening of her features. It is her physical beauty and virginity that is explicitly linked to her devotion and saintliness in these historical accounts—a feature which ultimately persists in female saints as well as the fetishization of Indigenous bodies.

The appropriation of Tekakwtiha, then, uses her Otherness as a means to dominate and project onto, while the goal of her glorification and hagiography ultimately lies in the purification and eradication of this foreignness and her status as the colonial subject. The novel here legislates the white, "phallic law… [that is] unable to understand the Other's difference" (Lesk 59). In the same vein, "the (hetero)normative order…is reinscribed and reaffirmed" (Lesk 56). IF's dialogue with history, and with it Leonard Cohen's own post-modern participation, is marked by his simultaneous complicity, perpetuation, recognition and criticism of Canada's colonial heritage. This paradoxical position reveals

the crux of contemporary post-colonial systems: how can the colonial heritage be rejected and criticized without the risk of its symbolic, ideological and systematic perpetuation?

Conclusion

Leonard Cohen's novel primarily deals with the pervading presence and influence of selected hagiography in colonial writing and history as a whole—specifically in the context of Catholicism and explorations of womanhood within both the Catholic and colonial framework. While *Beautiful Losers* joins the historical presentation of the chosen character of Catherine Tekekwitha on its own terms, it aims to disrupt its paradigms through criticism and possible subversions of its perspective. An exploration of Jesuit writing on Tekakwitha has revealed a decided focus on the corporeality of the saint and, by extension, the Native female body. This focus is explicitly mirrored in the narrations by both I. and F. who further expand the picture of Tekakwitha to include their sexual fantasies and projections of spiritual growth. The Indigenous female body thus remains the spectacle of both colonial and supposed post-colonial writings, despite the latter's desired subversion. Paired with the appropriation of the woman's sexuality (or, arguably, asexuality), the violation of her virginal state and bodily autonomy, both Edith and Catherine remain subject to the male gaze in both their colonial and post-colonial states.

In her holiness, Tekakwitha undergoes the purification of the spirit through self-mutilation and appears to have some semblance of authority, while Edith's only means of expressing herself is similarly self-destructive –both to deadly ends. Even after their respective deaths, both the colonial and post-colonial narrators I. and F. are free to formulate both Tekakwitha and Edith as holy vessels of their own sexual fantasies and projections.

The trends and rhetoric that were harshly and carefully critiqued and vilified in the writings of the Jesuits and the history of the Church are themselves thus perpetuated. This perhaps exposes IF as an equally oppressive authority on the historical colonial subject, despite their enlightened contemporary status. As long as colonial heritage is merely criticized but not actively subverted and disrupted, its underlying presumptions and judgements of inferiority and superiority, subjugator and subjugated, will remain intact. It is not enough, as Cohen's novel shows, to merely identify the historical perpetrator. It is still more crucial to extract the remaining traces of that very oppression within the present and identify today's perpetrators.

This last point is particularly indispensable in the use of Tekakwitha as a means of positive reclamation of Indigenous history and heritage (as has been

documented in part by critics such as Hogue and Holmes). Her iconic status can serve both for the Catholic imagination, or all of Christianity for that matter, and North America's Indigenous population. As such, her figure should be used as inspiration for contemporary spiritual and societal growth, rather than as subject matter serving a perpetuation of the very colonial power-structures she was confronted with during her own lifetime. In 21st century identity politics, historically obscured and marginalized, particularly silenced, voices must gain in volume in order to actively disrupt systematic oppression. Tekakwitha belongs less to the confines of a post-modern literary phenomenon, but rather to her cultural descendants of Native origin keeping her memory alive.

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Inuit Sentinels: Examining the Efficacy of (Life) Writing Climate Change in Sheila Watt-Cloutier's *The Right to Be Cold*

Claudia Miller

clmiller@ull.edu.es
ORCID: 0000-0001-5789-1949

University of La Laguna, Spain

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ABSTRACT
The impact of climate change on Inuit communities in the Canadian Arctic has been widely documented in a myriad of scientific publications. However, the cultural and identity shifts attached to these changes have often been overlooked in mainstream portrayals that center on ice melt and animal species extinction to the detriment of the human factor. As many scholars have stated (Patrizia Isabella Duda, 2017 and Andrew Stuhl, 2016), the risks embedded in Arctic climate change must be considered as directly related to a demise of culture, education, and the social conditions of Inuit communities. This paper examines Inuit experience as a human-centered approach to climate change in Sheila Watt-Cloutier's The Right to Be Cold (2015). The text explores how Inuit ways of being are inseparable from the Arctic environment, demonstrating the vulnerability, adaptability and ingenuity of Inuit communities in the face of environmental crisis. Informed by Inuit epistemology and impregnated with feeling, I will argue how the autobiographical subject positions interlaced with affectivity in The Right exemplify Inuit life writing as essential contributions to climate change discourse.

Keywords
Arctic Literature; climate change; Indigenous ecocriticism; Inuit life writing; Sheila Watt-Cloutier; vulnerability.

As scholars such as Patrizia Isabelle Duda (2017) and Andrew Stuhl (2016) have observed, popular representations of climate change, depicting melting sea ice and starving wildlife, "are void of human experiences" (Stuhl 153). Long before scientists scrutinized the Arctic region, Inuit stood sentry, watching, warning, learning and adapting to the unfamiliar developments of the changing environment. Sheila Watt-Cloutier conjures up this image of "the Inuk sentinel" throughout her memoir, *The Right to Be Cold*, symbolizing "the human face of climate change" in an effort to center the world's attention on Inuit experience of Arctic climate change. By extension, the analogy of the Inuk sentinel, "a figure of traditional knowledge," epitomizes Indigenous ways of being and sustainable living while stressing the urgency of their forewarning that "whatever was happening in our Inuit homelands… was about to happen everywhere" (205).

The aim of this paper is to explore how Inuit life writing is a substantial contribution to interdisciplinary discussions of climate change and environmental justice. Recently, Solvejg Nitzke and Eva Horn (2020) have argued that "the abstraction and imperceptibility of climate can […] be reversed and turned into vivid images, metaphors and stories we can relate to cognitively and affectively" (6-7). Likewise, Catriona Sandilands (2019) reasons that narratives including "grief, rage, hope, wonder, perplexity and love" will help to "notice, feel, understand, talk about, respond to the reality of climate change in ways that better acknowledge the personal complexities of our social and environmental problem" (8). My analysis of *The Right to Be Cold* will thus highlight the use of life stories and the value of affect in the human-centered approach to climate change. I will also employ autobiographical theory to consider how the multiple and overlapping genres of ecobiography, autoethnography and rights narrative support the text's predominant call to action.

In what follows, I will arrange my analysis into three parts: I will start by contextualizing Watt-Cloutier's life story within Inuit experience in the Canadian Arctic and elucidate how the environment is fundamental to Inuit wellbeing. Secondly, I will examine the formal aspects of the call to action, foregrounding Inuit epistemology and ways of being. The third part will then explore how the author uses autobiographical subject positions, which I will argue is an effective strategy to trigger affective reaction from reading audiences.

Ways of Being on the Land: A Life Story of Transformations in the Canadian Arctic

As an example of ecobiography, the genre of life writing that interweaves the autobiographical subject and region (Smith and Watson, *Reading* 268), *The Right to Be Cold* details how "Inuit culture is inseparable from the condition of their

physical surroundings" (236). The opening account of Watt-Cloutier's childhood and upbringing in Nunavik is saturated with an overwhelming sense of Inuk identity found in the narration of everyday life as an Inuit family in the Canadian Arctic. Although the first line of her memoir, "the world I was born into has changed forever" (xvii), delivers a distress signal marking the underlying message of the text, the overall tone constructs an idyllic aura fabricated in the repetition of words such as "safety," "security," "comfort" and "peace" (11). This loving environment is painted with images of family hunting trips, dog sleds and country food, an idealized childhood she recalls with "intense joy" (xvii): "To live in a boundless landscape and a close-knit culture in which everything matters and everything is connected is a kind of magic" (xvii). The initial picturesque tone of the memoir shifts in the abrupt transition from the comforts of her homeland to a number of southern schools, a time period she diagnoses as fatal to her sense of identity. This reasoning leads her to contend that, based on her own experience, severing Inuit from the traditional bond with their community and removing them from the land is conducive to the precarious circumstances Inuit are confronted with today. As a result, motivated to restore Inuit ways of being, she initiates her career addressing three major issues: the education system in Nunavik, persistent organic pollutants (POPs) and climate change.

Principally, Watt-Cloutier's work reforming the education system pushed for programs that would reconcile principles of traditional Inuit epistemology, known as Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ), with the curriculum in an effort to repair the rupture between the younger generation of Inuit and their Arctic environment. A sense of frustration can be picked up as she details a series of discouraging events and confrontational incidents, realizing that the obstacles impeding these changes were "too large, too systemic" for her task force to tackle (87). However, the memoir reaches a turning point when she attends an Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) assembly and discovers persistent organic pollutants (POPs) are responsible for a large part of the demise of the Arctic environment. This revelation brings her to identify environmental issues as a direct threat to Inuit well-being, systemically determining the social issues encountered during her work in education. Here, a sense of optimism and energy pervades the text, taking on a new tone as a "rights narrative" (Schaffer and Smith, 2004) describing the political fight against the use of POPs and the petition for legal action on climate change.

Similar to Amitav Ghosh's (2016) view of climate change as a 'threat multiplier,' *The Right* essentially demonstrates that the repercussions of colonization, resulting in intergenerational trauma and a lack of self-determination, are intensified by the decline in the Arctic environment. In order to illustrate this point, it is important to first consider how Inuit ways of being have transformed within the historical context of the Canadian Arctic.

The primary source of colonial interference in Inuit ways of being can be traced back to the triumvirate of the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and Christian missionaries. As Arctic whales and fur became a coveted commodity, an influx of foreign whalers and trappers settled in the North, hiring Inuit to collaborate in their activities, bolstering trade with the HBC (Wright 110). Christian missionaries, ignoring what had hitherto been highly functioning cultural systems, determined to convert Inuit and conform them to Canadian society (Laugrand and Oosten 379). In the 1950s, the Canadian government moved from a position of dispersing the Inuit on the land to centralizing them in settlements, enforced by the RCMP, subjecting them to systems and institutions inherently embedded within the culture of imperialism (Wright 141). One example of this manifestation of control can be found in the government issued military identification tags, what Watt-Cloutier calls "dog" tags, engraved with a disc number system to indicate relation and location of each community member, as Inuit did not have conventional surnames. To counteract this dehumanization, the Inuit-led "Project Surname" underwent an operation of assigning last names in a process that reidentified Inuit in a matter of 2 years, transforming traditional social relations even more than the military issued tags themselves. Other means of submitting Inuit communities to southern ways of being were more aggressive, such as the mass sled dog slaughter between the 1950s and 1970s, an affair Inuit call Qimmiijaqtauniq. The justification for these killings, the RCMP claimed, was for public health and safety, although the loss of sled dogs rendered Inuit incapable of traditional hunting by following game and coerced Inuit into permanent settlement (Vowel 251). Watt-Cloutier recalls these changes in Inuit ways of being in her memoir, even alluding to her disc number in one instance. However, the anecdote about narrowly avoiding an accident with a snowmobile while visiting her home on Christmas break confirms the abrupt pace of these transformations. Oblivious to the tragedy that had taken place while she was away at school, she comes to the realization that she must learn to safely navigate the streets of swarming snowmobiles that had suddenly replaced the sled dogs.

In addition to these traumas, Inuit children were forced into residential school systems that used "tactics of denigration, shaming and harsh physical, sexual and psychological abuse" (Nicholas 21) as "part of a coherent policy to eliminate Aboriginal people as distinct peoples and to assimilate them into the Canadian mainstream against their will" (Truth and Reconciliation, *Honouring* 3). Like so many others, Watt-Cloutier was among those selected for education outside of the Arctic, staying with different host families and even spending a few years at a residential school. As part of this process of assimilation, she shares how her letters home, written in English, were censored and she

was never able to express her homesickness freely, attributing what she calls the weakening of her voice (31), a trope encountered throughout her memoir. But, I would like to point out that her Inuktitut voice, found in the uncensored letters to her grandmother in Inuktitut syllabics, remained firmly established and unfiltered. After her time living with southern host families, she moves into Churchill Vocational Centre and considers her years there a favorable experience that strengthened her fellowship with other Inuit children and offered her the means to build up confidence and leadership, much needed life skills that would aid her political career (40). Cautiously, she clarifies that although her years at the residential school were overall positive, "not everyone may have felt this way" (45), pointing out that recent studies carried out by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) have uncovered some cases of abuse in Churchill. "The Final Report of the TRC on The Inuit and Northern Experience" concludes that residential schooling was ultimately cultural genocide and it "disrupted the intergenerational transmission of values and skills:"

> When they returned to their communities, they were estranged from their parents, their language, and their culture. Many of their parents, the generation still in a state of shock from the upheavals of the 1940s through the 1960s, could not knit their communities back together again. The removal of children added to the damage already done by other economic and demographic changes. And jobs—which were the main inducement to parents to give up their young people—generally failed to materialize. But despite these hardships, many Survivors found the courage and the energy to begin to pull their lives and their communities back together. (187)

Although Watt-Cloutier's time away from the Arctic unmistakably precipitated an identity crisis, by striving for the retention of her mother tongue and aspiring to leadership among other Inuit, she affirms her Inuk identity and Inuktitut voice. Therefore, this memoir is an example of Inuit life writing that asserts Inuit voices as a contribution to the ongoing discussions of historical vulnerabilities while emphasizing Inuit resilience amidst these transitions.

Additionally, *The Right* indicates how the precarity of Inuit relationship to the land, vital to Inuit identity, is twofold: firstly, in the ongoing aftermath of the aforementioned colonial interference with traditional Inuit ways of being; and secondly, in the current unsustainable conditions of the changing Arctic environment. The repercussions of this intersection between the two temporalities of historical colonialism and contemporary climate crisis have jeopardized the well-being of Inuit communities. As a result, Watt-Cloutier posits a reframing of the question of Arctic climate change by presenting it as a human rights violation so as to guarantee "protection against the power of others" (219).

Reframing climate change as a human rights violation also questions the normative earth, nonhuman and animal-centered approaches to environmental justice, and instead underlines the importance of a human-centered perspective. Inuit ways of being prioritize a safeguarding of the Arctic as a whole, including wildlife, although many anti-sealers, such as Paul McCartney during his 2006 campaign, condemn hunting practices. Watt-Cloutier makes a particular reference to this affair confessing the betrayal Inuit felt as a member of the first rock band that connected Inuit to the outside world essentially alienated and disregarded their way of life (43). Using this incident, she explains that while southerners have aversion to images of animal blood, Inuit understand that

> this blood offered to us by our wildlife will keep our own blood warm and fuel us from the inside as we, along with our wildlife, spend hours in the deep cold—a deep cold that all life, including the flora, fauna, and Inuit, depend on in order to remain healthy and vibrant. (247)

She further explains this by sharing an anecdote about a southern filmmaker who refused the country food offered to him saying that he had "too much of an affinity for whales to eat them," to which she replied, "but we too have an affinity for whales, which is why we eat them" (248). Later, a nursing Inuit mother offers the filmmaker some of the country food she was eating, a picture reflecting the interconnectedness between Arctic wildlife, the woman and her baby, and without thinking he accepts it. What the author designs to show by including these stories is then how environmentalist approaches must not disregard the cultural significance of the dependency on hunting and country food.

One of the author's primary intentions is to clarify that traditional hunting practices are not only crucial for sustenance, but also for the continuation of Inuit ways of being. Hunting provides younger generations with the opportunity of acquiring "the character skills one would learn on the hunt such as patience, boldness, tenacity, focus, courage, sound judgement and wisdom" (254). These, she adds, are life skills that are transferrable to other situations, aiding young Inuit to cope with the current social issues that plague their communities, namely substance abuse, violence, depression, and suicide. This is just one of the numerous rationalizations that identifies the precarious social conditions as inseparable from the environment:

> It was clear to me that a holistic approach must be taken to heal the wounds that affect Inuit communities– historical traumas; current spiritual, social, health, and economic problems; *and* the environmental assaults on our way of life. Our challenges cannot be "siloed" or looked at in isolation if we want to rise above them. (xxiii)

From this perspective, climate change is not merely seen as a contributing factor to the incessant state of devastation but also a driving force in the infringement of basic human rights: "the protection from climate change was essential in order to secure the social, cultural, and economic rights that were already internationally recognized" (224).

While *The Right* presents unquestionable anti-colonialist discourse that denounces "the deep historical traumas," Watt-Cloutier is very clear to address the problem of Indigenous self-determination: "It should have come as no surprise that if young people didn't see their elders take command of their lives and their culture, they would quickly lose their own sense of responsibility and survival" (111). In her opinion, we're still facing poverty, social and health problems, and many other struggles because we, along with our governments, haven't learned how to empower our communities to become prosperous and sustainable regions (291). As she sees it, it was *ilira*, or fear, that "made it difficult to speak for ourselves, to find our own voices" (99). However, I would point out that this translation of "fear" connotes a sense of submission to qallunaat out of fright. Instead, I would defer to Louis-Jacques Dorais' (2020) translation "high respect" and would like to point out that while there was a time qallunaat authorities were "sources of *ilira*… because of the power over the Indigenous population and the penalities they could inflict" (89), it is certainly not a sentiment that has been passed down to Inuit today. What has silenced generations of Inuit voices is, in essence, a manifestation of the deeply ingrained IQ principles of respect, cooperation and the desire for harmonious ways of being.

Accordingly, the predominant motivator in her petition for the Right to Be Cold boils down to self-determination: "ensuring that we continue to have a frozen Arctic allows us Inuit to *choose* our own future" (303).

Confronting the Climate Crisis: A Global Call to Action

Despite being bound to the region of the Canadian Arctic, *The Right* presents a call to action that is demanded on a global scale. From the perspective of ecobiography, "a textual place from which to call for an ethic of care for the environment" (Smith and Watson 161), the strength of the text lies in the exhortation addressed, on the one hand, to her Inuit community, and, on the other, to "the global community" (322). Aside from the overarching objective of compelling political and social change, Watt-Cloutier addresses her own people prevailing on them to return to traditional ways of being in order to reconcile their severed relationship with the land, and to her global audience she resolves to expose the connectedness of the world to Arctic environmental degradation. Capturing the intricacies of a region that depends on international mitigation

measures to protect itself from the threat of external activity, she demands international action: "Our challenges were local, but they were part of something global. Our problems were not made in the Arctic. So our solutions couldn't be entirely local either" (121). With this in mind, I would also point out that the global ethic of care proposed is a particular feature of Arctic climate change as it pulls the addressee into the vulnerable collective by reminding the reader of the global scale of the climate crisis: "I […] hope that this book inspires others to take up the cause of the climate change. What is happening today in the Arctic is the future of the rest of the world" (xxv). From this vantage point, the implications of the message trigger a unique self-regarding aspect to the ethical imperative of climate change action.

Throughout the memoir, the call to action swings back and forth between tones of reassurance and alarmist, a contradiction which she herself is aware of and refers to as a "strange balancing act" (150). On the one hand, the author exudes confidence in the resiliency and adaptability of the next generation, while on the other, her alarmist tone alerts to the urgency of her call to action:

> I hope… that future generations will continue to be global citizens with a vibrant culture that is uniquely Inuit. Yet because of climate change, this future, my grandson's future and the future of generations to come, is melting away. (323)

But, while the text expresses and definitely contributes to the ongoing discussion of the multiple vulnerabilities, it also, at the same time, foregrounds the historical adaptability, resilience and ingenuity of Inuit. Based on Jane Danielewicz's (2018) idea that life writing demonstrates "how writers believe in the possibility of action and how they honor their convictions through memoir" (5), I would add that Watt-Cloutier's autobiographical act and the inclusion of the trope of hope exemplifies a confidence in potential change and in Inuit ability to continue thriving in the Arctic, essentially overcoming the sense of alarmism.

In terms of the formal aspects of her call to action, I would like to point out the convergence of the peaceful and composed delivery of her powerful textual battle-cry. The author objects to wielding an "adversarial approach" to her petition and instead, repeatedly utilizes tactics of persuasion in the form of appealing to her audience "on a personal level" (209). Nonetheless, her consistent use of the analogy of the sentinel equates Inuit experience of climate change to that of wartime. Indeed, one of the concluding lines upholds this comparison: "We are on the front lines of the cataclysmic environmental shifts that are affecting the world" (325). Again, this metaphor is reinforced as she repetitively suggests Inuit take "the moral high ground" and maintain their "moral compass" challenging the many instances where Inuit have decided to adapt

to southern industries, such as resource extraction, and have compromised Inuit values (315). Using rhetorical questions she confronts this situation:

> How will our hunters, men, women, and youth, those who have known the wisdom of the land, feel at the end of a workday spent digging up and destroying the very land they have held sacred? Will these short-term jobs really address the dispiritedness of our men, a dispiritedness that is at the root of the social and health ailments of our communities? In other words, will the resource industry help make our communities safer? (293)

Watt-Cloutier goes on to argue that the optics of a people that welcome unsustainable industries undermine their demand for climate change action, bringing the image to a full circle, stating that the "high ground is fracturing as quickly as the ice is melting" (294). While her arguments deny antagonism, her rhetoric is riddled with a vocabulary that connotes conflict, to the extent that she even inserts her voice to explain that "my voice on these issues is once again about reaching out, not striking out" (294). I would argue that the idiosyncratic nature of these analogies intensifies the sense of responsibility to inform and alert on the nature of the changing climate "and to spur people and nations to action" (324), ultimately aligning with the principles of IQ that value serving, decision-making, learning, cooperation, resourcefulness and environmental stewardship (Wenzel 242).

Hunting is an essential exercise of these principles, as Inuit use the land as a "natural teacher of life" (110). In the author's own words:

> hunting has taught us to value patience, endurance, courage, and good judgement. The hunter embodies calm, respectfulness, caring for others. *Silatuniq* is the Inuktitut word for wisdom– and much of it is taught through the experiential observation of the hunt… But this important traditional knowledge has begun to lose its value as a result of the dramatic changes to our environment. This wisdom, which comes from a hunting culture dependent on the ice and snow, is as threatened as the ice itself. (xix-xx)

The unreliable, unstable climate has compromised the practice of Inuit hunting culture, rendering hunters vulnerable to unpredictable local weather. The already high-risk activities such as seal, whale, caribou and polar bear hunting have become even more dangerous due to unexpected changes in the weather and melting sea ice at times of the year that had hitherto been traditional hunting seasons.

An entire chapter of *The Right* is dedicated to this issue, titled "Voices of the Hunters," centering the role of the Indigenous voice in the collection of

ecological knowledge, exemplifying the extent to which Indigenous epistemology aligns perfectly with what scientific research has also determined:

> Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, and since the 1950s, many of the observed changes are unprecedented over decades to millennia. The atmosphere and ocean have warmed, the amounts of snow and ice have diminished, and sea level has risen. (IPCC, 2)

The hunters' accounts illustrate how the migratory patterns of sea mammals have changed as a consequence of the melting sea ice, rendering the once predictable hunting activities on known terrain unreliable. The hunters also tell of how the change in types of snowfall compromises the integrity of snow houses, which are the only means of protection against the cold, wind and predators such as polar bears. Still others compare how sea mammals and land animals are not as healthy or fatty as they were before (188-93).

The inclusion of the hunters' stories clearly promotes Indigenous knowledge, as Watt-Cloutier reasons that Inuit knowledge of climate change must be considered as sound contributions to scientific documentation:

> Science is a body of knowledge, and a way of knowing based on rigorous observation. By this definition, the hunters who criss-cross the ice and snow and embody centuries of observation are scientists. When they describe what is happening to their landscape, the world needs to listen. (199)

However, it is not uncommon to encounter reports of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) in international and governmental assessments such as the IPCC's Synthesis Reports. TEK has been extensively exhausted and presented for political purposes in the decision-making processes of climate change mitigation and adaptation. That being said, the unique quality of the inclusion of the Inuit hunter voices contributes differently to current scientific knowledge in that these accounts are human-centered. It is through these testimonies of accidents, injuries and even losses, that she offers the human facet of climate change, inciting an affective response to an otherwise factual report. In her own words: "I was adamant about adding the 'heart' of the matter to the political and scientific words" (162). As has been suggested at the beginning of this paper, unlike most science-centered representations of Arctic climate change found in international discussions, *The Right to Be Cold* brings firsthand narratives to the fore, exemplifying a text that puts climate change into what Candis Callison (2012) proposes as a "vernacular" or that which is communicated and integrated into a comprehensive account (46), in this case, of how Inuit have come to know climate change. In this way, a study of climate change as represented in

life writing can bring the felt experience of climate change and vicariousness to debates that have been mostly concerned with factual evidence. Concomitantly, the inclusion and integration of personal experience and affectivity function as means of bridging the gap between scientific observation and public understanding of the lived exposure to Arctic climate change.

Another noteworthy feature of this engagement with the collective memory of Inuit hunters is how it is distinctively intertwined with individual memory. As an example of how the author adheres to IQ principles of storytelling by honoring "the commitment to speaking only from experience" (Martin 107-8), the following excerpt corroborates a story of one of the hunters, Ronald Brower, by means of her own memory, with the purpose of pointing out the drastic rate at which these incidents have increased:

> All my years growing up in Kuujjuaq, I don't recall many stories of hunters having accidents with breaking ice. I remember hearing of one elder and her grandchild who fell through and drowned, but such events were rare. Now we were hearing stories like Ronald's all the time. And when I moved to Iqaluit, I was reminded of the tragic results almost every day. My neighbor, Simon Nattaq, had fallen through the ice on a hunting trip soon after I moved to Nunavut. (186)

This engagement with memory therefore shows how Inuit autobiography can actively put IQ into practice and observe Inuit ways of storytelling. I would also like to bring attention to the fact that the voices of the hunters in this text are male, yet as Dowsley et al. (2010) have argued, knowledge of climate change is not gendered. Inuit women participate in a critical social role "discussing environmental knowledge, processing it within the household and disseminating it to others" (157), as seen in the inclusion of the stories Watt-Cloutier has heard herself from local hunters.

As an account of both successes and failures, this memoir also aligns with the didactic nature of traditional Inuit storytelling. Keavy Martin (2015) has extensively examined how *unipkaaqtuat*, or traditional Inuit stories, contain "important lessons about ways to live a good life" (45). The author does not shy away from repetitively acknowledging that her life's work was not only purposed to serve Inuit but also to set a precedent for future generations, which is why she engages in the autobiographical act. However, not all of her professional endeavors were successful, as seen for instance in the rejection of the Petition to the Right to Be Cold and the loss of the Nobel Peace Prize to Al Gore. There is also a noticeable pattern of misfortunes that follow each milestone in her career: her divorce, her daughter's accident and the death of her sister are just a few examples. It is during these episodes of grief, opposition and failure that she responds with perseverance and resilience:

> I needed these character skills in order to survive my grief. […] There were many times I thought I could not carry on. But I learned that true commitment really begins when we reach a point of not knowing how we can possibly go on– and then somehow find the strength to go on anyway. (278)

Whereas Reneé Hulan (2018) writes that "Her success as a leader offers a model of how modern Inuit life can teach others to succeed" (71), I would like to add that the extensive and detailed account of the obstacles and failures in her memoir also serve a pedagogical function by exemplifying resilience. In her own words:

> My maternal instincts also tell me that it is extremely important that the younger generation see beyond the material recognition and grasp the meaning of success: achievements reflect an acceptance of the human condition, with all its challenges, and they mark the human journey, which requires us to show up and focus, commit to our passions, persevere, and endure the moments of struggle and loss in order to overcome them and transform our lives (xxv).

Therefore, similar to the *unipkaaqtuat*, or traditional Inuit stories that contain "important lessons about ways to live a good life" (Keavy Martin, 45), I would argue that Inuit life writing, grounded in IQ like *The Right to Be Cold*, can serve the same purpose of guiding young generations of Inuit through the difficulties of modern-day ways of being.

Considering the stress placed on the maternal subject position of the excerpt quoted above, I will now turn to examine the role womanhood in this life writing.

Affect as an Autobiographical Approach

In the Introduction, Watt-Cloutier makes her identity very clear before delving into her memoir: "As an Inuk woman, a mother, and a grandmother… I want to offer a human story from this unique vantage point" (xxiv). From the very beginning, the author invites the reader to approach her life writing from the perspective of these three subject positions.

In autobiographical theory, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (*Women* 1998) have argued that women's life writing has made visible "formerly invisible subjects" (5). The Indigenous subject position is explicitly drawn on throughout her memoir as one of Watt-Cloutier's intentions of writing is to share "the story of Inuit history and contemporary Inuit life, through my lens" and "correct the preconceived notions of the Arctic and Inuit that many people hold" (xxiv-xxv).

Through this autoethnographical perspective, or "lens of culture" (Adams 1), the author magnifies the significance of the cultural transitions Inuit women have experienced in this process of modernization.

Firstly, she observes that in a matter of just twenty years, Inuit women had become vulnerable to gender-based violence. Upon returning to the Arctic after spending her teenage years in southern schools, working as a translator at a health clinic, she writes:

> As a young woman, I was witnessing the painful, destructive connection between addiction and alcohol abuse and violence. And I was seeing that it was women who were bearing the brunt of this terrible social unraveling. (62)

This transformation, born of qallunaat interference with Inuit hunting culture and the effects of *ilira* mentioned earlier, arose from the "loss of integrity and pride" that festered into shame, guilt, anger and resentment, deemed the "wounded hunter spirit" (73). While the men fought to make their way in the new Arctic that no longer reflected Inuit ways of being, many Inuit women adapted into positions in society as wage earners displacing the traditional "hunter-provider" role of Inuit men (74). Tending to the injured Inuit women at the clinic, she is careful to consider the shame and embarrassment many displayed as their abusers were oftentimes beloved members of the community. At this moment, she adopts a collective voice:

> In the past, we had seen our men working on their sleds, carefully, meticulously preparing the runners; tightening the ropes; focusing on the tiniest details. And we had seen them heading out onto the land. We all knew they would be spending hours, days in silence and stillness, disappearing into the landscape so that caribou or the seals might appear. Their masterful control and focus were more important than anything. But later, as the years passed, we started to see men traveling out onto the land with booze packed alongside their food and supplies in the qamutiik. How could they hunt when they were drinking? How could they afford to engage in reckless habits in a remote and often unforgiving terrain, where clarity and focus are a must and where injury might quickly lead to death? How could they accept these bursts of violence when we as Inuit have traditionally looked at anger and loss of control as the most childish of behaviors? And why would they sacrifice the meditative, clarifying, healing experience of being on the land in exchange for mind-fogging booze? (64)

Here, the use of rhetorical questions and negative assertions creates, as it were, a small dialogue, using this very deliberate command of language as a means of "moral suasion" (Schaffer and Smith 3). As a result, the ethical dimension

of the diction contributes to the unremitting tone of the aforementioned rights narrative, demanding recognition of the injustices of their situation.

Watt-Cloutier is acutely aware of her influence, acknowledging the significance of her role as an Indigenous woman in leadership on many occasions:

> I was one of the few women leaders at these forums, and as an Aboriginal one, I was an even rarer entity. This crisis reminded me once again that I represented voices that often went unheard. My maternal instincts kicked in. And my desire to protect the Arctic and our culture … gave me the courage and perseverance to increase my participation in the council meetings. (207-8)

Here, a sense of responsibility binds her positionality to the allied collective of Indigenous voices. Bearing the weight of representing not only her own community and Indigenous peoples, she attributes her fight for environmental justice to the bouts of "maternal energy" that motivated her to "protect the future for *our* children" (211; emphasis added). From the subject positions of mother and grandmother, she considers the precarious conditions in which she must raise her own children and grandchildren. The determination behind her sense of purpose reveals the deep-seated IQ principles of caretaking and serving that extend beyond her own maternity, reflecting a global mindset:

> We have a common cause. A coalition of citizens, particularly women, from all regions of the globe is forming to demand that you, the governments of the world, take concrete and effective action to rid us of the POPs' threat to our children. (162)

This "coalition of women citizens" is a fierce metaphor that reinforces a resilient and steadfast collective female voice, yet also contributes to the directness of the call to action. In this sense, the trope of love and maternal affect is drawn on to illustrate this desire to protect children, a universality that is effective in approaching environmental justice on a global scale.

Correspondingly, the chapters dedicated to the issue of POPs are also impregnated with imagery of womanhood and motherhood. Watt-Cloutier establishes that the approach to environmental justice as a human right was inspired by the figure of Rachel Carson, emphasizing her perseverance despite opposition. I would argue that the reference to Carson's death by breast cancer lays the foundation for the importance she places on the image of breasts as indicators of health, wellness and womanhood. The author moves on to clarify that the problem of POPs found in breast milk and country food ultimately threaten Inuit ways of being. In this way, she maintains that the fight against the pollutants was meant to safeguard "families, parents, children, and grandchildren" and protect "our right to lead our lives and continue the strong traditions of our

hunting culture" (141). Illustrating the importance of breastfeeding, she conjures up the images of her own daughter nursing her grandson and Stephanie Meakin, the biologist who was either pregnant or nursing during the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) sessions, "lending powerful symbolism to our message" (160). The author even goes to the extent of presenting an Inuit soapstone carving of a breastfeeding mother to the chair of the session to bolster the ethical imperative of their task (161). Together, these images paint a picture that reveals the vulnerability of women yet manifests a shared space of womanhood and, in this case especially, motherhood, that enables an approach to environmental justice on a united front.

In safeguarding future generations of Inuit, she affirms to have "fortified" her "sense of self," stating that defending Inuit ways of being has brought her to the verdict that "I was Inuk– heart, mind, and soul" (183). This is not the first time that she mentions her Inuk soul, and I would argue that spirituality, like womanhood, plays an important role in her memoir. Whereas she makes multiple references to God, her abstract and vague language restrains from specifying what that spiritual relationship looks like: "the universe, or God, however we describe our higher power" (275). For this reason, I would instead like to examine the connection between spirit and land, unequivocally rooted in IQ: "the animals that are our country food connect us to the water and the land, to the 'source' of our life, to God" (135). On numerous occasions, she alludes to eating country food with overwhelming feelings of comfort and security. As a child, sent away to a hospital in Quebec for surgery, she refuses to eat the food provided until a First Nations woman serves her moose meat, similar to caribou, and cured her homesickness to a certain degree. This example and the many others demonstrate how country food "nourished me not only physically but spiritually as well" (137). Hence, securing country food, understood as vital to her spirituality, is a motivating factor in her fight for protecting Inuit hunting practices.

What these examples demonstrate is how the overall message avails of motherhood and spirituality as affective responses to environmental justice, a notion that is crucial to understanding the approach to climate change as a human right. From a theoretical perspective, the rights narrative provides a space that can embrace this manifestation of affect and draw on it to "invite an ethical response from listeners and readers" (Schaffer and Smith 4), a notion that I will argue aligns with the aforementioned call to action. In the words of Eva Darias-Beautell, "an affective perspective on literature opens up the space between the mind's power to think and the body's power to act as well as between the power to be affected and the power to act" (453).

Zygmunt Bauman (1993) notes that acquiring knowledge of others occurs naturally by living in close quarters and observing how others perceive their surroundings. This acquisition relies on intimacy, whereas larger distances

between subjects effect anonymity (148). Watt-Cloutier addresses this gap, acknowledging that "people don't damage the earth out of malice. We all want to do what's right– it's just not always easy to understand what that is" (210). To view life writing as an opportunity to gain this knowledge of people in remote and inaccessible locations, such as the Arctic, is to close in on the distance that restrains knowledge of other experiences and perceptions to a scale of proximity. Put simply, bearing witness to Arctic climate change by reading *The Right to Be Cold* is thus a means to swing from Bauman's pole of anonymity to intimacy and engage in a process of acknowledgment, awareness, and reflection and feeling, key contributions to discussions of environmental ethics.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper, I have attempted to demonstrate the substantiality of Inuit life writing as a means to intimate Inuit experience of the current climate crisis. The cultural and identity shifts detailed in *The Right to Be Cold*, inseparable from the transformations of the Arctic environment, are a testament to the vulnerability, adaptability and ingenuity of Inuit ways of being. The ubiquitous influence of traditional Inuit epistemology and the principles of IQ that permeate the memoir contribute to an approach to environmental justice that advocates Inuit voice and insight. The author's call to action effectively communicates the sense of urgency for environmental ethics and Indigenous self-determinism in the face of climate change. Her subject positions as Indigenous woman and mother enable vicariousness in the text, constructing an affective approach to the issues of environmental justice.

In my analysis, I have demonstrated that Inuit life writing is an asset to the human rights framework, as affectivity in life writing becomes an effective tool for literary representations of climate change as a human-centered experience. These findings suggest that, similar to the image of the Inuk sentinel, *The Right to Be Cold* functions as textual means of sounding the alarm, forewarning its global audience of the ethical imperative of imminent climate change.

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The Plants are Plotting: Political Orders in Ostenso's *Wild Geese*

Janice Vis-Gitzel

visgitzj@mcmaster.ca
ORCID: 0000-0002-9168-6786

McMaster University, Canada

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ABSTRACT

This article attends to non-human agency and plant communities in Martha Ostenso's 1925 novel *Wild Geese*. As non-humans shape the novel's setting and plot, they are entwined with human action but not subordinated to human agency or political systems; on the contrary, plant communities are political forces who ally, resist, and clash during the implementation of European agricultural practises in the early twentieth century. Thus, the setting details of this CanLit novel can be repurposed to think about the possibilities of community beyond colonial control.

This article begins by drawing on Vanessa Watts' articulation of ecosystems-as-societies as a framework for plant agency. It then follows Margret Boyce's eco-critical engagement with *Wild Geese* to examine how the farm's monocrops are connected to, but not determined by, the heteropatriarchal family and the colonial state. Further, by considering how homoeroticism emerges against colonial heteropatriarchy in non-agricultural settings, queerness is shown to pre-exist and resist the organizing tendencies of settler colonialism. Finally, this article turns to non-human alliances in the novel's finale to demonstrate the ongoing struggle between political powers. To grapple with colonialism and its legacies, non-human agency and political power must also be recognized.

Keywords

Plant Agency; Ecocriticism; Settler Colonialism; Canadian Literature; Agriculture; Queer.

"There's like a farm, a homestead, and the father figure is an absolute terror. There's all these secrets, and you're waiting for them to come out, but they don't…"

"Uh-huh…"

"Well…" I scramble for more words, for more exciting explanations, feeling pathetic as I try to outline the plot of Martha Ostenso's 1925 novel *Wild Geese* to my partner. "Ok, it *sounds* kinda dull, but this book is intense." My memory rummages through the novel's agents and events as I try to understand my own response. Some of the novel's tension emerges from the manipulative scheming and incessant threats of the farm owner and family patriarch, Caleb Gare, but the book's affective qualities cannot be fully explained by the activity of its human characters. Instead, the land—the material setting—is filled with tension, an uneasiness that infiltrates the cracks of the narration. The land is described in contradictory terms throughout the text, acting with intention but not a unified personality: the ground is "insidious" and "taunting" (351, 350), but there is also "freeness… in the depth of the earth" (68). I find myself tracking these nods toward more-than-human agencies, and I realize that I *am* enthralled by the novel's plot—just not the plot I initially explained. I am entangled in the literary descriptions of a *plot of land*, a place active in its own writing, plotting its own plot through the intersections and tensions of multiple plot-makers.

But I've gotten ahead of myself, gotten caught in the reeds of Ostenso's novel while forgetting my roots. I am a newcomer and a settler writing in the lands of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe peoples, governed by the Dish with One Spoon treaty.[1] I write from this place about the literary description of another place: *Wild Geese* is set in an undetermined location in Northern Manitoba, probably the land of the Cree and Métis. Ostenso fails to clearly name or acknowledge Indigenous Peoples and their political orders in her book, though she does apprehend some notion of sovereignty embedded in their lands. Reflecting on her move to Manitoba, she writes: "My novel, *Wild Geese*, lay there, waiting to be put into words" (qtd. in Hesse 47). For Ostenso, the story exists before and beyond her, living in the place. Of course, the narrative is still shaped by her settler perspective, but it retains a sense of land

1. The Dish with One Spoon wampum is a political agreement and philosophy that, as explained by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, represents the non-hierarchical, peaceful, and responsible sharing of land between sovereign Indigenous Nations (37). The wampum does not directly include me, as I am a settler. However, by living on these territories, I believe it is my responsibility to acknowledge and respect Dish with One Spoon principles. This includes continuously committing to be respectful towards other human and non-human peoples.

agency, a sense that the land is *living*—the place acts and is not merely a stage for human actors.

Ostenso's descriptions of this unruly, unbeautiful landscape were likely unappealing to early literary critics,[2] but in the mid and late twentieth century, scholars began to favour realism's harsher illustrations; "writing that engaged with the power… of the Canadian landscape" became "central to the national literature" (Hammill "Sensations" 88-89). *Wild Geese* was re-appraised and, according to Faye Hammill, accepted as "an early classic of Canadian prairie literature" ("Martha Ostenso" 17).[3] The subsequent academic engagements with *Wild Geese* often frame the novel around realist and naturalist trends within the Canadian literary canon, and *Wild Geese*'s land descriptions are taken up by critics insofar as they represent Canadian prairie living and writing. M.G. Hesse, for example, posits that *Wild Geese* depicts "the misery of the lives of people on the prairies," while championing the characters' various "quests" for freedom amid the hardships of early settler life (50). Similarly, Daniel S. Lenoski claims *Wild Geese* focuses on "man's alienation from the prairie environment" and draws attention to the "possibilities for the pioneer spirit" to either love or hate the land (279, 289). More recently, in *The Oxford Handbook of Canadian Literature*, Alison Calder identifies *Wild Geese* as a notable female contribution to the tradition of prairie literature in Canada that grapples with settler motherhood.

I value these readings, especially when they reveal the tensions and contradictions of settler colonialism. Nevertheless, Canadian prairie fiction is "a genre about settlement" and, more particularly, about the concerns, struggles, and ambitions of (some) human settlers building a (supposedly) new nation (Boyce 1). Along with Margret Boyce, I am concerned that centring the book's "relevan[ce] as Canadian literature" within determined literary traditions can lead readers to overlook or oversimplify the text's depiction of more-than-human communities (2). Labels like *Canada* and the *Canadian Prairies* invoke grander narratives that overshadow how the novel's hyper-local social arrangements

2. According to Hammill's analysis, many of Canada's early twentieth century literary critics were invested in "disseminat[ing] an attractive image of Canada to the outside world" (88). *Wild Geese* would not have furthered this aim.

3. Although *Wild Geese* has been generally accepted as part of the national canon, Ostenso herself holds a more complicated position in relation to Canadian literature. Hammill notes that Ostenso's identity as Norwegian-born settler working in Canada and the United States "disrupts nationalist literary histories by crossing political and cultural boundaries" ("Martha Ostenso" 18). Ostenso's status as a Canadian is put into question by her entanglements with other nation states. However, Hammill also posits that Ostenso's immigrant status might have helped her connect with readers in the early twentieth century, many of whom would have also been immigrants ("Sensations" 76).

exceed the settlers' schemes; the entanglements of plants and animals are too easily lost.[4] So rather than reading *Wild Geese* as a story about the arduous process of settler life within the context of single sociopolitical state, I want to attend to the many political orders proliferating, supporting, and warring over the plot(s) of the Gare farm, forming uneasy alliances and clashing with each other. These clashes are bound to, and seep into, the human world, but they are not subordinated to human agency.

To share this reading, I will begin by thinking with Vanessa Watts' articulation of ecosystems-as-societies in order to clarify my understanding of plant politics. Then, I will follow Boyce's eco-critical engagement with *Wild Geese*, considering how the farm crops—and blue flax particularly—organize bodies and energy on the Gare farm, forming sociopolitical orders connected to, but not determined by, the heteropatriarchal family and the colonial state. Finally, I hope to sit alongside the homoeroticism emerging against colonial heteropatriarchy, recognizing that queerness pre-exists and resists the organizing tendencies of the settler state. Thus, I propose to challenge the notion that the land is governed by a single political order and human agency, and to repurpose elements of this CanLit novel to begin to think beyond Canada.

Plant Politics

Whenever I think through land-based agency, I am returned to Watts' essay "Indigenous Place-Thought & Agency amongst Humans and Non-Humans (First Woman and Sky Woman Go on a European World Tour!)." Watts is a Kanyen'kehà:ka and Anishinaabe scholar whose thinking and seeing are guided by Indigenous cosmologies. I do not share her lived Indigenous histories, but she helps me to notice and respect non-human agency. She writes, "ecosystems are better understood as *societies* from an Indigenous point of view"; these societies have "ethical structures, [and] inter-species treaties and agreements" (23, emphasis mine). Framing ecosystems as societies brings their systematic affects

4. In her survey of Canadian ecocriticism, Pamela Banting identifies a similar concern when writing that "national lines still supersede commonalities of interlinked climate, weather, watersheds, flora, and fauna" in some scholarly practises. Banting points to regionalism and bioregionalism as shelters under which some literary scholars have (intentionally or not) studied environmental literature outside of national narratives. I admire the work of many bioregionalism thinkers and their ability to question colonial boundaries, but I do not draw specifically on bioregionalism in hopes of centering the hyper-local communities and ecological events that cannot be generalized, even within a given bioregion.

and creative power to the forefront: a "society" can be defined both as "state or condition of living in company" and "the system of customs and organization adopted… for harmonious coexistence" (def. 6a). Ecosystems are social, comprised of the interactions of many beings who live together; this collective living is not chaotic or haphazard. Instead, ecosystems organize the flow of matter and energy, developing place-specific customs while remaining open to adaptation. Ecosystems "interpret, understand and implement" changes in their more-than-human orders, re-making their community's customs as needed, and therefore they are alert and agential, systematic but not static (Watts 23).

The *societal* and *political* are closely related. *Societies* are organized forms of co-existence, and the term "political" is "concerned with the form, organization, and administration of a state and its relations" (def. 1a).[5] Taking a broad understanding of the word "state," I view eco-societies and their non-human agents as forming political orders through their organized and organizing relations. Watt's legal diction—for example, her reference to "treaties" and "ethical structures" (23)—similarly suggests non-humans act as political agents who organize themselves and develop customs, agreements, and habits of cohabitation.[6] The political orders of a field or a forest undoubtedly look different from those of a human nation state, and there remains a danger of trying to "fit" the non-human into reductive conceptions of social life. Yet, more-than-human communities are organizations administering energy, nutrients, and resources through systems that enable, produce, and care for relational beings living together. I hope that by recognizing eco-systems as eco-societies with localized political arrangements, I can better notice these communities' relationships with each other and ponder how human sociopolitical orders are always, already intermingled with the place-specific non-human lifeways.

Crop Cultivators

Building on the work of anthropologist Anna Tsing, Boyce reads the crops in *Wild Geese* as political agents who "arrange for their own survival by fashioning

5. The definitions for "society" and "political" also include the word "people," which I intentionally avoided in my provided quotations. Drawing from the work of Watts and other Indigenous scholars, (see, for example, "Learning the Grammar of Animacy" in Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass*), I consider non-humans as people, and so the definitions still fit. However, the terminology of personhood is a separate discussion.
6. John Borrows' extensive work on Indigenous legal traditions offer similar insights. See, for example, the chapter "Sources and Scope of Indigenous Legal Traditions" in his book *Canada's Indigenous Constitution*.

the novel's central family into an apparatus of agriculture" (1-2). By framing the crops as *arrangers*, Tsing and Boyce articulate the plant populations' political agency: the crops are actively organizing matter and energy—including human bodies and labour—to support their own wellbeing. In the novel, crops dictate the humans' daily customs: every morning, the Gare family rises early to begin farm work, and they "throw [themselves] down" into bed at night, entirely "spent," all their energy expended on crop care (36, 18). They have "not much time for play," as they expend their days planting, maintaining, and harvesting the fields (36). The family's behaviours—the habitual movements ingrained in their bodies—are inseparable from the needs of the crops. Their plant-dependant routines shape the materialization of farm life, and the organizing power of plants becomes palpable.

More particularly, the novel describes patriarch Caleb Gare as "absorbed" into the process of crop propagation, as he "lend[s]" the crops "his own spirit" (171). His very lifeforce is given over to the crops; he surrenders his power to them, and his energies are employed to support the growth and reproduction of the fields' plant populations. Notably, Caleb's investment is *societal*—he is not working for any single individual plant, but for the agricultural apparatus, a sociopolitical system led by plant lifeways that reproduces plant life. The locus of Caleb's commitment is clarified at harvesttime when he must choose between supporting individual plants and reproducing the agricultural cycle: he struggles with "a pang of regret" at the thought of cutting down a flax field that holds "such pride, such rich dignity" (250). Still, he resolves to cut the flax because the harvest will provide resources for "other years and other yields" (250). He admires the plants but makes his decision to harvest based upon his commitment to agricultural customs that ensure future crops. So, while Caleb is the farm's "owner," he is also a participant in a more-than-human eco-society through which the crops reproduce their populations in an orderly, systematic fashion.

Of course, Caleb still profits from the harvest. Caleb invests in the crops, and the crops offer him the resources that allow him to secure his position as patriarch. Thanks to the farm, Caleb can feed, clothe, and shelter himself, his wife, and his children. To Caleb, the farm's flourishing crops are "testifying" that he is a "successful owner and user of the soil" (249), vindicating his right to claim authority over farm and family. However, by tying his self-worth to his commitment to raising crops, his sense of self becomes inseparable from the monocrop propagation. Boyce elegantly elucidates the depth of Caleb's dependence on his crops by pointing to ambiguity in the narration: as Caleb brags that it "took" someone like him to face the challenges of farming, the text "signals Caleb's subordination to outside forces… not only does flax require Caleb to raise it, but something *takes him*" (3, emphasis mine).

But the crops don't just "take" Caleb—the entire Gare family is affected. They are dependent on patriarch Caleb, and while he feeds and shelters his family, he remains resolutely loyal to the agricultural apparatus, not the lives of his family members. Caleb uses most of the farm's resources to better the lives of the plants, not the humans. He avoids buying much-needed glasses for his daughter, even when her eyesight causes accidents, but he constantly schemes to buy and sell land for the crops (258). He "add[s] to [the land holdings] year after year" (14-15), and tailors his holdings to the crops' needs by "get[ting] rid of the useless land and buy[ing] in its place" land more amenable to farming (14). Here, his assessment of the "usefulness" and desirability of his land is dictated by the needs of the crop societies, whose demands trump his own children's. Caleb *does* value his children—but only for the labour they provide for the crops, and he schemes to keep them on the farm to work the fields indefinitely so as to support the continuation of the agricultural society. He keeps them home from church and school, isolating them so that they only know a life of crop-service (20, 39). As schoolteacher Lind observes, Ellen Gare can think "only as Caleb had taught her" and Martin Gare "understood only one thing: work" (96, 26). The Gare children are also manipulated into continuing their crop labours through fear for their mother, knowing that Caleb will "take it out on Ma" if they disobey him (27). Meanwhile, Caleb blackmails his wife into supporting his efforts by threatening to reveal the secret of her out-of-wedlock son, and so she, too, urges her children to stay, specifically warning the rebellious Judith against leaving (275). Thus, manipulation and entrapment structure the Gares' familial relationships, and Caleb "hold[s] taut the reins of power" with cruel efficiency (37), but he does so because he wants to continue growing crops, because he is committed to expanding an agricultural apparatus that is shaped by the plants' lifeways. Caleb's motives do not absolve him of responsibility for his abuse of his family. Yet, the novel's framing of the relationships between Caleb, his crops, and his family reveals that the agricultural apparatus does not emerge from a single human mind, but is a structure constituted by multiple actors with aligned interests; Caleb and the crops are both interested in his children's labour. On the Gare farm, patriarchy and agriculture are working together.

But while Caleb uses the patriarchal family model to organize his children's bodies and energy to serve the crops, and while the crops support his position as patriarch, the crops themselves are not inherently patriarchal. To paraphrase Boyce again, the crops organize whatever bodies emerge alongside them, appropriating energy to suit their needs; the crops use and support patriarchy because it is made available to them (4). This *availability* points to the influence of another political order—the colonial state. The settlement of Indigenous lands and the spread of European agriculture happened co-currently with the Dominion Lands Act of 1872, which "sells" land to European men and heterosexual

families (Canada 13).[7] Therefore, colonial policy has a hand in organizing which land and human bodies are present and available for the plants' appropriation. Patriarchal families settle alongside the agricultural plants, and these new, more-than-human communities influence each others' materializations and the materialization of the colonial state. More land is cultivated to take on the appearance of European farms, and farmers pay taxes to the colonial government, who provide the farmers with a pretense of legitimacy. The settler family, the colonial state, and agricultural plant monocultures are interdependent and intersecting, feeding off each other as they occupy the same physical space.

Nevertheless, these various political orders are not the same, even while they are entangled. The crops exist beyond and outside of Caleb's imposed order or the state's pretence of legitimizing. Plant potential is not subsumed by colonial organization, and the crops' customs do not consistently align with colonial or patriarchal political projects. For example, in the novel, Caleb aims to isolate and freeze the children into set roles so that "nothing happen[s]" in their lives (36). However, the crops are always growing and changing, requiring different actions from their human labourers, and thus highlight their human labourers' ability to change as well. While Caleb demands that his daughter Judith spend long, relentless days working in the fields, the plants seep into Judith's psyche, and she envisions her life transforming alongside the crops' shifting cycles; the lifeways of the crops give her a timescape to plan her escape from one mode of being into another. As she toils through the farm chores, she tells herself she'll run away with her boyfriend, Sven, after the hay is harvested (273), and she ruminates on "the other world where they [she and Sven] were going after the haying" (236). When alone with him, she tells Sven they are "going off somewhere—far away" where they will be "somebody else… not like the people round here" (217). Although she can't fully articulate the otherwise that she imagines, she knows change is possible, and the crops help her to structure her thoughts of transformation. Thus, the crops are allied with heteropatriarchy, but their orders can also be re-appropriated to support different relations. The struggle between Judith and her father unfolding throughout the novel—he aims to keep her on the farm, and she tries to leave—is not simply a matter of clashing human wills, but evidence of the complexity and flexibility of the farm crops and the sociopolitical arrangements they allow.

7. Single men over the age of 18 and female-led families (i.e. a widow with children) could claim a homestead. The wording is vague, but a single woman would probably be ineligible, and the document refers to the prospective homesteaders with masculine pronouns (Canada 13).

Following Flax

The crops collectively work through, in, and beyond the familial and colonial order, but specific non-human communities on the Gare farm also have their own particular habits, growing bodies and absorbing energy at different rates, and so organizing other bodies and energies differently. The novel doesn't offer a complete image of the farm and its non-human communities, though scattered references of crops and livestock signal a diversity of non-human beings. As Caleb looks over the farmlands on a spring evening, he mentally catalogues some of these different orders—cattle, wheat, rye—but his attention is fleeting until his gaze finally reaches the crop which is "most precious," even "transcendent" to him: the blue flax, sitting "beyond the muskeg and a dried lake bottom" (Ostenso 171, 14).

The placement of the flax at the edge of the farm is not incidental. To settlers in the early twentieth century, flax, an intentional introduction from Europe, was a "sodbusting crop" (MacFadyen 216), the crop to plant on land that had not previously been farmed. As Joshua MacFadyen explains in *Flax Americana*: "Flax was thought to outperform other crops on new breaking, preparing the soil and eventually conceding its space to wheat and corn… it became a significant first crop on some of the most fragile ecosystems and unforgiving northern grasslands" (206). From one perspective, everyone on the Gare farm—human and otherwise—serves the flax fields, because all serve the project of farm expansion, and any newly acquired territory is immediately given over to the flax. The flax itself is largely a cash crop;[8] it too serves expansion by providing Caleb Gare with the finances to buy more land. However, after a few seasons, the flax yields the space to other crops. The flax is only ever a temporary visitor in the soil, so the only way it can reproduce its current political arrangement—a population of flax organized in a uniform field—is to seek out new ground. The flax field becomes an ever-ambitious settler.

Of course, the farm is not expanding into empty space. Just as European settlement occurred through the intentional, non-consensual displacement of Indigenous Peoples' Nations, the flax fields must displace the pre-existing plant orders in order to occupy new territories, simultaneously disrupting the societies in the soil that had formed assemblages and alliances with a diversity of beings—including Indigenous Peoples. Although these pre-existing orders

8. Although flax has multiple uses, during the early twentieth, flax production is driven by the paint industry, which in turn is driven by urban "middle-class house and car consumers" (MacFadyen 21-22). The novel mentions Caleb's desire to sell the flax, and it does not refer to any other possible uses.

were flexible, open to change and new introductions, agriculture's single-species fields required (and continue to require) the complete annihilation of many species from a plot of land. Monocrop agriculture represents a radical reconstructing of how bodies are organized and who is allowed space and energy to thrive. This restructuring happened swiftly and forcefully in the early twentieth century, egged on by the colonial state. The aforementioned Dominion Lands Act not only gave settler farmers land, it stipulated that, within three years, the farmers must prove they were cultivating that land, otherwise their homestead could be taken away and given to another man (Canada 16). With limited time to produce visible results, settler farmers aiming to be recognized by the colonial government would feel pressured to establish the expected appearance and output of a well-functioning European-inspired farm, and so would seek out sod-busting crops like flax to occupy and displace the indigenous plants.

Meanwhile, the need to find a sod-busting crop suggests that the non-agricultural eco-societies were not particularly inviting to these new, single-species plant organizations. The novel calls flax "*a challenge to* the harsh conditions under which it grew": the crop has an antagonistic relationship toward its habitat, and the orders of the soil are organizing *to challenge* the invading monocultures and their alliance with the colonial government and heteropatriarchy (Ostenso 250, 206, emphasis mine). Caleb muses about the great difficulty of "forc[ing] from the soil all that it would withhold" (250): the soil *wants* to withhold support for the crops. As he compels his children to till the land, they encounter "intolerance" in the soil, the land working against them, unwilling to negotiate with their organization of bodies and energies, which would have all undesirable plants removed (68). The "hard labour" of the land is not metaphorical; land shows a material resistance to the political orders that the farm labourers are attempting to spread. So while the Gares are, on the one hand, organizing alongside the farmland (318), the land is not monolithic, and not all more-than-human orders peaceably co-exist. The Gares' service to agricultural fields requires the disruption of other political orders in the soil. And so as the Gares align themselves with the crops' lifeways, labouring to reproduce a particular more-than-human society, they displace and clash with other sociopolitical arrangements.

Beyond the farm, beyond patriarchy

While the soil's orders resist the intrusion of agriculture, they are not antagonistic towards humans in other contexts. When Judith is too frustrated to bear her father's abuse any longer, she runs away from the farm, and she enters—and

is welcomed into—a different political order emerging from the untilled[9] earth of the nearby forest. She acts, "[n]ot knowing fully what she was doing," outside of the logics or knowledges she is accustomed to. She strips down, baring herself, and lies on the ground, where she finds herself amid a "network of white birch" and sees "the bulbous white country that a cloud made against the blue" sky (67-68). The language here—a "network" and a "country" —speaks to the non-human systematic sovereignties she finds herself among. In her naked vulnerability, her body becomes entangled with the forest's societies, with its corporeality and flow of energies. She experiences an undetermined force "in the freeness in the air, in the depth of the earth" (68). As she is surrounded, saturated, and absorbed into the forest, she is "singled out from the rest of the Gares. She [is] no longer one of them" (68). She is momentarily separated from the heteropatriarchal agricultural family and untangled from their manipulations. For perhaps the first time in her life, she finds herself "strangely free" (67).

Judith is unable to understand her experience; she is swept away by the forest's affects, not master over them, and the presence of ellipses in the passage signal her inability to articulate her involvement (67). Still, her experience is poignant, and Judith becomes aware of "something beyond" the life she knows, and this "beyond" lies in direct contrast to the agricultural society: "the fields that Caleb tilled held no tenderness… but here was something forbiddenly beautiful" (67). The "but" in this passage emphasizes the break between the two settings—the two political orders—and in the "forbidden[]" orders of the forest Judith realizes she wants something beyond farm life and "beyond Sven" (68). Judith has previously imagined a life beyond her father, an imagination facilitated by the growth cycles of the crops, but that imagination has consistently been limited by heteropatriarchy. A new patriarch—Sven—has consistently represented her escape from her father. But here, the older orders of the sky and earth allow Judith a different imagination, and she comprehends something outside of heteropatriarchy. In other words, the freedom she senses in this place is not a freedom from one abusive man, but a freedom from systematized male dominance and—perhaps most importantly—a freedom to nurture non-heteronormative relationships. Here, queerness is entwined with the political orders that pre-exist colonial intrusion, and Judith's rejection of Sven tumbles into musings about the "delicate fingers" of Lind, the female school teacher (67).

Throughout the novel, Judith and Lind live in unrealized homoerotic tension. To make space for an unexpected guest, the women share a bedroom on

9. I use the term "untilled" rather than "uncultivated" intentionally. One could argue the soil is cultivated by bugs, plants, waterways, or other non-human who work within the soil to support its growth potential, but it is not tilled by the settlers.

their first night, and Judith "covertly" watches Lind undress, noticing her "dainty silk underthings"—the first of many references, as undergarments mediate their relationship (12, 259, 265). The text also dedicates significant passages to the women appreciating each other's physical forms, as Lind admires the "bountiful, relaxed beauty of [Judith's sleeping] body" (17), and Judith "seek[s] to be near [Lind] for the sake of the physical sweetness of her when the others were not about" (307). Yet, the sexual tension is never clearly recognized by either woman and they both pursue heterosexual relationships. Given their sociopolitical world, Judith and Lind's romantic decisions are hardly surprising: there is no room for lesbian relationships on the twentieth century family farm. Again, agricultural society is entangled in heteropatriarchy: men run family and farms, allied with monocultural crops and the colonial state—at the time of the book's writing, the state considers homosexuality a crime. This is not to say queer relationships never occurred in remote colonial-agricultural societies like the one described in *Wild Geese*, but state and familial laws and customs are set up against them, limiting what can be done and what can be imagined.[10]

Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson's introduction to *Queer Ecologies* offers further insight into early twentieth-century perspectives. Following some questionable extrapolations of Darwin's theory of evolution connecting reproductive potential with species' fitness, heterosexuality during this period is synonymous with "healthy" and "natural," evidence that a species is "flourishing" (11). Conversely, homosexuality is an example of "dysfunctional sexual biology or behavior" that represents a corruption or failure of nature (11). The natural and the queer become dichotomous terms, and nature-spaces and natural people are assumed to be without queerness (15). Living amongst such societal assumptions, Judith and Lind need to practise heterosexuality to be accepted as normal by their human neighbours. Nevertheless, *Wild Geese* directly challenges this norm by tying queerness to its non-human societies. The novel's nature-spaces are not "free from the taint of homoerotic activity" (15)—the forest societies invite Judith's erotic imagination, and they nurture Judith's homosexual desires beyond and against colonial-agricultural heteropatriarchy.

But even as Judith's desires are natural and appealing *to her*, the freedom she finds in the forest is not centered *on her*: Judith's encounter is not about her or her character arc. This is important, because it pushes against the wilderness

10. The opportunities for same-sex relationships would have been differently experienced by different demographics. For example, Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson explain that, due to the prevalence of single men in certain rural situations, there was some opportunity for (unsanctioned, illegal) homosexual activity between men (15). Women would have less opportunity to pursue same-sex connections.

mentality of the later nineteenth and early twentieth century. As environmental historian William Cronon explains, [11] the wilderness mythos imagines nature as a rugged but pure frontier existing outside of settler civilization, a place where European settlers could "rediscover" and "reinfuse[] themselves with a vigor, an independence… and national character. Seen in this way, wild country became a place… of national renewal" (7). This narrative frames "wild" non-human communities as inanimate resources to be mined for colonial inspiration, places to visit only for the state's benefit; the settler leaves "civilization" for a while, rediscovers the "natural" self, and returns inspired to further the goals of the colonial state. In Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson words, wilderness spaces are assumed to "develop moral and physical fitness"—though *morality* and *fitness* are both defined by the colonial state and framed for colonial benefit (20).

Judith's experience, however, does not serve the state. This forest community is not a static resource to support colonial society or individual enlightenment. Judith can be queer in the forest, but she does not find inspiration to improve coloniality through this queerness. Instead, she grapples with her desire through metaphor and slippery images. She muses over Lind's eyes, her hands, and how Lind opened "a secret lock in her being" (68). If anything, this passage demonstrates the inadequacy of Judith's frame of reference. The forest embraces Judith's longing and her erotic body, but the colonial-agricultural-patriarchal apparatus that have structured and storied her life thus far are too limited to allow Judith to find sustained engagement with herself or this place. When Judith returns to the farm and again is interpolated into the agricultural system, her life is unchanged, as if she has forgotten the space "beyond Sven" (68).

Judith's limitations are inseparable from her position as a settler and the impacts of colonial policy in the area. Colonial settlement—whether through the creation of wilderness parks or monocrop farms—displaced Indigenous Peoples, whose knowledge and Nations grew alongside the land and its non-heteropatriarchal orders. These Peoples held frameworks for relationality and familial organization far beyond the settlers' understanding of heteropatriarchy. Although Indigenous familial orders and customs are diverse and varied, there is substantial evidence to show that many did not rely on the gender binary or heterosexuality; queer identities were (and in some cases still are) celebrated

11. Cronon's work is based in the United States, and there are nation-specific policies that would not be applicable to Canada. However, the general assumptions about wilderness that I am pointing to here are shared across borders. Like the United States, Canadian governments also established wilderness parks during this period, and Boyce explains that Canadian Prairie fiction has often been read by conceptualizing settler relationships to the "inchoate frontier" (1).

and tasked with community-specific roles inseparable from Nations' sociopolitical arrangements, including their engagement with more-than-human communities (Tatonetti x).[12] Colonial policy made these non-heteronormative social arrangements illegal, and through policies of displacement, forced labour, and the coding of land as owned and accessible only to patriarchal families, the colonial government tried to erase Indigenous Peoples' non-colonial social arrangements (Schneider 18, Boyce 4).

Unfortunately, the novel leaves Indigenous Nations and imaginations in the margins, and thus is complicit in this erasure. In its silence, it cannot offer a more thorough interrogation into the intrusion of European heteropatriarchy into Indigenous human and more-than-human societies. Judith lacks the knowledge and vocabulary that Indigenous Nations developed to engage with the land's orders, and she is bound up in heteronormative and settler-agricultural frameworks that limit engagement with non-colonial communities. But these communities *do* exist, and they are actively present, even as the colonial logics fail to understand them, and even as European agriculture threatens to overtake them.

Complicity is complexity

So, if agriculture is implicated in the political orders of colonialism and tied up in the heteropatriarchy that builds itself by erasing other sociopolitical orders, then are the crops responsible for settlement? Are the growing habits of flax guilty of colonization? Boyce is quick to exonerate the crops by asserting that they merely accept benefits of human systems (4). It's true that the political orders of the farm crops are tied up in human affairs, and equally necessary to consider the choices that are open to the flax. Nevertheless, I am wary of simply writing of the flax's potential complicity. To excuse the flax as merely reaping the benefits from colonial-patriarchy's systems of governance seems to re-centre the human and rob flax of self-awareness, turning it into a by-product of human governance instead of an active agent making political decisions.

To be clear: I am not ready to blame flax. Rather, I am unconvinced that plants should be assimilated into the conceptions of blame or guilt as they operate in individual-obsessed human societies, and equally unconvinced that humans

12. This is a complex topic that far exceeds this essay and my own knowledge. The introduction to Volume 16 of *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* offers a concise, helpful, and accessible starting point for a discussion on queerness, Indigeneity, and colonial intrusion.

should place themselves as the arbitrators of plant morality. Perhaps the intersections between plant orders need to be thought more collectively and more specifically, beyond labelled individuals and the generalized taxonomy of independent species. Bodies have multiple capacities that can be employed differently; just as the novel's human characters engage in various interactions with plant orders, plants too can interact differently with each other.[13] Flax is not "good" or a "bad"; different flax plants and flax collectives participate in different, intersecting political orders and are complicit in different ways. Many blue flax plants have found ways to enter Turtle Island's societies on mutually agreeable terms, offering nourishment to local birds, deer, and other beings (Ogle et al 2). Scientists do not consider blue flax an invasive species (Ogle et al 2). However, the assessment of species invasiveness is a general assessment across space and time, and it cannot encompass the specific relations unfolding in every instance of flax. That is, to say that flax plants are not invasive to Turtle Island *generally* does not mean flax plants can never act as invaders, nor does it mean that flax cannot support the invasive tendencies of others. Every flax plant exists in a particular place that holds a unique blend of societies that impact the plant's decisions. Every flax collective exists within its own particularities.

In the novel, the flax field is a specific monoculture entwined with Caleb and a particular plot of soil at a moment in time; Caleb's flax is different from his neighbours', and this season's flax is different from the last. These plants and fields are connected within continuous systems, but these systems do not exhaust the plants' capacity for life or entirely strip them of agential power. In fact, there's evidence in the text that the novel's final generation of flax conspired with the various societies outside of the borders of the Gare farm to eliminate Caleb Gare, a shift in alliance that reverberates across *Wild Geese*'s intertwining plots.

Flax's final act

To maximize his harvest, Caleb forgoes carving a spatial boundary between the flax field and the forest, meaning that, while colonial land deeds undoubtedly define the farm's boundaries, on the ground there is no clear demarcation between field and forest (346). Instead, the boundaries of the flax field run against and into the forest; the plants meet and intermingle; eco-societies form new

13. While a comprehensive interrogation between Ostenso's novel and affect theory is well beyond the scope of this essay, my focus on particularity and bodies resonates with Deleuze and Guattari's engagement with Spinoza and the question: "What can a body do?" (256).

relationships as they share common ground on the field's edges. This space of solidarity allows for material exchanges and alliances, for new eco-social organizations that provide a physical pathway between the field and forest that the non-human orders use to undermine the agriculture's ever-expanding ambitions.

When Caleb sees the flames approaching the farm, he is enraptured by the show, "conscious only" of the flax's beauty, and so intent on saving the field that he is unable to comprehend the danger to his own body. The flames are propelled forward by the wind, providing a sense of urgency and "taunting" Caleb, mocking him and drawing him closer to the danger as they approach the alluring flax, moving across the material bridge formed by the co-mingling of field and forest along the farm's boundaries (350). The reeds also join in the scene, as they "tangle themselves about Caleb's legs" and slow him down (351); they work with intention to thwart Caleb and collaborate with the fire. Eventually, his quest to save his harvest thwarted, Caleb is caught in the muskeg, where the mud sucks him into the earth and buries him (351).

Caleb's death has been labeled "too convenient" by scholars, as a tragedy that simply happened to cleanly tie up the novel's plot (Keith). However, when attending to the novel's more-than-human orders, Caleb's death emerges as a carefully arranged event brought into fruition through the cooperation of many more-than-human forces, perhaps even a "multispecies network of performativity" (Gibson and Sandilands 2). Non-human agents harmonize their life-ways, working within their pre-existing orders and repurposing their life customs to ensure the fields burn and Caleb dies. But while led by the non-human, the death of Caleb is a more-than-human political affair. Not only does Caleb's death mark human vulnerability to non-human powers, following his demise, the farm's human bodies or energy will never be arranged in precisely the same way. In Boyce's words, the "simultaneous demise [of Caleb and the flax field] is part of a broader assemblage of effects that includes the reorganization of the Gare family" (3). The need for reorganization does not mean that sociopolitical systems end, but the fire's survivors must re-adjust, and new or altered forms of collective living will emerge. The tension that structured the Gares' lives dissipates, and the anxiety permeating the family members slackens as they are finally released from Caleb's cruelty. But this release does not emerge from their own ingenuity or conniving, nor does it come from the final revelation of Amelia Gare's secret son; the human secret remains a secret. Caleb Gare's death is tied up in human affairs—he is alone in the fields in part because of his children's trip to the harvest jubilee—but the story's climax is driven by the interactions of more-than-human orders that overlap with the various plots that ground and structure their world. Inhuman forces propel human re-arrangement because human arrangement was never strictly human to begin with, and human plots—literary or otherwise—were likewise never single-species stories.

In the aftermath of the fire, colonial legislation re-adjusts its order as well, plotting its own trajectory as the state tries to re-organize the land into private property by considering who remains available to implement its structures. To prevent the land from returning to the governments of the indigenous plant-orders, the role of state-sanctioned property-owning patriarch is shifted through the law of primogeniture to Martin. But even as the colonial state reproduces its orders, it cannot do so in precisely the same way: Martin is not Caleb, and the farm and the Gare family will not be the same with Martin acting as patriarch. The continuation of colonialism and heteropatriarchy can be read as a sign of the state's resilience and adaptability, but it is also an indication of an ongoing struggle. Even as patriarchy is reproduced, more-than-human orders will continue to use, infiltrate, support, and attack each other and settler organizations. Colonial societies are not idly inheriting the Earth and have not comprehensively conquered the land; they suffer defeats from which they must re-emerge. They are constantly being challenged, forced to re-adjust.

Wild Geese's relevance to Canadian literature isn't its development of a generalized Canadian mythos, but rather its denial of a singular Canada. *Wild Geese* grapples with colonial settlement as many materializing projects overlapping with pre-existing societies that are not finished, inevitable, or strictly human. Political orders beyond colonialism become visible, and even if the novel struggles to grapple with its own invocation of the otherwise, it refuses evocations of an empty, non-political land ripe for colonial appropriation. Instead, attention is directed towards the agencies and orders that are already supporting, arranging, and plotting the places and spaces of more-than-human livelihoods. *Wild Geese*'s non-human communities are powerful and contingent, dependent and destructive, entwined with the human and yet differing in their responses to those colonial customs that are constituting the state. Colonial orders cannot be simply erased, but they can be rearranged–*they are already being rearranged*–as they contend and ally with other societies and forces. Perhaps *Wild Geese* asks "us" to read "our" literature again: whose plots are these? In what plots do we find ourselves, not as masters or owners, but as agents and allies?

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Beautiful the beauty—Dionne Brand's Theory and Canisia Lubrin's *Voodoo Hypothesis*

Alexei Perry Cox

alexeiperrycox@gmail.com

Independent scholar, Canada

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ABSTRACT
Against the reductive and the often universalizing poetics of much poetry and much theoretical discourse that abandons feelings from its rhetoric, the works of Dionne Brand's *Theory* and Canisia Lubrin's *Voodoo Hypothesis* promote layered, black and multivocal reflections on beauty. They act out self-interrogating dialectics rather than provide symbolic clarity of their subjects. There is no aesthetic consolation in these works and that's where the beauty lies. Their works ask readers to enter into irreducible complexity as a form of attention. I posit that these black creative politics – in this poetry – are tied up in reading-work that can newly anticipate our global condition through ethical collectivity.

Keywords
Poetry; Poetics; Canadian studies and literature; Black Canada; Black aesthetics; Diaspora; Decolonization; Intersectionality; Gender; Race; Sexuality; Feminist pedagogy; Caribbean studies and literature; Social Justice; Spatial intervention.

Anybody who thinks that they can understand how terrible the terror has been, without understanding how beautiful the beauty has been against the grain of the terror, is wrong.

– Fred Moten

When Derek Attridge, at the end of *Peculiar Language*, describes the possible interpretations of the preceding pages in which he has discussed the political dimensions of language and etymology, he states: "Fortunately, the logic of my argument frees me of any obligation to settle the question, and I can leave it to the reader to produce—within the limits imposed by a particular position in time and space—her or his own structure of center and digression" (Attridge 231). Perhaps only a theorist can feel this way. Whereas an artist is more implored, by the very nature of her or his artistic ambition, to *try* to query the questions further—not to settle them but to try to attach meaning and morality to the pursuits while enregistering their works with the production of an aesthetic beauty. While Attridge can *get away with* this freedom in regard to authorial intentions, I do not believe conscientious writers, such as Dionne Brand and Canisia Lubrin, equate their work with the same such freedom. Or at least they are not inclined to feel such freedom as a liberating thing.

To borrow a phrase from *Double Negative* (a queer feminist collaborative long poem by Daphne Marlatt, Betsy Warland and Cheryl Sourkes), I want to continue questioning the question of whether, when we add it up, the poetics of paradox presented by Brand and Lubrin is a double bind or whether "two negatives make a positive." And whether a "positive" has virtue. It can be hard to examine the ideological writer because it is hard to recuperate all the complexities of reader responses, surely, and because it generally feels grossly inadequate to make generalizations about such ambitious works or to speculate on authorial intention as if such intentions are a wholly fixed affair. Luckily, I think both *Voodoo Hypothesis* and *Theory,* recent works by Lubrin and Brand, subject themselves outright to this sort of "hypothesizing" and "theorizing," revealing often the ruptures of their own arguments and estimations of representations of beauty—in the physical world and of the human body—and thus give us entry into the very speculative practice of their own work to allow us to examine these aesthetic and moral-dilemmic productions and reproductions. Support for that irony's intentionality may be gleaned from the critical practice behind Sophia Forster's discussion of Brand's *Land to Light On* in her article on "The Politics of Ambivalence," but the intentionality of a poetics of paradox opens more possibilities. That a textual conundrum brings this insight into the dynamics of difference, a provocative challenge to previously held aesthetic and ideological doxa.

i. Thesis *x*: *Beauty is not the absence of ugliness* in the physical terrain of Canisia Lubrin's poetry collection *Voodoo Hypothesis*

how our literal and figurative world-views are shaped by the mappings
of diaspora, colonization, and the Black Atlantic slave trade
+ the spatial changes of space exploration + the witnessing
of natural devastations in climate change

In the dark times, will there also be singing?
Yes, there will be singing.
About the dark times.

– Bertolt Brecht

In her instructive and important essay, "Poetry is Not a Luxury," Audre Lorde noted that writing poetry is an emancipatory praxis, a way to feel the world anew, and an act that can chart "revolutionary demand" (Lorde 38). In the same essay, Lorde reveals that the praxis of poetry, the struggle to write and feel freedom and call for revolution, is necessarily tied to "the deaths we are expected to live" (38). Lorde recognizes that the praxis of writing, for black women, is that of imagining, writing, feeling and realizing dreams that trouble and can potentially undo a world where, as the aforementioned quotes suggest, the increasing expendability of human lives and environmental well-being is permissible and acceptable. If the act of writing poetry weds emancipatory possibility to an otherwise harmful terrain, it also invites one, to borrow from Octavia Butler, to "read every day and learn from what you read" (Butler 139). While writing can certainly be a solitary act—elsewhere in her work Lorde reminds us that the economics of poetry allows for secreted creativity and survival—writing also holds in it reading-work that, like the poem itself, might open up, to follow Roger I. Simon "a commitment to responsibility…the need to imagine an alternative human world and to imagine it in a way that enables one to act in the present as if this alternative had already begun to emerge" (Simon 4). To return to the initial Lorde quotes, again: the history that has resulted in our contemporary colonial struggles with genocidal and ecocidal practices, in part, urgently requires that we learn from what we read and that, in the face of the increasing expendability of the poorest peoples and regions, we notice that black creative politics—poetry—and other acts of writing our present world anew—are tied up in reading-work that can newly anticipate our global condition through ethical collectivity.

While I'm reluctant to define ethical collectivity through definitions of ugly and beautiful or aesthetics and ethics, I want to provide support for irony's

intentionality, as paradox, that concretizes the poetic devices of folding over and onto each other what has been historically or geographically made disperse or individualized by polarization. Participating, as both writers do, in revolutionary thinking that works against the impossibility of imagining, the negotiations between these positions are what I determine to be most fruitful. Thinking with Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, in the "Education and Crisis" chapter from their anthology, does some work on these disturbingly beautiful enigmatic images by addressing Paul Celan's "black milk"—the breast milk tainted from the blackened burnt ashes of massacre, and more explicitly moves toward "the darkness of murder and death, from the blackness of the night and of the 'dusk' that 'falls to Germany' when death uncannily becomes a 'master'" (31). They suggest that this poetry, contrary to popular belief on lyricality and harmonizing, can reject, within its own theory and hypothesis, not its music and its singing but itself as a certain predetermined recognizably *melodious* endeavour. Brand and Lubrin's versing and phrasing distrust the beautiful and undisturbed while each insists on having musicality side by side with the greatest horrors. The concern of language, through this lens, is in all the unalterable multivalences of its expression: *precision*. Aesthetics that don't transfigure harm and ethics that don't poeticize the political expressions. Words that name and place.

Much of Canisia Lubrin's work in *Voodoo Hypothesis* reveals a world in great and searing distress: the planet and its various inhabitants are struggling with, against, and in the name of a barbarous global, even universal, colonizing system where all forms of life are quite simply wasted or subject to being wasted. And yet, Lubrin neither offers us a simply humanist project nor endorses a classical liberal notion of the self, of the human, and of community. Instead, Lubrin's vision is in part, driven by the desire to imagine a different kind of human order—one that, as Lubrin herself imparts, "involves navigating the immense contradictions" of being human (Nolan 3). She negotiates the strategy of herself as a writer trying to imagine through the position defined by Rinaldo Walcott as the "impossibility of imagining blackness as Canadian" by defending the disturbing nightmare it takes to dream toward it. She elucidates this hypothesis in continued conversation with Martin E Nolan for *The Puritan*:

> I haven't yet in my few years on Earth encountered any human-created anything that doesn't have at its germ something contradictory. So, I don't find that I'm in conflict with tending towards the beauty in language, because this is how I come. I can only hope that you—the reader—will find it beautiful, because you have brought your own range of decoding skillsets to the task of finding whatever beauty lives in the thing for you. It's important to note that beauty need not mean saccharine and I find that people often conceptually confuse the two. I still

> believe that beauty is part of a poem's integrity and that beauty is not dressing and it can be naked and vehement. But, do I want you to be disturbed by the supposed tension of this paradox? I do. And I am. (Nolan 6)

Lubrin's ethical demand for new places and languages of difficult beauty, poignantly outlined in poems such as "Restoration" and the title poem, but evident across the collection in its entirety, asks the *poet* and *poetry* as well as the *reader* to work towards providing a different account of the harmed and harming world. In "Restorations," by example, we can look at the same places that confront hurricanes *while* the sea sings in them:

> and where the sea licks that black Caribbean shore,
> out of hurricane season
> I see for the first time what they see:
> everything the sea sings is untraceable (Lubrin *Voodoo Hypothesis* 76).

Practices of colonization, too, are evoked in the same sites of encountering the resorts and the typified prettiness of touristic island beauty as if finding this same localization taking place upon the speaker's very body and being:

> […] these encounters fall to summon
> that same high praise: colonies of resorts along my spine (76)

In the same poem, Lubrin offers that some "safety" is said to be felt while facing the shore, while the "waves toss their comfort," even while she addresses the slave trade of these same waters (76). It follows that it is the work of poetry in witness of this physical landscape of terror and wonder, and as poetry is artistically manifested as "watercolour," that triumphs the representation of beauty, that counters that not even these impositions on her spine can exploit the work of exposure that poetry itself can expose. It introduces the hypothesis in these lines:

> lay nothing on the back of poetry
> which does its work in pH, in watercolour, in
>
> whatever causes us to,
> in some sense,
> be cautious of time's dampening dusk
>
> that every place of home must reckon malediction
> even the happiness, which was mine—militant (76)

And concludes:

> how lost I feel to watch the sun leave from the belly of the ship
> my faith in sunrise narrows to the tip of my pen

in the final couplet of the poem (76). Her writings here call attention to a system that might and can be rendered possible through the relational work of words, sounds, poetics and sharing. It might be narrow on the horizon, but it can be written.

Lubrin, by this process, provides her readers with the opportunity to imagine another world in which human and other life forms are conceived as central to our well-being beyond the realm of their exploitability. From "Voodoo Hypothesis":

> Did you not land with your rocket behind
> you, hope beyond hope on the tip of your rope
> & the kindness of anti-gravity slowing you down
> you, before me, metal and earthen. But I am here to
> confirm or deny, the millions of small
> things that seven minutes of success
> were hinged upon when I was little more than
> idea and research, in the hypnotic gestures of flame and Bunsen burner
> and into parachute
> no one foresaw, the bag of rags at the end
> of the tunnel (1)

In this way, she asks that her readers account for their inactions, our belief in "the hypnotic gestures" of scientific exploration, as well as the science fiction of their non-colonial adventures and our usual indifference to these local-global-universal violences. The poet, Lubrin, does not offer us a solution; instead she asks us to notice the place we are at and the times we are in and to account for them. It is important to note, then, that Lubrin's work is never about the inability to imagine a different kind of future, but rather about how we might collectively make our present world livable, how our historically present crimes against this world might reorient our political desires, and how the politics of being human is bound up in a difficult and ethical worldview that is not necessarily honoured in our broader episteme, despite all of our claims about progress and human possibility. Lubrin often points us in the direction of how our practices prohibit human possibilities and limit human potentialities. In lines roving the notions of colonized human life on Mars such as:

> but I am Curiosity. If I kill the bitch right,
> she'll take us deeper and convince us to send earthlings
> to set up Earth's colonies on your deserts. They won't ever
> come back but that's not so bad when we trade in the grander scheme

We witness Lubrin's diasporic chartings refuse a commitment to our present order of knowledge vis-a-vis her spatial poetics. She writes geography, and her own political affiliations to space, as assertions of humanness rather than tacked to one side of an insider/outsider world (1). This positioning of the poet and writer as the agent of "Curiosity" is important, because it refuses to venerate the comforts of us/them paradigms as Lubrin herself writes of trading in the "grander scheme" for a new schematization of, say, potential cities, roads, buildings, waterways, streets, oceans, houses, and other spaces anew vis-a-vis her own colonized black diasporic history.

In *Voodoo Hypothesis* we are conscientiously kept from marginalizing or escaping the beauty-terror paradox in a method similar to one theorized by Saidiya Hartman in the following lines: "It is not then a question of escaping blackness but escaping the idea of blackness made during the construction of whiteness" (Hartman 166). Or, to go on, "to produce a thought of the outside while in the inside" (Ka 6) and doing so while "[l]iving inside of a world that is in so many ways uninhabitable" (6). Lubrin speaks directly to this nightmare of being both inside and outside in her language(s) and poetic works because the constraints are directly related to what is happening on the inside:

> When later I came to write poetry, my language struggled in its rhetorical firings. There was little craft-specific discipline to hold the subjects that I naturally gravitated towards: the horror, the suffering and troubles of what I could perceive of this life up against any sufficient sense of beauty in the illusory surety of language. For me this was often akin to not being able to speak at all: there is vice and unrest in such a thing as "beautifying" tragedy, yes. But it is a necessary trouble. To think of how to use the language of the colonizer to decolonize. To think of my Creole—the language of the colonized—invented by slaves whose very survival bred this linguistic creativity, a liberty twisted up in their need to communicate external to their masters, in spite of their subjugation. To think of language as a place of freedom for my ancestors: even as their ancient tongues were sliced from their mouths, they grew new speech. I think of what this means for me, the possibility of this dual inheritance. My Creole and my English, like language estranged. And nothing seems more true and cruel to me: both exist in me at once. This is language as a kind of trauma in itself but it is still a beautiful thing. I'm trying to negotiate the larger world that becomes, in fact, divisible because of language. And I often think that the relationship between language and beauty

> cannot be adequately considered without deconstructing the silent suspicions of inferiority that lead to the dichotomy in the first place. (Nolan 11)

Picture the work of this collection as a radical refusal of that dichotomy. An elaborate undoing, whereby even the slave trade's "Atlantic under-mapping" is re-marked by a connectedness that outlasts its rupture, that is capable of realignment (Lubrin "On Beauty and Poetry" 4). Looking, with humanity, at human beings even under the inhumanities of the slave trade is made both a pleasurable project and a heavy one here. In this sort of reading as a *re-writing of the history that continues the present* the mind can dart to James Baldwin speculating that "[h]uman beings are too various to be treated so lightly" and following this with the admission that he himself is "too various to be trusted" (Baldwin 37). By elucidating that the wordsmith (i.e. all wordsmiths, i.e. all humans) are untrustworthy (ethically unstable) we are forced to question whether this is so—and there's the fun, the actual fun in a book like this. In other words, truth only becomes true by knowing its oppositions and counter-truths and variants. The correct representations of poetry as the most articulate discourse of human conscience and social concerns are, after all, the foundations of an ideological poets' ideologies. But it is also simultaneously well-known by these same conscientious writers that ideology itself is *produced*, and reproduced, in iterative material processes of social ritual and conscience *through* their works, their words, their rewrites. The moon is white until it is black, and even this depends from which side of a non-dichotomy you're looking at it from after all.

Paradoxically, when we let go of ideologizing, when we give up on figuring out the bigger picture as one picture, we find powers of resistance, too. We get into the landscapes of who would be marginalized by creating a picture that is inaccurately universal. And we get art we can *feel*. Poetry that can move us. Lubrin exonerates us from stasis. She, turn and turn again, shows that "poetic form is not immutable; it is in motion. It cannot be divided into positive and negative space, as if it were a still life" (Willis 6). Being here, now in this flux of things begins with relinquishing the presupposed perfection of art. And there's the beauty in Lubrin's shards of written orality and experimentation of her theses, in her critiques and assertions that evade binary oppositions as they have been shaped by the conditional. Agitate the line between aesthetics and politics in each poetic line to feel just how her work turns between moments of surveillance and action, how the agitation is indeed the beautification.

The previously quoted line from Lubrin's "Restoration" ("be cautious of time's dampening dusk") brings to mind Sue Sinclair's article "As the World Ends, Has the Time for Grieving Arrived?" in which Sinclair locates her feelings of defamiliarization with the beauty of beached starfish—and beauty, generally, as it is transposed in scenes of the effects of climate change and environmental devastation

(Lubrin *VH* 76). Sinclair, by contrast to Lubrin, found herself "distanced from the beauty of those starfish" and confesses that, though she could "see it" she certainly couldn't "feel it" (Sinclair 4). She asserts that "the *dampening* of the effect of beauty [she felt] wasn't just the result of dissonance between beauty and the awfulness of climate change" but also a "protective instinct: [as she] didn't want to attach to, or care about the beauty of nature that was vanishing" (4 my emphasis). Sinclair sees herself as failing to be grateful and, like poet Jan Zwicky, "turns away from the beauty that is" (qtd in Zwicky, Sinclair 4). Lubrin's work, however, speaks not only of the human-created beauty-horror paradoxes that have changed our conceptions of our geographies through the Black Atlantic slave trade and colonization both globally and universally, but also of this climatic nature of earthly devastation. In a conversation with an anonymous poet for "The Writer in the World: On Beauty and Poetry," Lubrin offers this insight into her own representation of non-binary beauty in these predicaments:

> I suppose I should start by disclosing why I don't subscribe to the idea that beauty is the absence of ugliness. […] One central consideration is why such binaries could be or is or has been unhelpful to the poet. (Lubrin "OB&P" 3)

It is here where she fully discloses her process:

> Let us take stock of imagery (sight) in this brief study: imagine what you can about Hurricane Irma, with its destruction of whole towns, whole countries, whole lives—things by all accounts that call up in me the expression of the catastrophic. Then I see Irma in an image (caught moving across the crown of the Atlantic). Irma as photography, as painting, cinema, as language—and the first few moments of this encounter without my willing it, produces something beautiful. It is a beauty that breaks. (3)

Lubrin doesn't turn away from the points of breaking in her work, from the catastrophe; she stays inside the eye of the storm with her own eyes wide open. She posits, instead, that an art that can transmute the obscene without being a redemptive act is perhaps the most worthy. After all, the artist who is in solidarity with beauty is not the artist who sets out to undermine the trueness of the treachery of things, but the one who knows that in spite of treachery, we are "elevated towards saving—or hopes of saving—ourselves" (8).

So if, commonly, we tend to think the hard-nosed work of moral conscience is better suited to politicians or scientists than the smaller seeming imperatives of poets, we will continue to be the ones suffering the consequences—as indeed, we already and always do. As literary scholars, we have the opportunities to see that ambitious and conscientious poetry necessarily shifts definitions of quality to contribute to a new mode of value of what is/can be beautiful. It can

then be hypothesized that the most sincere of desires for this discourse—and the many discourses in them—is to make cultural room for poetical works to shift the ethos of collective imagination. Lofty in my poetics, admittedly so, but I do, I just can't help it, believe that poetry has a unique potential to fathom our new universes much like the enlarged world created by Lubrin's worldview—not just an utterly fresh poetic idiom but one that is powerfully kinetic in its resources, that makes new spaces beyond current constraints.

ii. Theory *x*: *All the beautiful pages* written on the human bodies of Dionne Brand's novel *Theory*

how held/withheld genre categories and beauty/intellect binaries are reassigned onto new mind/body politics of the aesthetics/ethics of the female form and formulations

PURE REASON would be the source of Intelligibility, and Cause too. It must have to do with love, and beauty at its root. No matter how it is obliterated after that.

– Erin Moure

The best poets demand something of their readers. The language of poetry is both a call to thought and an ethical command to humanness. And thus, perhaps, the best theorists must be the best poets. Across a range of genres, the one constant in Brand's work is what we might call the poetic-ethical dimensions of humanness. It could be suggested that in her earlier works—for example *Sans Souci* (1988), *No Language is Neutral* (1990) or *Bread Out of Stone* (1994)—Brand's political commitments to her representation of the black female body are more evidently clear than in this newest philosophical novel, *Theory*, but such a claim does not mean that Brand has recoiled from the political here; rather that she asks her audience to work through her narrative demands more perceptively, to see anew her formal representations of aesthetics and the value of such aesthetics. In this context, *Theory* is a metaphor for Brand's struggle with this position in Canada and her speaker/theorist's struggle with the vastness and variety of this country's politics and social ethics. It symbolizes her attempt to understand what she must do politically by living where she can neither have full participation in national citizenship nor revolution. It is not so much liberation politics dogma as it is the strategy of a writer trying to negotiate her in-between and paradoxical positions, as defined by Rinaldo Walcott as "the simultaneity of being here and not being here" due to the "impossibility of imagining blackness as Canadian" (43).

The aesthetic, as the moment of letting the world go and clinging instead to the formal act of knowing it, is given a reunion with the meritorious in *Theory*. Brand tempers essentializing effects by admissions and counter-admissions. She brings together the poles of subject and object, value and fact, nature and reason, beauty and intellect, body and mind, which are often riven apart by social trends and politics or delineated by strict poetic or literary generic conventions or limited-perspective narration or adherence to fixed theorizations, even. She lets it all go and clings to it all, at the same time. Simultaneous with an apparent objectification of female beauty in relation to the narrator's first accounted lover, Selah, as "carnal object" experienced "at the level of skin," for example, she explains a very opposing position (Brand *Theory* 19-20, 84). The objectification is qualified not only as an aspect of the woman's personhood but as an elemental human truth: she explains, for example, "I don't mean to dissociate Selah, the body, from Selah, the intelligence, in the way that most people do. We are mainly body after all, and the body is intelligence" (7-8). This is part of what makes Brand's *Theory* a "difficult pleasure" to read (qtd. in McKittrick): the insistence on maintaining the cohesion between body and intelligence, the exhibition of a self-awareness that sometimes prevents our first impressions from doing so, and the self-directed necessity to analyze the female form from being passively objectified to embodying more dynamic humanness itself. Brand and her narrator know the inherent difficulty of her projects—and yet we *are* allowed access. Not accessibility, but access to this difficulty. Her always co-mingling aesthetic choices and ethical deliberations suggest that Brand is grappling with all these constitutive aspects of being a wholly conscious writer (theorist, in this case) with the elements of being a wholly embodied human (lover, in this case). In other words, Brand's moral and aesthetic and body conscience seem inextricably linked and it would be unethical not to represent her narrators and their lovers to the fullest forms of their beings (being her being).

The only way Brand (et al in *Theory*) has been able to work through the incompatibilities of scripting life as she knows it and life as she might desire it to be revolutionized is through a mortal *and* spiritual perspective to embody all these inconsistencies within her character/speakers. There's one of these mortally/transcendent moments in the novel's section recounting her love affair with Odalys:

> I loved Odalys because she reminded me of a certain affect I experience at certain times or, shall I say, over the time of my life. […] You are born into time and place, more place than time, and the sounds, the colours, the gestures and movements of people around you come to form your aesthetic. I was in thrall to this aesthetic before I came to know Odalys. And so Odalys walked into my

> aesthetic practices. When I say practices, I mean the way I see, the way I apprehend pleasure, the sounds that are most pleasing to me, et cetera. […] I loved Odalys' skin, pure and simple. […] Let me say from the outset I loved Odalys' body the way one loves a theory. Not, say, the theory of relativity—that would be too simple and unitary, I suggest. […] A theory such as the theory of language is more the theory that comes to mind. How it is acquired and why certain sounds occur in certain regions; the uses of the tongue, et cetera. […] To be more precise, it wasn't Odalys' body but the *sense* of Odalys' body, like a universal weight in the world. […] Sometimes I think I created Odalys out of what I needed, and what I needed was a balancing weight to my theories—some presence that would deny or counter those theories through embodiment. (Brand 138)

It's enough to make you sigh aloud. *Like a universal weight in the world. A presence that would deny or counter those theories through embodiment.* It is a sort of mercy that writers must possess to exert, again and again, their ambition in lieu of their own best interests. She knows she fails; she continues. It is as always: duty and inclination, and a trying to harmonize with its aesthetic advances that Brand undertakes in her projects, or Brand's narrators undertake in their projects of work and/or love.

Brand has, of course, become aware of her reader—aware that her work will be widely read—thus she has this sort of social responsibility to us. Aesthetic sensibility is socially necessary: it is this struggle and tension that develops a conscience in general—if you are aware of your observable behaviour, you can be aware of the repercussions of who you are. That said, there is very little that is solely self-indulgent here, even when it portends to be. When the narrator stands at the bus stop across from Odalys' place, recalling "Adorno's statement, 'There is no aesthetic refraction without something being refracted, no imagination without something being imagined,'" it does not feel navel-gazing, but the opposite (133). It harrows when she follows this perception with the acknowledgement that "[she] lacked the 'imagined' that would imagine what Odalys imagined in that derelict place. And in [her] dissertation [she] was investigating that very imagination, the ability to see beyond the flatness of the existence that [she] attend[s] to—[her] own" (133).

Rather than ever limiting the prospect of herself as main speaker, it is this sort of flexibility and mutability of consciences within the single mind that is evidenced in this working conscience as it is made up utterly of dynamic components when exposed to the different conditions of different characters and loving them differently. Brand is at once telling the story and its anti-story of each representation of beauty, its deconstruction and construction—linking together these co-existing playing fields in—and throughout—the body (and mind) of her poetic (and theoretical) life thus far.

Bakhtin articulates how unavoidable the strictures of each particular poetic and literary genre make themselves manifest on the ethical choices of the writer in these lines: "Each genre is only able to control certain definite aspects of reality. Each genre possesses definite principles of selection, definite forms for seeing and conceptualizing reality, and a definite scope and depth of penetration" (131). Brand does away with that and transgresses all the borders of all the conventions here. Driven by the imperative of making good judgments, complexity is often obscured, or redacted or made into theorem or manifesto in the fulfillment of linking justness to the artistic aims of lesser writers. In other words, genre is sometimes affixed to connect to larger thematic concerns addressed by the discipline itself but, conversely, it is these very estimable concerns that create limitations. Brand, instead, uses no limits. What can it mean to volley one's entire poetics against potentialities of love? Brand doesn't volley her poetics against these possibilities—she lets them volley against her work (her theorizations) to illustrate this aesthetic predicament. Reading *Theory* made firm my imperative that Brand has made seeable, throughout the dissertation's oeuvre, her most moral character (no matter how ambiguous or ambivalent or enigmatic) by keeping it in check with her own ever-shifting poetic discourse. It is part of Brand's strategy to foster and exploit perception—past its limits.

Readers can see Brand's labouring, and labouring still—unfinished as the thesis remains in the final pages of the book after all. And we, as readers, must labour to see the whole, and the more we scrutinize, the more we see. The poetry of *Theory* requires a telling that is at once personal deliberation and public discourse, that involves in it a challenging history, a conflicted present and demanding future and that features an aesthetic voice that can transcend the borders of any known limitation—linguistic, material, philosophic etc. One that can witness humanity, as much as being equally a part of it, and one that somehow (how?) has access to greater knowledge beyond our human existence than we ourselves can.

In this way, *Theory* explores her imperatives for accounting for the world we presently occupy, how we might have arrived in our present global position in the first instance, and how we might imagine ourselves beyond its present confines without giving up the difficult beauty and "beautiful pages" of poetry and the poetic in theoretical process (Brand 137). Here we see how her writings foster conversations that transgress disciplines and political perspectives, in local and diasporic contexts—at home and abroad—while also holding steady an artistic imaginary and political reality that challenges readers to live with the difficult mis/representations of the beauty of love and the love of beauty. On the bodies/minds of her lovers, the narrator inscribes various intellectual and geographic terrains, thus highlighting the ways which her writings contend with and trouble nation-based and discipline-based affiliations. Underlining

her love of her lovers is also always her acknowledgement of her unknowing of them—often unclear of their origins, backstories and family histories as the narrator is.

Theory might be read as informed by an interdisciplinary framework, an analytic scaffolding that allows us to notice the uneasy, migratory, creative and intellectual spaces that Brand herself inhabits and produces when creating and imagining the world, and the collaborative form of knowledge making that arises from such histories, events, conversations, debates, and love affairs. In *Theory* the work of the artist is the template, the palette, and the insistent reminder that all is not right in our world—but it is beautiful nonetheless. By recognizing and "feeling" along with the poet/artist/theorist Brand, the conditions of the present human existence—as a sometimes disembodied black female person (as figured by Odalys in the Teoria section where the narrator recounts "I had no body, [Odalys] said that I walked around her place like a floating head")—we take up her challenge to cast our own thinking beyond the confines of textuality, to account for real encounters with the material and actual political work of living a life in our human bodies (218). Brand, as Leslie Sanders writes, asks that we "take witness beyond itself," and thus think our world through a register that refuses to simply watch and survey our unbearable world in familiar ways (Sanders 16). In the final section of the novel, we see Teoria's mortality being measured by her capacity for her theoretical output in a way similar to Teoria's initial objectification of her lovers' bodies and beauty: her body as theory is now laid bare and exposed to the reading eye (Brand 157). We must, indeed, *take witness beyond itself* here and see, finally, that the initial hypotheses of Teoria's theories as body and bodily representation are actually manifested rather as theory as *beauty* and this is finally encapsulated in the aesthetic dimension of "all the beautiful pages" (157) of her work and being.

In her creative imagination and the difficult stakes and mistakes that she considers in *Theory*, Brand's narrator then provides a pathway, many strategies, through which we cannot easily reproduce the world that we live, witness and survey. She suggests we must physically manipulate our being in it as well. Brand's writing, and the reading-work of her writing, invokes us to both see the world for what it is, and through this witnessing, ask how we might collectively desire, live and physically inhabit the planet, and our local worlds, and our given bodies, differently. It is a criticism that imagines, calls for and desires ethical responses to reading, living and writing the world; and it is a criticism that as read from its "beautiful pages" identifies the ethical imperatives to which we account for our intimate and troubled relationships with each other and with our differential planetary lives (157). Brand lays bare the body of her work and its inherent difficulty to embody. But this work also points to the beautiful theorems of her critical and creative challenges of being human.

Concluding remarks

> if i know anything, it is that "here" is a trick of the light, that it is a way of schematizing time and space that is not the only one available to some of us. maybe i am not here in the objectivist sense. maybe i am here in the way that a memory is here. now, ain't that fucking sad and beautiful?
>
> — Billy Ray Belcourt

Lubrin's poetry is at least partly about an insistence on questioning, hypothesizing the negotiation of the private, interior imagery and mythology of ourselves in this "complicated relationship with a vast, public, political, realm we can't ever wholly grasp. A realm in geologic and genealogic time" (Lubrin "OB&T" 3). She knows she is complicit, trying to allow "the world in its immensity to pierce you through the poem" (3). As for beauty, she suggests "it's easier to see what beauty is if you consider that we disregard what we believe is ugly. We regard what is beautiful" after all (6). But Lubrin's work changes that: she asks us to regard, "to teach ourselves to regard, to practice the look long—that isn't safe and of itself," and to find the "willingness to risk safety, and at the same time to create conditions of safety, for the one who is seen, and for the others who want to see with you"—that sounds like the most beautiful project possible (6). And Brand's novel is at least partly to explain the theory that to *feel* is to make of understanding an embodied experience: when you have a feel for something, you actually "get it." By undoing the objectification of desired subjects, she frees up the agencies that have imprisoned and policed bodies to revolutionize a body of work that agitates aesthetics and ethics beyond their delimitations, to create new resistances of being solely gazed upon even when being gazed upon. You "hold with when you with hold" and this is beholden in this notion's transmutation of beauty (qtd in Barrett). As Moten says:

> The black aesthetic turns on a dialectic of luxuriant withholding—abundance and lack push technique over the edge of refusal so that the trouble with beauty, which is the very emanation of art, is always and everywhere troubled again and again. New technique, new beauty. (Moten *Undercommons* 55)

Forging a beautiful existence, without the separability imposed by the categories of an *earthly beauty without ugliness* or a *humanly beauty without intellect*, yields the possible inhabiting of a black female political environment that sustains life rather than absolves responsibility. These writers chart the difficult paths. Here, in *Voodoo Hypothesis* and *Theory*, is language that honours the ethical impossibility of achieving a single position, and the necessarily vulnerable climate of that impossibility. In the face of irreparable injustice and the

fragility of the continuously devastated present, these works call on the dignity of the skin and the body. In such a world, it's this sort of spiritual stubbornness in both writers that I find most blessed as a reader. Against the reductive and decisive expletives of mass-media language and against the often universalizing poetics of much poetry and much theoretical discourse that abandons feelings from its rhetoric, their lines are thick, layered, black and multivocal. They act out the self-interrogating dialectic rather than provide symbolic clarity of the visual images (world and body) of their subjects. There is no aesthetic consolation. Their works ask us to enter into irreducible complexity as form of attention. Formally, the complexity (as suggested by the very titles of these books) expresses itself by pushing beyond simple closure. From the fundamentally unstable ground between beauty and nowhere, acts of both negation and embodiment forge the will to continue. But for both Brand and Lubrin the will is not an accretion of power focused and exercised upon an other; rather it quickens the register and resolve of perception as a meditative engagement with the world. And it gives the world its serious gorgeousness.

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It's All About the Body: Zombification and the Male Gaze in *Oryx and Crake* and *Brown Girl in the Ring*

José V. Alegría-Hernández

ORCID: 0000-0003-2952-3262

University of La Laguna, Spain

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ABSTRACT
This article seeks to analyse the commodification of women of colour in two dystopian Canadian novels: *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998), by Nalo Hopkinson, and *Oryx and Crake* (2003), by Margaret Atwood. I argue that the women in these stories are subjected to similar patriarchal strategies of control. Namely, I suggest they are zombified through the male gaze, or in other words, they are regarded as ambulatory bodies by their societies. This draws attention to the Canadian government's neoliberal policies that often belie neocolonial undertones in their usage of the bodies of women of colour. In addition to this, I will focus on the characters' ability to resist this totalising and zombifying gaze through different means. Here I posit that Hopkinson presents a world that emphasises commonality among women and, therefore, her characters are more successful in dismantling patriarchal structures. In opposition to this, I argue that Atwood's novel isolates Oryx which makes her unable to achieve structural change, and therefore she chooses to become an elusive figure as a form of protest.

Keywords
Commodification; Exoticisation; Male gaze; Neocolonialism; Race, Zombification.

Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* both deal with a post-apocalyptic future caused by human interference with the natural world, and scientific and technological advancements. However, these novels are quite distinct in the ways in which they address their subject matters. For instance, the world of *Oryx and Crake* presents us with a posthuman and postfeminist dystopia characterised by lack of female agency (Tolan 282). In addition to this definition, I propose that it is also post-racial, presenting the reader with a seemingly colour-blind society that obscures discourse around race, but where racial prejudice, at least in the form of exoticisation, is still prevalent. Conversely, *Brown Girl* highlights racial differences by focussing on the struggles of a Black, migrant family living in a desolate Toronto, centring the action around "the battle between a mythical and mystical Caribbean culture and the demands of a postindustrial, postcolonial, and here posturban society" (Wood 317).

Both authors openly discuss, and critique matters of sexism and gender in their writing, which clearly impacts their respective narratives and how these frame womanhood. In fact, both texts are concerned with the commodification of women and their bodies. Moreover, there is a further similarity in that the main commodified women in these stories are non-white. In Atwood's novel this woman is Oryx, who hails from an unidentified East Asian country. Hopkinson, on her part, deals with a family of Caribbean-Canadian women, Ti-Jeanne, Mi-Jeanne and Mami Gros-Jeanne. These women are all characterised by the way in which they are turned into commodities in the text, but more importantly, by the ways in which they rebel against sexist and colonial systems of oppression, which take the form of the male gaze and zombification. In this paper I will analyse the commodification they are subjected to, as well as their efforts to liberate themselves from racial and patriarchal shackles. I will argue that Oryx's rebellion is ultimately unsuccessful because she is forced to work individually, and within the norms of an already established, highly oppressive, system. On the other hand, this essay will demonstrate that Hopkinson's characters are far more effective, since they work to dismantle said system through a collective effort.

The commodification that these women are subjected to comes from the zombifying effect of the gaze as a sexist strategy of control. The (male) gaze can be defined as "a phallocentric apparatus that frames and perceives the image of *woman*" (May-Ron 261, emphasis in original). In this regard, it deals with the textual representation of women and their bodies. My contention is that the male gaze 'zombifies' women by reducing them to ambulatory bodies, and in so doing constructs them as subjects without agency to perpetuate the idea of the subservience of women of colour: "to be a body without a mind is to be subhuman, animal; to be a human without agency is to be a prisoner, a slave"

(Lauro and Embry 90). This is not to say, however, that to be zombified through the gaze inherently erases women's agency. As previously stated, the mechanisms of the gaze function within the realm of textual representation. In this case, the subject remains capable of exerting their agency, but critically, she is seen as zombie by the patriarchal system.

This conflict between agency and lack thereof is instrumental to understanding the duality of the figure of the zombie, as Lauro and Embry have put it:

> There is the Haitian *zombi,* a body raised from the dead to labor in the fields, but with deep associations of having played a role in the Haitian Revolution (thus, simultaneously resonant with the categories of slave and slave rebellion); and there is also the *zombie*, the American importation of the monster, which in cinematic incarnation has morphed into a convenient boogeyman representing various social concerns. The *zombie* can also be a metaphoric state claimed for oneself or imposed on someone else. (87)

Both stories engage in this duplexity, particularly as it pertains to the zombie as an enslaved person or a rebel. I am also concerned with this idea of the zombie as a state that can be claimed or imposed. Throughout *Oryx and Crake* and *Brown Girl* the zombie is a state that is being forced upon women through the gaze. Paradoxically, however, in so doing the oppressors often end up becoming the zombies themselves in certain ways. After all, the zombie is often associated with "powerlessness – be it in the powerlessness of the oppressed or the mindlessness of the privileged" (Romdhani 77). Or, in other words, the zombie can represent an oppressed group or, in its ingestion of meat, become a metaphor for how the privileged consume wealth.

The utilisation of the figure of the zombie in this analysis comes from its intrinsic connection with the history of colonisation and slavery, as McAlister argues:

> The zombie came to being (as it were) in the plantation society of colonial Saint-Domingue … its figure, its story, its mythology, are at once part of the mystical arts that have developed since that time *and* compose a form of mythmaking that effects the mystification of slavery and ongoing political repression. That is, the zombie represents, responds to, and mystifies fear of slavery, collusion with it, and rebellion against it. (65, emphasis in original)

While I do not wish to divorce the figure of the zombie from the cultural context in which it emerged, namely as an Afro Caribbean response to slavery, I believe that it can prove useful in understanding the forms of oppression that other non-white women are subjected to, especially in regard to Asian women and in

the context of sexual exploitation. In other words, the notion of the zombie can also be applied to Oryx, who throughout the story is often highly exoticised in sexual terms and who is forced to become a sex worker from a young age.

As previously mentioned, the zombie is particularly connected to the history of colonisation and slavery suffered by Black people across the Americas and Africa. Thus, its usage in *Brown Girl in the Ring* is pivotal to Hopkinson's denunciation of the asymmetry of the mosaic of cultures (Reid). In the world of *Brown Girl,* disputes within the Canadian government lead to the submersion of the economy in downtown Toronto, known as the 'Burn,' which prompts an exodus of the upper classes, industries and police forces to the outskirts of the city, known as the suburbs or 'Burbs': "those who stayed were the ones who couldn't or wouldn't leave. The street people. The poor people. The ones who couldn't see the writing on the wall, or who were too stubborn to give up their homes" (Hopkinson "Prologue"). As a result, the citizens of the Burn are left to fend for themselves in a power vacuum, prompting the rise of mafias, the most powerful of which is led by Rudy, a kingpin who uses vodou to exert control over the people of the Burn and who turns out to be Ti-Jeanne's biological grandfather. Given the clear class differences between the Burbs and the Burn, downtown Toronto in this story can be equated with the pleeblands of *Oryx and Crake*. However, while in the latter story there is no mention of the racial demographics of the pleeblands, in the former it is made patently clear that Burn citizens are predominantly from immigrant and non-white backgrounds.

This adds a racial level to the exploitation of Toronto in the story, as it highlights the utilisation of people of colour by the upper classes in the pursuit of political gain. McCormack argues that: "Those living in the downtown area are reduced to bodies; the population is a wealth of biological resources for the extension of other lives" (255). This is exemplified in premier Uttley's decision to receive a heart transplant from a human 'donor' rather than a pig, as is usually the case in this world: "human organ transplant should be about people helping people, not about preying on helpless creatures" (Hopkinson "Prologue"). The irony here lies in the fact that they enlist the help of Rudy to obtain this heart, which clearly shows that they do not care if the person it belongs to donates it willingly. Not only that, but they are essentially making the rights of people of colour secondary to those of animals. Thus, they belie their view of the citizens of the Burn as zombies, reducing them to nothing more than body parts to be utilised, lending truth to McCormack's assertion "That these people are less than human, outside the laws that protect the whiter, richer humans in the suburbs, links the narration of this Caribbean family's life in Canada to the history of racialised segregation based on a system of enforced slave labour" (254). The dehumanisation of the people of the Burn in the eyes of the upper classes serves to highlight how Uttley, and by extension the

Canadian government, enforces Thanatopolitical control over people of colour in order to revamp the state (Turner 241), which hearkens back to the idea of the zombie as a slave.

Interestingly enough, this leads us back to the aforementioned notion that in the Anglo American/Canadian context the zombie can be used as a metaphor for consumption; under this light, taking away parts of the body can be analogous to resource extraction of the land (given that these are the only true resources left in the Burn), which clearly highlights the history of Western colonisation in the Caribbean. Moreover, it draws attention to Canadian neocolonial practices through its immigration system which 'consumes' the skilled work forces of developing nations in order to revert its dwindling fertility rates and maintain its exponential economic growth: "In this way, the countries with the fewest specialised professionals and workers in the world finance from their meagre local resources their best human elements, for the benefit of countries, which are already developed" (Bourdreau 6). Thus, the Canadian government engages in the consumption of non-white immigrant bodies to sustain itself through the creation of migratory pathways based on the fields within which they have a deficit of professionals. However, as happens in the Burn, these people are commodified and promptly forgotten once the government has made use of them, as is evidenced in the historical erasure of women of colour "whose bodies are racialized as non-White and who are thus outside the narrative of desirable Canadian citizen" (Kelly and Wossen-Taffesse 169). As such, Uttley, the other politicians of the Burbs and Rudy are the true zombies in the story as they long to consume (absorb) human flesh in order to survive and/or maintain their political power.

Of Rudy's involvement Romdhani argues that it "draw[s] attention to the role that some black people themselves have played and continue to play in black oppression" (81). Although this is certainly an element worth bearing in mind, my reading departs from it. I argue that the fact that the person whose heart is taken is a woman, Mami Gros-Jeanne specifically, confers a much deeper, intersectional layer to this issue. As Jackson argues: "Blackness is not imperviousness to a politics of sex-gender but a site of its profound intensification" (85). Thus, it becomes not only racial objectification, but gender-based objectification as well, after all "In *Brown Girl* zombification of both the living and the dead is only ever performed on women" (Wood 323). In fact, given that Mami Gros-Jeanne was originally married to Rudy, who was physically abusive towards her, her death can be seen as Rudy's ultimate assertion of patriarchal control over her. Thus, he proves his 'power' over her by deciding on the conditions and time of her very death. This also ultimately applies to Oryx's predicament in *Oryx and Crake* as she is eventually murdered by Crake in order to further the development of his plans. As such, both stories clearly take on elements

of patriarchal violence wherein men exert ultimate power over the lives, and therefore deaths, of women who are seen as mere tools in their own struggles for authority.

Although the circumstances around it are completely different, Oryx shares with Mami Gros-Jeanne the fact that she is seen as a zombie, an ambulatory body that can be used by the upper classes. The main difference here being that Oryx's body is seen as a wholesale resource, rather than divided into body parts. As such, she is sold as a commodity to an older man who utilises her, alongside other children, as beggars, essentially turning them into a cheap labour force, which clearly draws on the imagery of the zombie as slave labour. After that, she is made to offer her sexual services to tourists only to later extort them and, eventually, she is passed from hand to hand as a sex worker. Thus, in the eyes of these men she is transformed into an instrument for their sexual pleasure, nothing more than a commodity. Similarly, when Jimmy references this time in her life, he constructs her as a defenceless individual on account of her being a child, and becomes outraged at her village's custom of selling children for subsistence which he labels "an asshole custom" (Atwood "Oryx"), in spite of Oryx's understanding that it was a custom that emerged from necessity "Oh Jimmy, you would like it better maybe if we all starved to death?" (Atwood "Oryx").

Oryx's objectification is trifold, as a child, as a woman, and as an Asian person. This is particularly prominent in the fact that the men she is made to offer her services to are, overwhelmingly, sex tourists who exoticise her: "it [the website] claimed to show real sex tourists, filmed while doing things they'd be put in jail for back in their home countries" (Atwood "HottTotts"). The connection here between the exploitation of women of colour and tourism highlights how the orientalist gaze echoes many characteristics of the male gaze (Drichel 27). This sort of tourism is also relevant to *Brown Girl,* where it is mentioned that the Strip, a neighbourhood that is characterised by its night life, was "fuelled by outcity money. It was where people from the 'burbs came to feel decadent" (Hopkinson ch. 9). Through Ti-Jeanne's description of the Strip, it is clear to the reader that it shares many similarities with exoticised views of foreign countries, particularly in the East, as evidenced by the mention of the mythical city of Shangri-la: "If you believed them, Shangri-la lay beyond each door, in the form of fragrant, compliant women and men, drinks that shamed the nectar of the gods, and music that would transport you to ecstasy" (Hopkinson ch. 9). This creates a very clear correlation to the exoticisation that Oryx is subjected to by Jimmy who "fetishises Oryx, both for her beauty, and for her alien otherness" (Tolan 289), as seen by his description of her: "Oryx was so delicate. Filigree he would think, picturing her bones inside her small body. She had a triangular face… skin of the palest yellow, smooth and translucent, like old, expensive

porcelain" (Atwood "Oryx"). In both cases the mentions of 'passiveness' or compliancy further create the narrative that these women are objects for men to control, as evidenced in Jimmy's desire to own Oryx: "he wanted to touch Oryx, worship her, open her up like a beautifully wrapped package" (Atwood "Crake in Love"). The mention of her as a gift that needs to be unwrapped highlights her status in his mind as a mere object of desire, wherein unwrapping signifies owning her sexually but more incisively uncovering her life story "he'd tortured himself with painful knowledge: every white-hot factoid he could collect he'd shove up under his fingernails. The more it hurt, the more—he was convinced—he loved her" (Atwood "Pixieland Jazz"). Thus, he attempts to transgress the boundaries of the skin and own her psyche by fusing the real Oryx with the zombified, powerless idea of her he has constructed.

Critically, Jimmy puts Oryx into a Cinderella-like position of total submission to the men who abused her in order to satisfy his own fantasy of rescuing her, while ignoring the ways in which she has managed to obtain power on her own terms (May-Ron 264). This obsession with rewriting Oryx's life in a pursuit to 'rescue' her stems from Jimmy's white saviour complex; Yu holds that the objects of the complex, the 'rescuees' are generally "nonwhite people from developing nations and people of color in developed nations who are characterized by negative stereotypes—including their inability to self-help" (2). Therefore, Jimmy's interest in pushing Oryx into a defenceless position comes from the fact that, were he to acknowledge her agency and resilience, he would not be able to satisfy his own fantasy.

This need to 'save' Oryx stems from her personality putting Jimmy's world view into question, as he is unable to comprehend Oryx's lack of self-pity at her own situation. This is in stark contrast to Jimmy's utilisation of his own childhood trauma, on account of his absentee mother, to victimise himself and manipulate other women: "They knew about his scandalous mother, of course, these women. Ill winds blow far and find a ready welcome … Soon the women would be consoling him, and he'd roll around in their sympathy, soak in it, massage himself with it" (Atwood "Applied Rhetoric"). In other words, he weaponizes his familial tragedy to zombify women, since he reduces them to bodies from which he can derive a form of emotional or sexual labour. While the end goals are different, this is remarkably similar to how Uttley sees the citizens of the Burn, not as actual human beings, but rather bodies whose usefulness lies only in whatever resources they may hold for the upper classes. This strategy of control, however, is unsuccessful on Oryx: "Only Oryx had not been impressed by this dire, feathered mother of his … She was not unfeeling: on the contrary. But she refused to feel what he wanted her to feel. Was that the hook—that he could never get from her what the others had given him so freely? Was that her secret?" ("Applied Rhetoric"). This puts his obsession with Oryx under a new

light, as it evidences that what he attempts to do, under the guise of 'saving her' is to zombify her, making her act in the ways he sees fit, and it is her refusal to reduce herself to only a body that he can utilise that further makes him want to dominate her.

This attempt at submitting Oryx takes on the form of his manipulating her feelings, as seen in the fact that he harasses her about her past in order to elicit a reaction from her due to his refusal to believe that she was never angry at her situation: "He couldn't leave her alone about her earlier life … Perhaps he was digging for her anger, but he never found it. Either it was buried too deeply, or it wasn't there at all. But he couldn't believe that. She wasn't a masochist, she was no saint" (Atwood "Crake in Love"). Once again Jimmy is creating his own Oryx by rejecting the information given to him by the true one. Thus, he prioritises his own subjectivity and is so doing truncates his desire of ownership over her, as the version of Oryx he forms in his mind does not correspond with the real one.

Atwood makes the reader aware that, similarly to Jimmy, we are only capable of collecting slivers of information about Oryx. Additionally, given Jimmy's unreliable narration, much of what we have access to might be fabricated or skewed by his subjectivity, he reflects on this himself when he says: "There was Crake's story about her, and Jimmy's story about her as well, a more romantic version; and then there was her own story about herself, which was different from both, and not very romantic at all" (Atwood "Oryx"), to this we could also add the barrage of interpretations of Oryx that come from the readers as well, making her an even more elusive figure to the point of almost becoming inexistent, given how diluted her true personality might be. This seems to reflect Spivak's assertion that "Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernization" (Spivak 61).

Oryx's diluted personality may be seen as akin to her being silenced, which would also reflect Spivak's view that "there is no space from which the sexed subaltern subject can speak" (281). However, while she may not have a 'voice' as such, the text seems to highlight Oryx's personality in her ability to enthral Jimmy with her storytelling, which, in the way it seems to draw on from evening to evening, as "Oryx continued, later that night, or some other night" (Atwood "Birdcall"), references Scheherazade's role in the *Arabian Nights*. In this way, Atwood emphasises Oryx's intelligence while simultaneously infantilising Jimmy, whose outrage at her stories heavily resembles temper tantrums: "he'd marched his outrage off to Crake. He'd whammed the furniture: those were his furniture-whamming days" (Atwood "Oryx"). This is heavily juxtaposed with

Oryx's poise when telling these stories while doing mundane things like doing her nails: "she was painting her nails now … peach-coloured, to match the flowered wrapper she was wearing … Later on she would do her toes" (Atwood "Pixieland Jazz").

Oryx's link to Scheherazade also lies in the fact that her stories might also be fictional: "Sometimes he suspected her of improvising, just to humour him; sometimes he felt that her entire past—everything she'd told him—was his own invention" (Atwood "Crake in Love"). I would thus argue that Jimmy's recreation of her story is analogous to translation, which, as has been pointed out by Behnam et al, recreates Hegel's master-slave dialectic:

> Using literature and translation of the literary works of the east, the westerners have tried to gain dominance over the minds of the Easterners, thus keeping the more dangerous form of the master-slave relationship going … Moreover, throughout the history, translation has been employed as a mighty tool for colonization and depriving the colonized from having a voice of their own. (566)

In other words, Jimmy's inability to control Oryx, to zombify her as he has done to other women in the past, is what further attracts him to her specifically. However, since he cannot bear not to control her, he 'recreates' her through his own subjectivity, his gaze. Although paradoxically, this idealised Oryx of his cannot exist without an actual recognition of the true Oryx, which is the reason why these glimpses of her true self escape through interstices of his narration.

Rudy similarly recreates and imposes his own narrative onto the women in the story, thus attempting to turn his gaze into a reality. This can be seen when he drugs Ti-Jeanne and attempts to turn her into a duppy, a malevolent spirit that he creates by separating the soul of his victims from their bodies. The ritual for making a duppy necessitates that the soul of the victim be given willingly, for which he finds a work around by drugging them to make them more susceptible to manipulation. In the case of Ti-Jeanne specifically, he entices her with the idea of the freedom she has longed for throughout the story. In order for this to work, he fabricates a story about both her mother and grandmother: "'I go tell you a little something, Ti-Jeanne.'… 'Is your mother sheself ask me to put she duppy in the bowl.' … 'Your grandmother did putting visions in she head, trying to control she. Trying to make Mi-Jeanne stay with she'" (Hopkinson ch. 12). The fact that he invokes the figures of these dead women, who cannot give their own account, in order to manipulate Ti-Jeanne speaks to how, for him, they are but commodities in his quest for power and their stories are liable to being rewritten. Furthermore, not only are they commodities but, once again, when faced with the impossibility of controlling their bodies he resorts to making up his own version of their stories, like Jimmy does.

As previously mentioned, the strategy that Oryx utilises to escape the gaze is, predominantly, to thwart it by becoming an elusive figure, as May-Ron postulates: "Atwood paradoxically constructs Oryx as an exceedingly exploited, defenseless individual and, at the same time, as an ultraclever heroine whose ingenuity draws on the very conditions of her subjugation" (265). Indeed, despite living under a racist and patriarchal system that commodifies her body, Oryx draws a certain degree of pleasure from reappropriating it as an object and using it to either obtain better conditions for herself, such as being taught English, or to inflict damage on her oppressors. This is seen in the epiphany she has as a child: "it made her feel strong to know that the men thought she was helpless but she was not. It was they who were helpless, they who would soon have to stammer apologies in their silly accents and hop around on one foot in their luxurious hotel rooms, trapped in their own pant legs" (Atwood "Roses"). The mention of their "silly accents" further highlights the foreignness, and subsequently, the racial difference between herself and these men. Although in this case, she completely subverts the hierarchical structure that has historically positioned white men as all-powerful and Asian women as helpless and subservient. In so doing, she is dismantling the male gaze that reduces her to an object by controlling the narrative around these men and, therefore, making her subjectivity the prevalent one in these interactions.

This form of subversion within the repressive constraints of a patriarchal system is also explored by Hopkinson, in this case in the form of the duppy Rudy creates out of Ti-Jeanne's mom, Mi-Jeanne. For Mi-Jeanne her subjugation seems near total, as Rudy can order her to do his bidding through vodou, and thus, uses her as a weapon against his enemies and as a channel through which to obtain eternal youth. However, thanks to Ti-Jeanne's ingenuity, the duppy learns to stall for time: "instead of pouncing on her, it lowered itself to the ground and licked up the drops of blood, one by one. Rudy loudly ordered it to finish the job, but it kept licking, one drop at a time. It was obeying him, but at its own speed. Ti-Jeanne had shown it that trick" (Hopkinson ch. 10). This form of disobedience keeps Mi-Jeanne from total zombification, or in other words, from being totally powerless before the patriarchal control of Rudy's vodou.

Nonetheless, the difference between these heroines lies in that Mi-Jeanne's stalling for time is a temporary strategy, and she is later liberated by her daughter, whereas in the case of Oryx it is the only tool at her disposal, since the story does not allow her to find a sense of 'sisterhood' in the way that the characters in *Brown Girl* develop. Most probably this stems from the class (and very likely racial) differences between her and the rest of Crake's Maddaddam workers who come from similarly wealthy backgrounds, having grown up in the compounds. As such, Oryx is left in a position where she can only work to ensure

her own survival and that of the Crakers, a new species of bioengineered humans that Crake, Jimmy's childhood friend, has created to survive the coming apocalypse. There is a level of connection between Oryx as their 'teacher' and the Crakers, and in fact, they present an opportunity for her to rebel against Crake's desires by surreptitiously planting the seeds of what would later germinate into the Crakers' religion: "'today they asked who made them' … 'and I told them the truth. I said it was Crake … I told them he was very clever and good'" (Atwood "Crake in Love"). However, despite this connection they develop, the differences between the two species and the fact that the Crakers are still learning about the world at large means that they are not at an equal level and Oryx cannot truly find companionship with them. Conversely, in the case of Hopkinson's characters, they can work together to oppose Rudy and are more concerned with the well-being of the other women in the story, especially since they share familial connections. As Reid points out: "centralisation and unity is highlighted in Hopkinson's novel. The novel's title evokes the many ideas of inclusion and exclusion associated with being 'in the ring.'" (Reid).

Hence, I would assert that through commonality the women in *Brown Girl in the Ring* can obtain wholesale liberation and structural change, which in a way serves as a reappropriation of the zombie as slave rebellion (in this case rebelling against the very condition of 'zombie' that men and the government have imposed on them). This is evidenced in the fact that it is only thanks to Ti-Jeanne's experience of the suffering that Rudy caused her grandmother and mother that she manages to rebel against his ritual magic. She realises that his promise of freedom is only a façade and that, ultimately, would bind her to the wishes of a man, as she says to the Jab-Jab: "I can't keep giving my will into other people hands no more, ain't? I have to decide what I want to do for myself" (Hopkinson ch. 12). This realisation for herself is coupled with a stronger sense of connection with her grandmother, as it is only through her teachings that she can summon the spirits to the human world and oppose Rudy: "She remembered her grandmother's words: *The centre pole is the bridge between the worlds*… What were the names Mami had told her? 'Shango!' she called in her mind. 'Ogun! Osain!'" (Hopkinson ch. 12 emphasis in original). Her utilising the CN tower as a conduit to reach the world of the dead is also quite subversive in nature, as she is essentially weaponizing a symbol that, throughout the novel, has represented Rudy's oppression; an imposing and clearly phallic symbol that overlooks the Toronto skyline and that, in a demonstration of hubris, he has turned into his offices. Furthermore, the CN tower has another equally powerful meaning, as it also is a reminder of the part of Canada that has forsaken the residents of the Burn. Therefore, Ti-Jeanne being able to reappropriate it and connect it with her Caribbean roots serves to highlight her healing from the identity struggle that had previously led to her renouncing her

Caribbean heritage, thus showing her growth as a person as well as making her culture more conspicuous to the Canadian landscape, rather than a small fragment of a mosaic that is predominantly white.

In addition to this, as has been noted by Lauro and Embry, "the zombie metaphor also reveals to us our own enslavement to our finite and fragile bodies" (90). Therefore, Ti-Jeanne, in her connection to the spirit world, manages to further shed the body that others utilise to zombify her. This is in stark contrast to Rudy, whose constant consumption of human blood through the duppy only further links him to his body. As such, his quest for immortality is inherently flawed, as it always necessitates that he maintain himself through others' blood. Thus, while attempting to transform the women in the story into zombies, he ironically, becomes the zombie himself. This is further exemplified in the fact that his duppy-making technique subverts the usual view of the zombie: "[the zombie] only symbolically defies mortality, and woefully at that: even the zombie's survival of death is anticelebratory, for it remains trapped in a corpse body" (Lauro and Embry 97). However, the duppy is not trapped in its body, but rather pulled away from it, becoming an 'embodied soul.' By contrast, Rudy is the one who remains trapped in a body so aged that he essentially constitutes a walking corpse, try as he might to hide it through his magic.

In comparison to this, Oryx does not truly manage to break free from the gaze. A clear instance of this can be seen when Crake and Jimmy first find her as a child on a porn website, and she looks directly into the camera: "she looked over her shoulder and right into the eyes of the viewer–right into Jimmy's eyes, into the secret person inside him. *I see you*, that look said" (Atwood "HottTotts" emphasis in original). This scene symbolises a subversion of the male gaze, turning it towards Jimmy and making him feel vulnerable, or as May-Ron puts it: "such a scene changes Oryx's position within the power structure in which she participates; the gaze, she proves, can be a two-way street" (May-Ron 271). This analysis, however, overlooks the fact that immediately afterwards Crake screenshots and prints the image for him and Jimmy to keep. Therefore, even her subversive look is turned into an exotic commodity for two white men to draw pleasure from, devoid of its original, meaningful impact insofar as it is captured. This is seen in Jimmy's description of it as his property: "He still had that paper printout, folded up, hidden deep… His own private thing: his own guilt, his own shame, his own desire" (Atwood "Extinctathon"). In this way, the story grimly highlights how, in spite of her work to subvert the gaze, men will still reduce her to a simple body.

The commodification of her body exceeds this printout. In fact, Crake also utilises her as a super spreader of the virus he has concocted, as she realises later on: "it was in those pills I was giving away, the ones I was selling. It's all the same cities, I went there. Those pills were supposed to help people!" (Atwood

"Airlock"). Thus, her body is utilised, though in this case not in sexual terms, as a way for the men in the story to reach their goals. Ironically for this analysis, her becoming a super spreader of a highly infectious and deadly virus is quite in consonance with the representation of zombie outbreaks in most American pop culture examples, rather than the slave analogy of its Caribbean origins. This could be seen as a further example of the zombification of Oryx who becomes patient zero of the Anglo American/Canadian bastardised form of the zombie apocalypse. Furthermore, it also highlights how the bodies of women of colour have historically been seen as disposable by Western medicine which has led to many women being experimented on against their consent.

In summary, Oryx never manages to truly break free from patriarchal oppression, in spite of her conditions seeming better as Crake's worker. Or in the words of Tolan: "[Oryx's] multiplicity seemingly signals freedom, but cannot disguise the fact that each of Oryx's identities is defined and limited by capitalist power structures: either as a sex worker or as the employee of a multinational corporation" (290). In this regard, it can be said that the freedom she seems to possess while working under Crake is not that dissimilar to the idea of freedom Rudy offers to Ti-Jeanne. As we can see, this freedom-within-subjugation condition is ultimately a façade that only serves to further marginalise and utilise women of colour. This is something that Oryx, while not aware of the extent to which she is being utilised, seems to be cognizant of as can be seen in a conversation she has with Jimmy about their sexual encounters:

> "Why do you think he is bad?" said Oryx. "He never did anything with me that you don't do. Not nearly so many things!"
> "I don't do them against your will," said Jimmy. "Anyway you're grown up now."
> Oryx laughed. "What is my will?" she said. (Atwood "Pixieland Jazz")

Even the form of the narrative seems to highlight Oryx's ultimate powerlessness, after all, "Despite the centring of Oryx's history in the novel, the fact nevertheless remains that her voice is only heard via Jimmy's intermediary recollections" (Tolan 289). Moving further beyond this I would assert that, as said before in regard to Spivak's ideas, Oryx is completely left without voice, her narrative is so constructed, and she as an object so uninscribed with meaning, that she is left open for the reader to impose on her whichever role they decide. Additionally, the reader is also made complicit in her objectification, as May-Ron argues: "Oryx's look into the camera seems to be aware not only of Jimmy and Crake (and all other fictional viewers) but also of Atwood's readers. It implicates the readers in the same voyeurism of which Jimmy and Crake are guilty" (271). This could be argued to help the critically-minded reader to engage with their own objectifying gaze, however, it can also lead to a reification of the gaze the character is attempting to escape.

In contrast, in *Brown Girl in the Ring* the literary genre "frequently changes—from science fiction, to magical realism, to folktales" (Romdhani 72), thus truncating the reader's own gaze. Of Hopkinson's usage of fantasy and science fiction elements Sarah Wood claims: "her amalgamation of the Western space with a Caribbean imaginary disrupts the epistemological framework usually associated with this rigid generic definition of science fiction" (325). As such, the text itself becomes an elusive figure, rather than a singular character, as is the case with Oryx. In this way, both *Oryx and Crake* and *Brown Girl* utilise the same strategy to thwart the gaze. However, by centring its utilisation to the whole text rather than a single character *Brown Girl* once again emphasises commonality while *Oryx and Crake* isolates its heroine.

Thus, Oryx's story ends exactly where it began, with myriad questions as to who she is, but no real change in her position as a commodity, be it for Jimmy to lust over or for the Crakers to revere as a goddess. In contraposition, *Brown Girl in the Ring* finishes with the promise of change, thanks to Mi-Jeanne's, and Toronto's, liberation from Rudy's power. However, unlike the previous power vacuum, this one is hopeful insofar as the spirit of Mami Gros-Jeanne takes over the body and mind of the premier, instigating her to bring about change to the Burn. Thus, the story once again breaks with the zombification of the women as it emphasises Mami Gros-Jeanne's mental fortitude which heavily contrasts the idea of the incognizant zombie. In this way, Hopkinson reveals that in spite of the commodification Black women are subjected to, they ultimately are the owners of their bodies and minds. Mami Gros-Jeanne's heart might beat elsewhere, but it remains imbued with her spirit and linked to her family and this is what allows her, even after death, to keep fighting for structural change and better conditions for women of colour.

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Neo-Cosmopolitan Tidalectics as Planetary Poetics in Kaie Kellough's *Magnetic Equator*

Florian Wagner

florian.wagner@uni-jena.de
ORCID: 0000-0001-8911-4546

Friedrich Schiller University Jena, Germany

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ABSTRACT
This contribution focuses on the role of the literary and cultural imagination in constructing alternative imaginaries of the planet which exceed the purely economic dimension of the global and globalization and are open to different modes of knowing and doing. Expanding on Erin Wunker's suggestion of a planetary poetics as an aesthetic mode with which to think and write across multiple spatial and temporal scales and engage with the ethical implications of living in a globalized world, this article looks at Kaie Kellough's *Magnetic Equator* (2019) and its neo-cosmopolitan tidalectics as planetary poetics.

Keywords
Canadian poetry; planetary poetics; neo-cosmopolitanism; tidalectics; Kaie Kellough.

The last few years have seen the emergence of the planetary as a critical-theoretical category in the humanities and the social sciences. Amy J. Elias and Christian Moraru have termed this the 'planetary turn' in their essay collection *The Planetary Turn: Relationality and Geoaesthetics in the Twenty-First Century* (2015), in which they identify a lack of critical paradigms with which to adequately respond to the complexity of living in the 21st century, and consequently try to stake out a claim for the planetary, or rather planetarity—a concept originally coined by Gayatri Spivak—as a "way of being and a way of measuring time, space, and culture in the human sciences and on the planet at large" (vii). They argue that the planetary is able to rupture the homogenizing cultural logic of globalization—meaning the imposition of neoliberalism's teleology of progress and economic growth—through "*relationality*, namely, by an ethicization of the ecumenic process of coming together or 'worlding'" (xii), i.e., developing alternative ways of being in the world.

Looking at the role of the poetic imagination in providing such alternative imaginaries, Erin Wunker's article "Toward a Planetary Poetics: Canadian Poetry after Globalization" (2016) examines the current trajectory of Canadian poetics and poetry and the way its production, consumption, and circulation is affected by globalization. Charting the 'transnational turn' in Canadian literature and following Jeff Derksen's observation that there is a "growing body of poetry in North America that is critically and intensively engaged with the politics and restructuring brought by neoliberalism" (qtd. in Wunker 94), Wunker argues that Canadian criticism has to take the global as one element of poetic production into consideration. Utilizing the notion of planetary poetics, she argues for a relational and networked understanding of poetics and poetic production, and consequently emphasizes "the importance of understanding poetics in Canada as open, mobile, polyvalent sites of productivity that push against or offer alternatives to the seemingly relentless movement of global capitalism" (93). Modeling her understanding of planetary poetics closely after Spivak's concept of planetarity as a way to "respond to the conditions of globality within a poetic framework" (94), Wunker's article looks at the diverse poetics of Nicole Brossard, Dionne Brand, and Sina Queyras. What surfaces from her analysis are the specific ways in which these poets think and write across multiple spatial and temporal scales to engage with the ethical implications of living in a globalized world, and reconstruct and reposition the subject in relation to global processes.

While Wunker's understanding of planetary poetics remains largely within the limited frame of the economic flows of the global, I want to suggest in this article that in times of the Anthropocene it is vital to also take into consideration the materiality of planetary forces, the vast timescales of geologic deep time, as well as the vitality of the non-human world. Emphasizing an eco-critical

perspective, Elias and Moraru, for instance, suggest that the planetary is "polemically subtended by an eco-logic" (xxiii, emphasis removed). In *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (2021), Dipesh Chakrabarty similarly points to the need for a "new 'commons' […] in search of a redefinition of human relationships to the nonhuman, including the planet" (20). In a passage worth quoting in full, he suggests that we

> need to connect deep and recorded histories and put geological time and the biological time of evolution in conversation with the time of human history and experience. And this means telling the story of human empires—of colonial, racial, and gendered oppressions—in tandem with the larger story of how a particular biological species, *Homo sapiens*, its technosphere, and other species that coevolved with or were dependent on *Homo sapiens* came to dominate the biosphere, lithosphere, and the atmosphere of this planet. (7-8)

Understanding planetary poetics in this way then allows for imagining alternative modes of engagement that not only resist the homogenizing tendencies of the global, but that also generate imaginaries of collective planetary futures that are open toward other ontologies and epistemologies.

Utilizing the framework of planetary poetics, this article looks at Kaie Kellough's Griffin-prize-winning volume of poetry *Magnetic Equator* (2019) and the specific ways in which it is carefully attuned to the materiality of historical, global, and planetary forces through Kellough's use of formal aesthetic experimentation. My argument is two-fold: as a first-generation Guyanese-Canadian poet who is writing and performing from within Canada's troubled narrative of multiculturalism, which is deeply embedded in the structures of the global, Kellough's poems examine the complexities of the black diasporic experience and confront feelings of (non-)belonging and in-betweenness by looking at different kinds of memory and drawing from multiple (post-)colonial archives. At the same time, however, his poems go beyond the global by transcending its spatial and temporal boundaries and by evoking a sense of perpetual movement and fluidity. This, I argue, establishes a relational subject-planet position that fosters and encourages a sense of planetary futurity and possibility that emanates from the past and the present moment.

Generally speaking, the poems in *Magnetic Equator* constitute a broad assemblage of multiple archives that, as described on the back cover,

> puzzle their language together from the natural world and from the works of Caribbean and Canadian writers. They reassemble passages about seed catalogues, about origins, about finding a way in the world, about black ships sailing across to land. They struggle to explain a state of being hemisphered, of being

> present here while carrying a heartbeat from elsewhere, and they map the distances travelled. (n.p.)

The poems seamlessly move across North and South America and the Atlantic Ocean by way of Georgetown, Vancouver, Calgary, and Montréal—cities where "black diasporas have localized in particular ways" as Karina Vernon points out ("Reckoning" n.p.). In a similar vein, Rob McLennan—alluding to the rich histories of these places and their entanglements—writes that *Magnetic Equator* is "populated, in a generative sense, by all who had come before" interweaving issues of "location, dislocation, immigration, longing, and belonging" ("Review" n.p.). The poems closely examine notions of home, nation, and identity while looking both at the consequences of colonial histories of these places and the role they play in today's globalized economy. They ask what it means for the diasporic subject to belong, or rather to live in-between and navigate these particular geographies. As Vernon suggests, they "explore the peculiar doubleness that frequently characterizes diasporic experience of place, of living in the 'stereo' of overlapping geographies" ("Reckoning" n.p.). Rob McLennan similarly recognizes this state of in-betweenness in which these places take on personal significance in addition to their historical and extra-historical dimensions as they are all also important to Kellough from an autobiographical point of view. McLennan writes that throughout *Magnetic Equator*, Kellough

> excavates and investigates the materials of his own past, and the pasts that made his possible, moving through a deeply personal and intimate series of investigations, memories, joys and frustrations, many of which come with the shifts of geography and culture. He writes of between-ness, being of one place in another, and then of being of both, but somehow neither, concurrently evolving into and away from. (n.p.)

As will become evident throughout my subsequent readings, the poems in *Magnetic Equator* are constantly looking for new ways of expressing the intricate vortex of historical, global, and planetary forces as experienced by the speaker's body which is put in relation to and radiates outward towards these forces. In doing so, I argue that the poems in *Magnetic Equator* generate what I would term a *neo-cosmopolitan tidalectics*, which I use in reference to the feminist and postcolonial scholar Sneja Gunew's understanding of neo-cosmopolitanism and the Caribbean poet Edward Kamau Brathwaite's tidalectics tradition.

In *Post-Multicultural Writers as Neo-cosmopolitan Mediators* (2017), Sneja Gunew argues for a revitalized understanding of cosmopolitanism that is shaped by post-multicultural writers and modeled after Spivak's planetary position. The neo-cosmopolitan project Gunew proposes against the homogenizing

tendencies of transnational capitalism and rising global inequality, tries to instigate a shift towards "re-interpreting notions of the spatial and temporal to create a new cultural politics and ethics that speak to our challenging times" (3). Such a shift would be achieved by questioning "traditional ways of conceptualizing space and time by invoking the planetary to set against the ubiquitous use of the global and by referring to deep or geological time (often associated with Indigeneity) as distinct from a linear colonial time that undergirds most national histories" (ibid.).

Gunew's reading of neo-cosmopolitanism as filtered through the relationality and translationality of the planetary position would open up toward new ways of becoming, meaning that it would provide a means of "denaturalization that would enable receptivity to other ways of 'being at home in the world'" (7). Utilizing Jean-Luc Nancy's notion of *mondialisation*—the *creation of the world* or *world-forming* as opposed to *globalisation* as the *immonde* (the non-world)—Gunew's understanding of neo-cosmopolitanism "originates and stays rooted in the specific, unassimilable singularities of the local" (Schoene qtd. in ibid.) while simultaneously taking the planet in its radical alterity into consideration.

The post-multicultural writer then enters as a leading figure of such a neo-cosmopolitanism as this world-making is also an imaginative task. It is important to note here that she understands the "post" in post-multiculturalism not as an "after" but rather in the Lyotardian sense of the "future anterior," that which was left out in the construction of multiculturalism, i.e., the *petit récits* of localized differences and local vernaculars that have been subsumed by the "grand narratives of nationalism or internationalism, or even of West and non-West" (Gunew 10). She writes:

> I am suggesting that inside these vernaculars we need to expose the cosmopolitan dimensions that connect us to a world that should not remain fully mediated by the nation-state or by prevailing neoliberal models of globalization. My argument is that what was left out of multiculturalism was the cosmopolitan element, something that draws us into the world via the perspectives (combining languages and histories) of those "minority ethnics." My contention is that post-multicultural writers offer a cosmopolitan mediation and translation between the nation-state and the planetary. (10-11)

The mediation between nation-state, the global, and the planetary is best exemplified by Gunew's attempt to re-frame the migrant condition, i.e., "the belief that [migrants] are at home nowhere or in more than one place" which is often deemed constitutive of their suffering and oppression, as their "greatest attribute" (5). For Gunew, this condition of in-betweenness of the migrant, however, means that they "can navigate the structures of belonging in numerous

ways not least by putting into question the complacent assumptions of self-evident universalism that undergird many forms of both nationalism and globalization" (5). In this sense, post-multicultural writers would act as "mediating figures that facilitate new relations between national cultures and […] the *planetary*" (5, emphasis in original) because they "provide a more nuanced grammar for cultural legibility within globalization, a sensitivity and reflexivity toward what cannot be taken for granted that is in contrast to nation-states and their assertions of autonomy vis-à-vis the global" (11).

Kellough's poems in *Magnetic Equator* mirror Gunew's understanding of neo-cosmopolitanism precisely through the way they challenge seemingly self-evident universalisms such as nation, space, and time, etc., and instead emphasize the complex dynamic interplay of historical and planetary forces and the way they shape the black diasporic subject. Resisting the imposition and administration of blackness by the nation-state, the poems embrace a poetics and politics of becoming and allow for a different understanding of 'being at home in the world and on the planet' by rethinking and remaking linear conceptualizations of space and time.

In *Magnetic Equator*, this reshaping takes place in the spirit of Edward Kamau Brathwaite's tidalectics tradition as is also invoked by the poet and writer M. NourbeSe Philip on the cover copy: "*Magnetic Equator* joins the tidalectics tradition of Brathwaite. This is a poetry of place, albeit a fluid place of in-betweenity, of migration and hybridity, ethnic, geographic, historical, temporal, and chronological" (n.p.). Tidalectics, as understood by Brathwaite, seeks to break with fixed Western universalisms and instead tries to replace them with notions of fluidity and hybridity. According to Brathwaite, tidalectics is "the rejection of the notion of dialectics, which is three—the resolution in the third. Now I go for a concept I call 'tide-alectic' which is the ripple and the two tide movement" (qtd. in Reckin 1).

As a play on Hegelian dialectics, tidalectics ultimately aims at replacing a linear understanding of historical time by eliminating the final step of sublation (*Aufhebung*), i.e., the resolution of the negative, which is an indispensable part of the historical process in Hegel's philosophy as it is that which moves history forward. In Brathwaite's understanding, however, history is not linear but tidal. It moves in overlapping waves and dwells in contradiction. I align myself here with Elizabeth DeLoughrey who describes the concept of tidalectics as follows:

> Challenging the binarism of Western thought, the ocean and land are seen in continuous relation—as shifting points of contact, arrival, departure, and transformation. Tidalectics engage what Brathwaite calls an "alter/native" historiography to linear models of colonial progress. This "tidal dialectic" resists the synthesizing telos of Hegel's dialectic by drawing from a cyclical model, invoking

> the continual movement and rhythm of the ocean. Tidalectics foreground "alter/native" epistemologies to colonialism and capitalism, with their linear and materialist biases. In contradistinction to Western models of passive and empty space, such as *terra* (and *aqua*) *nullius*, which were used to justify territorial expansion, tidalectics reckons a space and time that requires an active and participatory engagement with the island seascape. […] Tidalectics are concerned with the fluidity of water as a shifting site of history, invoke the rupture of modernity created by transoceanic migration and transplantation, and imagine a regional relationship beyond the bifurcations of colonial, linguistic, and national boundaries. (94-95)

Tidalectics establishes an 'alter/native historiography' based on transoceanic movement and mobility—thought of in terms of migration and dislocation—against linear conceptualizations of space and time. As Stefanie Hessler points out, the tidalectic worldview allows for a "different way of engaging with the oceans and the world we inhabit," i.e., by "[d]issolving purportedly terrestrial modes of thinking and living, it attempts to coalesce steady land with the rhythmic fluidity of water and the incessant swelling and receding of the tides" (31). Consequently, Brathwaite's tidalectics resonates with the planetary project in that it puts forth different ways of being in flux, of moving in relation to the planet, and of actively (re-) inhabiting spaces—including the poetic space.

In his review titled "A Portrait of the Poet as Tidalectic Sound Artist" (2020), Mark Grenon specifically points to the manifestation of Brathwaite's tidalectics in Kellough's *Magnetic Equator*. He tries to frame Kellough as a tidalectic sound artist drawing on Anna Reckin's reading of Brathwaite's poetry as sound space. Her reading of Brathwaite's poetry as multi-dimensional sound-spaces along specific vectors—i.e., that they constantly echo the past and project into the future, that they overlap multiple social worlds and forge trans-oceanic connections through their sonic qualities—is echoed in *Magnetic Equator* which follows similar dimensions. To highlight this, I primarily want to take a closer look at the first two poems, "kaieteur falls" and "mantra of no return" and show how they generate a neo-cosmopolitan tidalectics that rewrites diasporic subjectivity from a planetary point of view.

The opening poem of *Magnetic Equator*, "kaieteur falls," takes the reader on a journey deep into the Amazon rainforest with Kaieteur Falls being the largest single-drop waterfall located on the Potaro River in Guyana. It is a highly unusual poem that defies linear reading practices with its complex arrangement of brackets, slashes, repeated letters, compounds, and portmanteaus. Instead, it is—much like Kellough's other works—an invitation to dwell in the poetic place where it is impossible to take everything in at once. The reader is presented with a complex typographical landscape that takes time to decode and which requires a certain openness towards multiple readings in different directions, ultimately,

revealing endlessly branching connections, and mirroring the multi-layered complexity of the real landscape, its colonial past and the postcolonial present that are constantly reworked throughout *Magnetic Equator*'s 'narrative.'

"kaieteur falls" is immediately striking on a visual level through its imitation of the natural landscape of the Kaieteur Falls, which is underlined by both, the sound and constant movement of water, as well as the abundance of flora and fauna that dominate the poem. On a phenomenological level, the slashes and repeating û's that run through the middle of the poem create the impression of water flowing down from the ledge. This is amplified by onomatopoetic expressions such as "potarorapidsfume," "waterthunders," "riverripples," "afarfrothingroar," and "bankgurgle" (2-3). Sustained by the waterfall, plants like bromeliads, orchids, heliconias, Victoria amazonicas, sprouts, flowers, vines, fronds, moss, and ferns abound, and the place is inhabited by birds and lizards. The reader is presented with a lush and vivid ecosystem as "leavesdecompose," "distilledsound / syllablesricochet," "betweenmossslick / rockswordrides," and "earth'srockjaw / grinswidegapes" (ibid.), creating as Reckin calls it a "textual kinetics" (4) through the phrase's sonic qualities and frequent line breaks. The palimpsestic arrangement of natural history and geologic deep time of the Kaieteur Falls is complemented with the juxtaposition of brackets, slashes, lines, and dots that replace spaces between words following the nomenclature of objects in various programming languages or domain names, blending digital-visual culture, the information flows of neoliberal capital and representations of the landscape.

At first glance, the impression arises that the 'grammar' of the digital world is simply imposed on the natural landscape, seemingly creating a hierarchy in which the natural world becomes a resource—both in material and aesthetic terms—that is fully integrated into the global world market and the capitalist imaginary. Kellough, however, counters this impression with a much more nuanced understanding of the natural world in which every element is connected in a rhizomatic way—much like the digital world—, as well as teeming with agency as plants ruminate and the river remembers. The poem consequently points to an 'excess of life' that is non-commodifiable and emphasizes the dissonant tensions between the global and the planetary, in which the natural world is at once commodified and resists commodification. This resonates well with Reckin's reading of Brathwaite's poetry as having access to something "beyond" the "fantastical layering of New, Old, and other worlds" (2) that coexist at the same time and require different readings.

It is in small glimpses and in the margins of the poem that one also finds hints to the 'old world,' i.e., Guyana's colonial history and its significance in the Atlantic slave trade, as, for instance, in the naming practice of the water lilies "victoria amazonica" (2), named in honor of Queen Victoria and which are now

the national flower of Guyana, or in the presence of "africvocabulary" and "empire'sseasons" (ibid.). Connecting the seemingly random letters in the brackets and between the slashes reveals talk of exiles, creole dialect, mapping practices and blood in the vines. The complete fragment hidden in the interstices of the poem reads as follows:

> exiles evaporate in the mist wafting over the waterfall generator of electric bloom creole dialect lilie shoots rusted trunks escape map map create echoes exiles contemplates silent generations of plant cycles blood in the vines xeeate [?] in the mist wafting over the waterfall generator of electric bloom creole exiles contemplates silent generations of plant exiles evaporate in the mist wafting overt map map create echoes exiles contemfplant cycles blood i. (2-3)

Kellough plays here with contemporary attitudes towards the natural world in which the colonial past is often glossed over, veiled behind the sublimity and grandeur of an aestheticized and commodified landscape that serves as a popular tourist attraction. Throughout the second repetition, the original phrase deteriorates and ultimately collapses towards the end. Colonial and natural history are blurred and become indistinguishable ("plant exiles," "contemfplant"). The last line of the poem also introduces and culminates in the displacement of the diasporic subject, whereas the river continues to flow as if nothing happened: "i}exiled{riverripples" (3). Deciphering the colonial history of the Kaieteur Falls thus requires active work to render it legible in the margins of the poem otherwise it risks being overlooked.

Recalling Rob McLennan's observation that Kellough writes about the 'materials of his own past' additionally adds a personal layer to the poem as *Magnetic Equator* interweaves pieces of the author's life with (post-)colonial archives arranging them in a continuous stream. The displacement that is experienced by the speaker in the last line then can also be read through this personal dimension as it is a recurring theme throughout *Magnetic Equator*. To emphasize this, I briefly want to turn to Kellough's auto-fictional short story "Smoke that Thundered" in *Dominoes at the Crossroads* (2020), which I think proves valuable when read as a companion text to *Magnetic Equator*. The short story details the protagonist Kaie's difficulties of growing up in Calgary, his first trip to Guyana, and a visit to Kaieteur National Park, providing a deeper meditation on cultural rootedness, hybridity, and feelings of (non-)belonging, while also reflecting on South American Indigenous myth and naming practices.

In the beginning of the story, the protagonist states that growing up in rural Canada he would have preferred a more 'common' name, like Kelly, Jay, or Chris, thus allowing him to blend in better. Recounting Kunta Kinte's naming ceremony in Alex Hayle's *Roots*, he writes that Kinte's "name is imbued with

meaning, ancestry and spiritual resonance" (180). Yet, the protagonist's connection to his name is uneasy:

> I didn't finish the book. I understood that I was born here, in the suburbs of southwest Calgary, that we owned a 3,000 square-foot house, two cars, and I had 'everything' […] A byproduct of my reading was that I became doubly sensitive to my name, which features in South American Indigenous myth. Kaie was an Arawak chief who paddled his canoe over a waterfall in a sacrifice to Makunaima, the creator, to assure his people's future. I always withheld that story when people asked me about my name, because Calgarians despise Indians. One of my uncles disputed the story of Chief Kaie and Makunaima […] He dismissed the myth as a fiction of patriotism or a fable to lift the hearts of children and the credulous. He annoyed everyone by asserting that the real legend is about an irascible old man who drank too much high wine, went out on the Potaro River in his canoe, but he was too drunk to control the canoe, and his canoe sailed over the falls, and since then the falls have been known as Kaie Teur Falls, which means Old Man Falls. (ibid.)

There is an implicit kinship to the postcolonial poetics of Guyanese writer Wilson Harris in this passage whose work examines Guyana's multiethnicity and its cultural imagination through the lens of its colonial past. I am particularly reminded of a passage in his novel *Jonestown* (1996), where the narrator, Francisco Bone, muses about the meaning of Indigenous myths for modern-day Guyana:

> the mixed peoples of African or Indian or European or Chinese descent who live in modern Guyana today are related to the Aboriginal ghosts of the past […] if not by strict, biological kinship then by ties to the spectre of erosion of community and place which haunts the Central and South Americas. (7)

Harris's strategy of re-mystifying the present as a strategy to address the trauma of colonization is outright dismissed as fiction by Kaie's uncle, who puts a humorous twist on the story, whereas Kaie who questions the myth's validity still acknowledges an imagined connection as he is affected by it in his dreams: "Whatever the case, I still think about it. I even dream about it. The dream dissipates in the mornings so I can never completely remember it, but I wake up gasping, to a chorus of voices shouting: Kaie! Kaie!" (181). Nonetheless, Kaie feels like he must repress or deny his Guyanese heritage as "Calgarians despise Indians" (180), which is a recurring topic throughout *Magnetic Equator*—a poignant example would be the trauma of racist violence in the poem "high school fever: nowhere, prairie" for instance, in which the speaker reflects on Calgary as a repressive "shithole built by bitumen" and dreams of "suicide in the back seat"

of his car (20). By contrast, the described trip to Guyana—which also prominently features in *Magnetic Equator* in poems like "mantra of no return" and "exploding radio"—is supposed to establish a connection to the protagonist's Guyanese heritage, which is again critically reflected in "Smoke that Thundered":

> I was going somewhere I'd never been before, somewhere I was supposedly from, and that word, "from," carried unspecified expectations, although the force of inflection told me that "from" assumed a connection, one that I was expected to feel and to further establish. What if I didn't feel a connection? I didn't know what I was supposed to feel when I arrived. […] The idea seemed to be that I couldn't know myself until I encountered myself in Guyana. (183)

Kellough here essentially captures what Fred Wah calls "living in the hyphen," (53) the constant feeling of in-betweenness and the uneasiness of belonging, which underlies the entire collection, following the speaker from his childhood in Vancouver and Calgary to his adult life in Montréal.

I hope what becomes clear at this point is how "kaieteur falls" combines several dynamic vectors that draw from personal memory, the digital, the natural, the colonial, and the postcolonial, emphasizing the complex interplay of historical and planetary forces. Through its formal experimentation, "kaieteur falls" dissolves linear conceptions of space and time and replaces them with non-linearity and the tidal that depends on "hearing / reading through" (Reckin 2) its multiple layers. The poem's edges are not clearly defined by punctuation and fray out into the book's margins, mirroring the vast openness of the planetary. The locale of the Kaieteur Falls is turned into a symbolic space that serves as an imagined point of departure for *Magnetic Equator* as a whole by positioning the diasporic subject in relation to the global, the trans-national, and the planetary.

The following poem, "mantra of no return," stays with these ideas and particularly focuses on the entanglement of colonial history and modernity, i.e., the way colonial history echoes into the present globalized economy as the poem speaks of human cargo and the legacy of slavery, of global commerce, as well as the fragmentation of human experience. The poem's title echoes Dionne Brand's image of the 'door of no return' and the poem also utilizes quotes from *A Map to the Door of No Return*. "mantra of no return" focuses on the multiple wounds that slavery and the slave trade have left upon the world while simultaneously emphasizing that movement and mobility are inexplicable parts of human existence. This is established in the beginning of the poem and fleshed out in the central narrative of the poem that details the speaker's experience of a trip to Guyana for his uncle's funeral.

The first part of "mantra of no return" immediately conjures the open ocean and formulates an oceanic worldview through the waves that break on the

shore and 'tide back' into the Middle Passage which becomes a ghostly presence throughout the poem:

> this piece is / is not about the past, and it is / is not about the future, but it is / is not about a stasis all waves syncopate. this piece awash in ways is not a pisces, though fish flash in the offing. this piece ripples on the surface. it foams ashore in futures, it tides back into the passage. (7)

Recognizing its own artifice, the poem engages in writing an alter/native tidalectic historiography as alluded to earlier by presenting parallax perspectives made up of multiple presences and absences. These perspectives are neither fully realized through Kellough's wordplay ("is / is not", "piece […] is not a pisces, though fish flash in the offing"), nor collapsed into eachother. Simultaneously echoing and disavowing past, present, and future, "mantra of no return" then, from the onset muddles and complicates a linear understanding of time and space, and instead presents what Reckin terms a "kind of recursive movement-in-stasis" (2) with the tidal moving in overlapping, yet irreconcilable ways; or rather, the tidal is manifested through 'syncopating' waves ("it is / is not about a stasis all waves syncopate"). While the parallax perspectives Kellough opens up move to the planet's rhythm, they require a constant shift in focus due to their constantly changing accentuation. The poem's focus on its sonic and rhythmic qualities thus allows the reader to inhabit multiple worlds at the same time, belonging to neither fully.

Yet, the poem is only able to scratch the surface of the complexity of the historical process as it merely "ripples on the surface" (7). With this limitation in mind, "mantra of no return" addresses one of the major questions opened up by planetary poetics in the following paragraph, namely in how far something as fragmented and open as poetic language can move and shift or even contain the world. The poem tries to answer this question through an economic dimension, drawing comparisons between words and cargo and thinking about the commodification of words and thoughts:

> these words shift and chop, dissolve and go nowhere. these words don't go nowhere, they simply shift atop. they could shift a ship, these words wharves shift and as they do space shifts, and a ship of some mass also shifts. its contents shift. its contents constitute a cargo. as with continents, cargo shifts. this piece is a cargo harried across a world. the cargo constitutes a consonant carried across. the cargo carries across. this cargo is stars. it is a shifted piece of ass. the world itself is a cargo carried in the hold of this verse hold thoughts shimmer along pixelated surf. these thoughts are also a cargo. they migrate

without ever arriving at a store. thoughts know no store
are unsure and sometimes dissemble. economies are unsure and
sometimes dissolve. cargo sinks to the bottom asv shift, overheard.
somewhere in an office, the cargo is written off. the written onus. (7)

Kellough seemingly puts in tension the ubiquity of the commodity form, i.e., as cargo and its circulation in the form of global commerce, and the way language seeks to contain things, i.e., by trying to make sense of the world through words and thoughts. While Kellough compares thoughts to cargo that can be transported in the hold of a ship and are able to migrate across the world's oceans, they seemingly elude commodification as they never arrive at a store: "thoughts know no store" (7). At the same time, Kellough acknowledges the instability of language and economies alike, meaning that while the world is mediated by language and thoughts and structured by economic processes, both are ultimately unstable to a certain degree: while thoughts are "unsure," and sometimes "dissemble," "economies are unsure and sometimes dissolve" (7).

In addition, there is also the ghostly presence of the Middle Passage that haunts these passages from the beginning: slaves as human beings and as cargo that is transported in the hold of the ship. Cargo sometimes gets lost, it "sinks to the bottom," and "somewhere in an office, the cargo is written off, the written onus" (7). Yet, the thoughts and memories of the 'sunken cargo' persist in the offing:

the letters
crouch and signify in the offing. the signifying mitigates but never ashores.
the arrival is delayed, in four-four tide. the time elects to move forward and
back at once. the tide elects not to arrive but rather to lingo between, among,
within, beneath, atop. the letters syncopate atop the screen but are backspaced.
the is rewritten (7)

This is where the presence of the tidalectic as an alter/native historiography is most visible as the poem opens up tensions between the globalized point of view of the digital economy and the planetary in its attempt to reckon with colonial history, as the letters syncopate atop the screen and are backspaced. The empty space is rewritten on the screen by the 'post-multicultural' poet. Words create resonances and are able to create new worlds within the linear narrative of globalization, thus writing a planetary historiography in which pasts, presents, and futures coexist as the "tide elects not to arrive but rather to lingo between" (7).

The second part of the poem continues this planetary historiography as it presents a collage of human experiences based on movement and migration,

which takes on a mantric quality by telling stories of arrival, of voluntary and forced departures:

> people arrived from portugal. people arrived from africa. people arrived from india. people arrived from england. people arrived from china. people predated arrival. people fled predation. people were arrayed. people populated. whips patterned rays into people. people arose. people rayed outward to toronto, london, boo york. people raided people. people penned the past. people roved over on planes. people talked over people. people rented places. people planted people in people. people raided plantations. people prayed. […]
> people departed and arrived again. people retreaded. people stole knowing. people plantation. people horizon. […]
> people arrived riven, alone in the world. people made their way from time. people hailed from climes. people fanned their spreading. people cleaved unto people. people writhed over / under people. people arrived over / under people (8)

Kellough constructs an abstract image of humanity that is based on a constant ebb and flow of bodies, depicting colonial histories of violence and its echoes into the modern world. What is striking is that this part is unanchored from a linear understanding of time, and instead moves in concentric circles, in waves that defy any sense of linearity. Instead, what emerges is a constant echoing of the various material connections to the planet, as people are "planted" or "hailed from climes" (8).

The enjambment at the end of the second part allows for a seamless transition of another form of "arrival." It is precisely against the backdrop of this abstract image of movement and migration, that the speaker situates his 'story of arrival,' namely in Guyana for his uncle's funeral (9-15). While the first two parts of the poem have dealt with questions of belonging from a broader perspective, the third part turns to the speaker's experiences as a globalized diasporic subject who is constantly situated in the 'in-between' of multiple worlds. This part also problematizes the notion of a simple return to "one's roots," or rather expresses the impossibility of such a return as alluded to by the title of the poem. Both issues are expressed by constantly contrasting global and planetary entanglements and disentanglements on multiple levels.

Beginning with a cab ride from the airport, the poem expresses the global embeddedness of Georgetown in subtle ways, starting from the arrival at "cheddi jagan international," to "japanese car gears," and "retired expats" caring for their "suburban gardens" (9). On the surface, there is a light, rhythmic quality that connects the city and its inhabitants: "the car swerves, and everyone

serves together. dancehall's two-beat / rattles the dash. passengers in the dash, we bide the / same interval, the same interrupt idle lyricism" (9). The "irruption of the riddim into our pensive longing" that connects the speaker, is held in tension with Guyana's (post-)colonial history, i.e. "blood, / sugar estates combusting" (ibid.) and the assassination of Walter Rodney, which also resurfaces in the poem "exploding radio." The bustling atmosphere of Georgetown is then compared to other postcolonial cities in the following paragraph highlighting a certain continuity and similarities between them as a consequence of their colonial histories: "we gear into georgetown traffic, brake across latitudes, across martin carter's / 'insurgent geographies' the city's compressed cacophony echoes / lagos, mumbai, where urgencies converge, simultaneous, improvised" (10).

What follows are personal notes on belonging by looking at the speaker's mother:

> she is estranged, returning
> and we are revenants to a place inside a narration contrived
> to read like non-fiction, a continuous telling since one
> mouth inside another, one word emigrating from another's vowels.
> a paper place we've glossed in novels, in atlases
> materialized into sweltering road printed under us, the car
> horns blasting past, the black faces that map ours for relevance, the faces that
> could belong to our relatives faces we are instructed not to trust, into
> whose night we are cautioned against venturing, whose have-not we must not
> tempt. my mother banters with the ~~river~~ driver, her voice
> angles into accent, some words chop others stretch. she ent
> home, but her return bends
> here, her speech soaks into the air near the equator (11)

For his mother, the visit to Guyana marks a return to her estranged home. However, this is not an easy return as she has been gone for so long that she has taken on an accent and has lost the ability to fluently communicate with the driver. On a poetological level, this uncomfortable return is heightened by mixing up of 'river' and 'driver,' as well as the ambiguity of 'ent' as a possible misspelling of 'ain't.' In the end, her speech still connects her to the place as it "soaks into the air" (11). For the speaker and his brother, on the other hand, this is not a return. They are compared to spectral presences in this place that they only know from stories and from atlases and which suddenly materializes in front of them. Similarly, there is an ambiguity between the faces of people that could be their relatives that is put in tension with a warning often given to tourists, namely, to be cautious and not go out at night. What is interesting

on a deeper level is the sense of alienation from this place which seems both familiar and foreign as expressed by the speaker.

In a brief interlude, the speaker further reflects on the place and its significance by comparing the rainforest to a mixing board which ultimately produces the rhythm that connects its inhabitants. Like in "kaieteur falls," Kellough draws on the multilayered complexity of the rainforest, from its biodiversity to its rich mythic history, as well as revealing a larger planetary connection of place: "turn up the hemisphere. boost the mighty rainforest's canopy into the stratosphere. exceed ire" (12). What is particularly striking in this passage, however, is the connection of landscape and colonial history as the Essequibo River emerges as a deliverer of 'history,' a "liquid archive parser" (ibid.). The river as connected to the Atlantic Ocean becomes a space of memory and remembrance and "haunt[s] the tidalectic" (12). This connection is also rendered tangible in the visual poem "Essequibo," in which digitally abstracted passages from *Magnetic Equator* were put on top of mapped images of the river. The physical materiality and the space of the river are thus semioticized and join the polyphonic chorus of Kellough's neo-cosmopolitan tidaletics. The Essequibo is theorized as a geographically, culturally, and historically constructed space that is intimately connected with the fluctuating tides of the Atlantic Ocean and becomes in Elizabeth DeLoughrey's words "a shifting site of history" (95).

The poem then moves from the larger frame of the planet and the natural world to the individual body which becomes "a continental jut," "a density of times past" (13). The individual body turns into a historical site that merges deep time and material histories as it necessarily constitutes an "assemblage of others," a "being made of beings" that is connected to the "vertiginous intelligence" (13) of the Guyanese rainforest as a site of memory, a site of pre-historic cave drawings, where flora and fauna abound as described above. However, the poem also introduces a rupture in this connection of body and rainforest. The conscious crossing out of home in the following passage reveals the simultaneous sense of belonging and nonbelonging the speaker experiences:

> i pass them on the way down.
> they belong to other families indi-, -akan?
> i do not know them. portu- chi-?
> ~~home~~
> […]
> i knew
> my great grandmother, and only knew stories of my great grand. counter-
> narratives. i don't know any farther, grand, mother, slave, identure
> i know 2.5 generations, and i have glimpsed the blistered
> creased photographic evidence. (13)

There is a gap in the speaker's memory before his grandparents' generation. Before that, there is only what he has read in history books, seen in photographs, or heard from the remnants of oral histories, such as the story behind the naming of the Kaieteur Falls. This belonging / non-belonging and the feeling of in-betweenness is also reflected in the following passage, where the speaker and his brother smoke a cigarette on the verandah. Both feel neither at home in Canada where they are viewed as "high yellow niggers" (14), nor in Guyana, where they are perceived as wealthy tourists, "prince, resented, / drunk on gold" (14), which both superficially laugh off, hiding their real feelings. This idea also reoccurs during the funeral passage where the "unruly / beach whose stones rebuke sandals / reject tourists" (15).

The poem ends with a meditation that riffs on and quotes Dionne Brand's *A Map to the Door of No Return* and highlights the arbitrariness of planetary being: "too much has been made of origins / all origins are arbitrary / too much has been made of others / all others are arbitrary" (16). While this last part follows a fixed and regular structure and every arbitrary subject starts with the same letter, thus raising awareness to the poem's overall material structure and underlying design; it blurs and puts into question notions of stability and fixedness and instead replaces them with a sense of relationality by taking into consideration material and lived realities. Together with the opening passages of the poem, the last passage then acts as a planetary frame in which the individual life and the experiences of the speaker are situated.

What has emerged from my readings of "kaieteur falls" and "mantra of no return" is how the poems in *Magnetic Equator* recognize how the current moment has been shaped and continues to be shaped by the histories of colonial exploitation and its continuation in the global. By utilizing the framework of planetary poetics, however, I looked at the function of poetry as a disruptor that, precisely because of its openness and often experimental formal qualities, is particularly apt in rupturing the perceived hegemony of globalization and global capital. The poems in *Magnetic Equator*, as I have shown, put forth a poetics of resistance to essentialized accounts of the diasporic experience, transcend the spatial and temporal boundaries of the global, are closely attuned to the material forces that encompass the planet, and celebrate the vitality of the non-human world.

Overall, they represent a multi-dimensional assemblage that proves valuable in responding to the ethical demands of living in a globalized world and resonate with the demands of the planetary condition by tapping into the ebb and flow of life and matter on the planet. In this sense, I suggest that understanding poetics from a planetary perspective can initiate a paradigm shift from homogenizing theories of globalization towards planetary multitudes and multiplicity. By opening up towards different ontologies and epistemologies,

planetary poetics enunciates positions of collective responsibility for the future of the planet and its human and non-human inhabitants and cultivates visions of shared planetary futures. I hope that this view contributes to the ongoing conversation on the planetary and consequently works towards a politics of possibility of acting and living 'otherwise.'

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Emergent Critical Strategies Against the Nation-Trap: The Digitization of Literary Apocalyptic Affects and Larissa Lai's *The Tiger Flu*

Matthew Cormier

matthew.cormier@umoncton.ca

Université de Moncton, Canada

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ABSTRACT
Focused on interrogating the ways in which twenty-first century writing in Canada is currently approached critically and theoretically, this article proposes new reading methods that expose the influence of nation-state powers over literary productions. In particular, this article takes up Larissa Lai's dynamic, post-apocalyptic novel, *The Tiger Flu*, as a case study to examine these ideas by using digital tools. It studies the novel's reflections on gender, sexuality, and technology within re-imagined patriarchal structures that recall those upon which nationalist ideals thrive today.

Keywords
Post-apocalypse; English-Canadian fiction; nationalism; Larissa Lai; digital humanities.

While scholarship on literary productions in Canada has significantly evolved as well as diversified and expanded its lines of critical inquiry since the inception of the concept of "Canadian literature," it has consistently returned to self-reflexive questions pertaining to its purposes, methods, and values. These recurring questions, in some form or another and seemingly at each turn, tend to arise from various interactions with the nation-state and its pervasive frameworks and from diverse perspectives; therefore, as much as scholars have progressed in their varied endeavours, seeking to move beyond the trappings of national constructs in their investigative approaches to literary and cultural works produced in Canada, such a task remains daunting. The call for papers for this special issue of *Canada and Beyond*, for instance, asks, "what is the present role of Canada's literary and cultural production? How will the development of new critical perspectives further our understanding of what we think of as *Canada*?" (1). The possessive form in this provocation, "*Canada's* literary and cultural production," in and of itself betrays the colonial intrusiveness of national structures and the challenges that these networks present to critics working vigorously to transcend them. At least for now—and of important note, here, at least to *me*, since I certainly do not want to speak for others—the idea of having surpassed national frameworks in our studies seems premature.

That being said, this assessment should in no way diminish the tremendous work currently being done in vital areas such as Indigenous and environmental studies in building on the critical leaps and bounds which scholars have taken since the inception of the nationalist, Canadian literature initiative to challenge the latter's stakes and ambitions. Indeed, this significant effort did and continues to disrupt determined efforts to instill a cohesive cultural nationalism in Canada and to expose its problems, particularly during and since the latter half of the twentieth century when postmodernism took hold of literary productions in Canada. As I have argued elsewhere, this period thrived in its embrace as well as in its critical and creative exploration of the ambiguity of what being or writing "Canadian" meant.[1] In any case, although cultural and literary thinkers have made much progress thus far, I suggest in this article that we slow down as critics, that we postpone our perhaps at times myopic mission to transcend national frameworks in our research and instead turn our attention more diligently to recognizing exactly *how* these systems function currently because, while they are perhaps not as overt and transparent as they once were in their causes, they maintain great power, and we would do well to understand their

1. See my work, "The Destruction of Nationalism in Twenty-First-Century Canadian Apocalyptic Fiction" and "Theorizing the Apocalyptic Turn in the Literatures of Canada: Un/Veiling the Apocalyptic Direction in Affect Studies" for further reading on this topic.

adapting modus operandi. This work, now and as it will progress in the future, will be up to current emerging scholars across disciplines and critical interests, a number of whom appear in this special issue. The opportunity at hand is one for self-reflection on our research, on our objectives, and on potential networks of collaboration in the future across diverse perspectives.

This article puts into dialogue several critical perspectives on the structure and influence of the nation in literary Canada at present, focussing on the apocalyptic genre in particular. It reflects on the challenges involved with this topic and proposes a reading lens that employs digital humanities methods to analyze Larissa Lai's dynamic novel, *The Tiger Flu*, as an example of the recent rise in apocalyptic fiction in Canada. This Lambda Literary Award-winning novel speculates a post-apocalyptic future—from the year 2145 onward—in which environmental destruction and a pandemic that is particularly deadly to men have ravaged the world as we know it today. In particular, I study Lai's reflections on gender, sexuality, and technology within re-imagined patriarchal structures that recall those upon which nationalist ideals thrive today.

Reflecting on the Influence of National Structures; Digitizing Literary Apocalypse

My own scholarship on literary works produced in Canada—no doubt influenced by my interest in postmodernism along with the self-reflection and uncertainty that this formally challenging period championed—has chiefly concerned itself with existential questions similar to those mentioned in the introduction that centre identity and representation. In this respect, I have been especially invested in innovating reading methodologies or approaches since the beginning of my graduate studies, upon reading an article by renowned Canadian scholar and writer, E.D. Blodgett, in which he argued that "one of the reasons the Canadian literatures are looked upon with a kind of benign diffidence by those unacquainted with them derives from our failure of imagination as critics" (63). The question of what preoccupies writers in Canada, specifically their *Canadianness*, has been addressed numerous times over the past mid-century: by the likes of Northrop Frye and Margaret Atwood earlier on, and more recently by scholars such as Smaro Kamboureli in works like *Scandalous Bodies: Diasporic Literature in English Canada* that include and consider a more diverse range of voices that persist in and around literatures in Canada. Yet observations like Blodgett's—and, of course, the diversification of critical topics on writing in Canada—suggest that our focus would perhaps benefit from a shift to self-reflection on our criticism and the composition of our reading methodologies.

Doing so requires acknowledging two important, at times conflicting, realities. Acknowledgments: first, that the *Canadian* needs to be broken up, apart, to see the many fragments that identify with it in a variety of ways; second, meanwhile, that each of these fragments still operates under this Canadian, nationalist system of power. More nuanced, less totalizing critical conceptualizations of collective identities than those of the nation are thus helpful, here: Homi K. Bhabha's fluid notion of a "locality of culture" (292), for instance, building upon Benedict Anderson's watershed work, *Imagined Communities*, is one such flexible and sophisticated theoretical avenue, even if a bit dated. Another lies with the field of cultural memory studies, due to its dynamism in engaging the competing systemic hierarchies, cultural perspectives, and historical events that define localized collectives and beyond. Theorist Astrid Erll succinctly outlines cultural memory as the "interplay of the present and past in sociocultural contexts" (2) that comprise "social (people, social relations, institutions), material (artifacts and media), and mental aspects (culturally defined ways of thinking, mentalities)" (4). In other words, memory mediates these aspects and the ways in which they interact at the personal and collective levels, the major and minor centricities, and the higher and lower hierarchies.

In "Insurgent Utopias," Larissa Lai expounds on such situated, cultural collectives that function related to but underneath the nation-state of Canada —those that, precisely, "interplay…the present and past in sociocultural contexts." Interestingly, Lai here conceptualizes these types of relationship to the Canadian nation-state, namely in the form of citizenship, as "utopic": "In a Canadian/Turtle Island context, we might consider the full range of Indigenous refusals of Canadian citizenship. For Indigenous people, Canadian citizenship constitutes assimilation, and thus complete colonization. If Canadian citizenship is a kind of utopian form, its prior outside, or better, beneath, is Indigenous claim to the land, and by corollary, an imperative to attend to Indigenous epistemologies" (99-100). Lai's thoughts on Canadian citizenship as this misleading utopia for which to strive recalls the false utopia put forth in the United States of America during the Obama administration onwards, according to filmmaker Jordan Peele, director of the films criticizing racial and class issues, *Get Out* (2017) and *Us* (2019). Peele's articulation of what he calls the "post-racial lie" in the United States interestingly appears to coincide in compelling ways with the "post-national lie" that gripes Canada and that seems to infiltrate our scholarship at times. "When I was writing [*Get Out*]," Peele explains in an interview with *The Hollywood Reporter*, "people were saying, 'Racism is done'" (n.p.). Speaking to *Vanity Fair*, Peele elucidates: "We were in this era where the calling out of racism was almost viewed as a step back… Trump was saying that the first black president wasn't a citizen… There was this feeling like, 'You know what, there's a black president. Maybe if we

just step back, [Trump] can say his bullshit. No one cares. And racism will be gone.' That's the era I imagined this movie would come out in" (n.p.). Nationalist systems of power have accordingly been adjusting how they operate; they continue to carry great influence, yet work in much more indirect, subtle, and often sinister ways, exploiting the complacency that our new theoretical and critical advances might sometimes enable as an unfortunate consequence of their lofty aim to surpass them.

In what appears to be a response to the evolving pervasiveness and subtleties of nationalist structures, a diverse range of fiction in twenty-first-century Canada has taken on a speculative, often apocalyptic or dystopian turn. Other than Lai's *The Tiger Flu*, other recent titles in this genre include Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, Nicolas Dickner's *Tarmac*, Nancy Lee's *The Age*, Thomas King's *The Back of the Turtle*, Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves*, Wayde Compton's *The Outer Harbour*, Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven*, Waubgeshig Rice's *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, Christiane Vadnais' *Faunes*, and numerous others. Literary apocalypse has also been a staple in Canada since before Confederation, as I have argued elsewhere.[2] Apocalyptic imagery features prominently in settler-colonial work such as Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush* in 1852. A century later, striving to develop a Canadian literary canon, Northrop Fry understands the apocalyptic narrative as mythic temporality, arguing that Canadian literature has to transcend history, or time and space, and accept myth to find a national, cohesive sense of continuity (Lecker 289). Frye's work and the apocalypse then underscored much of Margaret Atwood's canonically-influential, though often-criticized, *Survival*, published in 1972 as part of an ongoing national project. Finally, Marlene Goldman diversifies literary apocalypse and complicates "Canada" by studying stories from the disenfranchised in her book of criticism, *Rewriting Apocalypse in Canadian Fiction*, in 2005. Now, apocalyptic writing is in the midst of another resurgence in Canada, supported by scholarship such as *Writing Beyond the End Times?*, for instance, a 2019 collection of essays edited by Ursula Mathis-Moser and Marie Carrière.

Varying speculative apocalypses, the respective cultural memories in which they are situated, which themselves bear different nationalist constraints, and the affects that generate and then emanate from them comprise numerous variables orbiting within a highly complex and delicate constellation. As a potential solution, I propose adopting approaches and tools from the digital humanities to proceed with what I have conceptualized as the "sieve reading" method,

2. See my work, "The Destruction of Nationalism in Twenty-First-Century Canadian Apocalyptic Fiction" and "Theorizing the Apocalyptic Turn in the Literatures of Canada: Un/Veiling the Apocalyptic Direction in Affect Studies" for further reading on this topic.

which balances close and distant reading, helps to locate targeted data and recognize patterns within it, and facilitates the articulation of these findings in new, revealing visualizations that inform our analysis. First, one establishes distant reading parameters before digitally organizing the texts according to them, thereby empowering their querying for the data of choice; next, one studies the results alongside close readings of the texts to support, contest, or contribute to the representations garnered from the distant readings. As a result, this methodology entails the sifting of select literary-cultural artifacts as itemized data through two critical sieves specified by the scholar, with the first being a distant reading relying on digital tools to illustrate various aesthetics and narrative elements as a network of data, and the second consisting of a close reading from applicable critical perspectives as a means to engage both sets of information in relation to one another, gaining a fuller view of the objects of study. This way, critics have much more tangible evidence to engage while maintaining their ability to practice specialized hermeneutics.

Lai's *The Tiger Flu* is particularly ripe for a study using this method due to its rigorous structure, which facilitates localized data and its analysis. With each chapter of the novel sectioned off into parts while featuring an explicit narrator and setting, the novel inspires situated examinations and comparisons of relationships of various natures within it that speak to broader, sociocultural and structural issues.

Sieve Reading *The Tiger Flu*: The Post-Apocalyptic Nation

I have previously written on the ways in which recent apocalyptic fiction in Canada attempts to destroy or at the very least undermine national structures. Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven*, for example, imagines a pandemic that erases national borders and orders of government altogether. Meanwhile, Thomas King's *The Back of the Turtle* emphasizes the fact that the environmental crisis is a global one that does not care about differences between and within nations, but rather demands humanity's collective greater care and attention. Nicolas Dickner's *Tarmac*, for its part, ridicules the apocalyptic, Cold War justification for national defence systems and self-serving, "bunker" mentalities in general with postmodernist fragmentation and irony. Yet, some apocalyptic fictions, instead of merely imagining futures that dismantle nationalist frameworks, also work towards demonstrating the ways in which they operate at present by contrast to speculative representations that circulate affects of anxiety and uneasiness among readers. While women become the majority with the advantage of a greater immunity to the eponymous Tiger Flu in Lai's universe, the author imagines and cleverly inserts futuristic technologies into the narrative

that, combined with the other mitigating factors crippling humanity, generate new intersectional threats for women, threats that are especially revealing of the inner workings of current patriarchal systems. In particular, Lai makes highly effective use of the feminist cyborg figure famously theorized by Donna Haraway—as she has before, even explicitly so in her collection of poetry, *Automaton Biographies*—to complicate and expose issues of race, gender, sexuality, and technology under speculative, reflective structures and conditions of patriarchal oppression that so often support nationalist ideologies.

Speculative fiction, in all of its intricacies, is most often effective at the situating and facing of "ends," of temporal markers, which are of utmost importance—and so are those of "beginnings." The apocalyptic genre is especially instructive in understanding this concept of temporal markers, of pivotal points in narrative or discourse: the biblical apocalypse, for example, is a prophesied event that is supposed to bring about the end of the world to make way for a new one—yet the time of arrival of the apocalypse is unknown, sealed away. In "Insurgent Utopias," Lai makes the poignant and similar argument that speculative fiction

> has something to show us in relation to the work of eruption, or what John Rajchman (via Deleuze) has called the "knock at the door" (1999: 47), a moment of contingent arrival, not a teleological end, but a double-edged sword that crystallizes hope for an instant, or offers a sign of wonder. Such a knock, or sign, or figure, or eruption is open to co-optation, destruction, bastardization, incorporation, death, or defusal, and yet, when it bursts through, it offers the powerful possibility of critique—narratively or discursively, in its very materiality. The materiality of the rupture is important because it is attached to embodied history. (94)

Evidently, the cyclical nature of apocalypse has much in common with the "knock at the door" that Lai focuses on; however, both concepts demand a great deal of complex and challenging, though necessary, work. As Lai goes on to explain, using the calls of the Idle No More and Black Lives Matter movements as examples, social justice activism "demands an attention to the body and calls for forms of social, sexual and racialized arrangement that have not yet been thought, and have not yet emerged in the eruptive sense I have been attempting to articulate, and yet that also recognizes the injustices of the past and present" (100). In *The Tiger Flu*, one of Lai's goals appears to be precisely a prioritization of embodied experience that has not yet been imagined but that also recognizes past and present injustices.

As a prime example, the opening chapter of *The Tiger Flu* frames fragile masculinity and the consequential threat of violence, elevated in a post-apocalyptic future world in which men consist of a physically weakened minority that

nonetheless sustain lingering patriarchal ideals. In this chapter, Kora, one of the novel's woman protagonists, has a vicious encounter on a rooftop with Stash, a Tiger Flu-ridden friend of her brother's. In a tightly-wound scene, Lai interlaces the misconception propagated by popular rape myths—that most rapists are strangers that attack at random by jumping out from behind bushes—with the more accurate representation of sexual violence against women, in that women overwhelmingly know their attackers:

> Something rustles behind the shed. She drops her feet back to the ground.
> "Who's there?"
> No answer. She goes to look, but before she's taken half a step, a young man leaps out and grabs her from behind. "Boo!"
> "Mother fuck! Get off me! Who the hell are you?"
> Actually, she recognizes him. He's a friend of her brother's—Stash Sacks. He looks awful. His face is covered in weeping sores. His eyes ooze pus. (14-5)

While Stash's diseased body literally and figuratively signals fragile masculinity, becoming all the more "toxic" in this context, the assault itself shows the desperate, unpredictable, imminent, angry, and most of all violent potential of a threatened masculinity. Just as Kora appears to have escaped harm, these traits manifest with renewed vigour in Stash: "Gripped by jealousy and desire, he won't let go […] Rage grips him, makes him superhuman for a moment […] 'It isn't fair!' He pushes on top of her again. Rolls her over towards the brink […] The sick boy clings to her waist. 'I don't want to die!'" (16). Even with her life in danger, Kora saves Stash from plummeting to his death from the rooftop, and thus, in this brief, but dangerous struggle, the pervasiveness of a patriarchal, masculinist society, sharpened under the apocalyptic threat of complete extinction, appears to frame the novel. In this sense, *The Tiger Flu* acknowledges past and present injustices, all the while imagining them in a speculative future setting.

Yet Lai's future also allows for the emergence—the *eruption*—of collectives that, although not immune to these recurring patriarchal threats, adapt to them in new ways. These collectives include the Cordova girls that Kora eventually joins as well as the Grist sisters, from where Kirilow, the novel's other protagonist, hails. Critic Chiara Xausa astutely points out that "[d]isease outbreaks affect marginalised groups and at-risk communities in multiple ways, exposing and deepening pre-existing differences and inequalities related to gender, race and ethnicity, as suggested by the storylines of Kora and Kirilow. Belonging to vulnerable, albeit different, communities, they prove that a higher male mortality rate can, nevertheless, have indirect deadly effects on women." Furthermore, Xausa goes on to observe "intersectional experiences of the outbreak, alongside its thought-provoking concern for gender and racial justice" (25) in

the novel: "Being sent to the Cordova Dancing School for Girls, Kora is affected by the stigma associated with the flu pandemic," Xausa explains. "In fact, we come to know that her father was the one who brought the Caspian tiger back from extinction for consumptive purposes; the flu is its deadly side-effect. She is constantly discriminated from the other girls for coming from a low-income family" (26).

Interestingly enough, in her essay, "Familiarizing Grist Village: Why I Write Speculative Fiction," Lai, herself a "a second-generation Hong Kong Chinese person" (240), relates Hong Kong and questions regarding nationalism—among numerous other intersectional identifiers, of course—to her work in *The Tiger Flu*: "Now, as a triumphal China rises and populist movements around the globe turn also to vicious forms of nationalism, what will happen to Hong Kong," she asks, "a city without a national origin, one whose legal status has shifted radically over the course of the past 150 years, but one that nonetheless understands itself as peopled and as inhabited?" (n.p.). As Lai explains, "the Grist sisters are not exactly a community of feminists, lesbians, Asian women, or queers. They are not exactly Asian diaspora, or people of colour. They are a community of clones with capacities for self-reproduction, without the assistance of men. And yet there is something of all of those things in them. Sometimes they might appear as metaphorical for feminist community. Sometimes they might appear as analogical for Asian Canadians or queer women of colour" (n.p.). Of note, here, is Lai's dismissal of a "national origin" in her intricate conceptualization of a collective in the Grist sisterhood, which implies that nationalism is a systemic force that depends upon other, more foundational societal structures, ones that in turn begin with more intimate relationships that play roles in aforementioned construction of hierarchical organizations. *The Tiger Flu*, in this sense, introduces and delves into specific, complex, and developing relationships between characters within the context of the societal pillars of nationalism without invoking the latter, effectively mapping out the interior designs and sustenance of national projects. The apocalyptic cycle of creation and destruction, in particular, or "the knock at the door" allows the imagination of universes that can play with sociocultural and historical variables.

In terms of relationships that speak to wider-ranging insights, some fairly basic data visualizations are helpful in their demonstration of the protagonists' interactions within the broader, structural direction of *The Tiger Flu*, the latter of which is of immediate significance, though it might initially seem trivial. Figure 1, for example, shows clearly that the number of chapters per part in the novel consistently decreases throughout, beginning with *16 chapters* in Part I and ending with a *single chapter* in Part V:

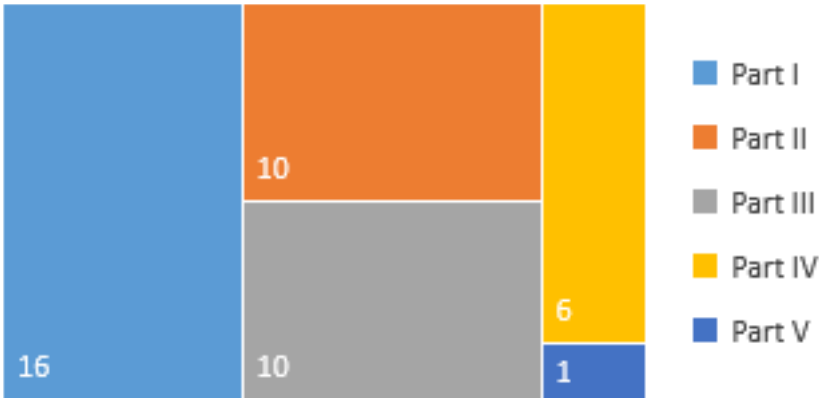

Figure 1: Chapters per Part: *The Tiger Flu*

Speaking affectively, the narrative thus has a certain pace, a gradual acceleration towards an inevitable proposed "eruption." A reading of the novel's two protagonists, Kora and Kirilow, and their appearances in these chapters and parts suggests that this climax is one of convergence—the story of, precisely, a particular relationship as it forms. Kirilow is a "groom" from the recently raided Grist village who lost her coupled "starfish," Peristrophe. Grooms act as doctors, surgeons who cut out organs from their starfish, who can regenerate them, to sustain the life of "doublers," who in turn can birth cloned daughters. Kora, a teenager from the Saltwater Flats, joins a group of thieves known as the Cordova girls before eventually learning that she is a starfish and that her father's side of her family is responsible for the manufacturing and distribution of the tiger wine responsible for the tiger flu.

Figures 2 and 3 reinforce the idea of a fated meeting of the two; the figures display the near exactness of number of appearances in terms of quantity and location within the narrative:

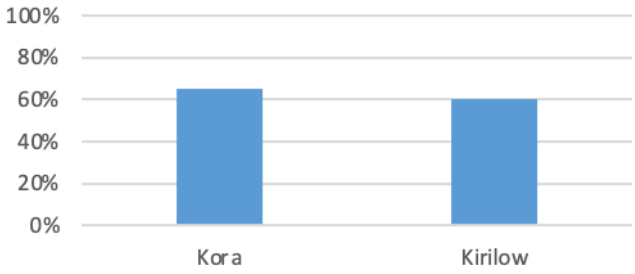

Figure 2: Percentage of Total Chapter Appearances

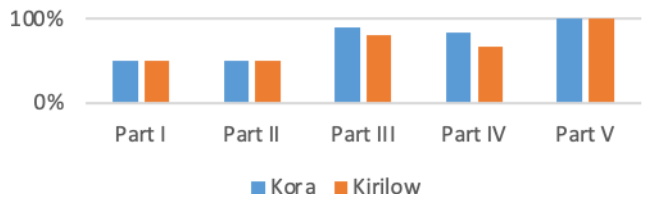

Figure 3: Percentage of Chapter Appearances per Part

These figures illustrate a certain balance or symmetry between Kora and Kirilow throughout the novel: while Kora appears in slightly more chapters, both women feature in roughly half of the total chapters in the novel, even per part, while occupying more and more of the total chapters per part as the narrative progresses and culminates. Lastly, Figure 4 visualizes the percentage of chapters in which both characters appear together, tracking the development of their relationship; their narrative connection begins in Part III, with 70% (7/10) of chapters together, continues in Part IV, with 50% (3/6) of chapters together, and concludes with 100% (1/1) chapters together:

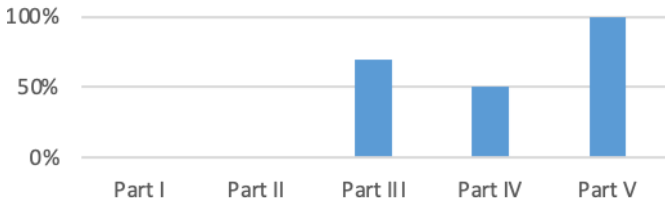

Figure 4: Percentage of Chapter Appearances per Part

Together, these quantitative representations show the almost metronomic, individual evolutions of Kora and Kirilow and the subsequent emergence and significance of their relationship as a core tenet of *The Tiger Flu*.

Together, this data represents the abstract development of the stories of these central characters, stories that, according to Xausa, "force the readers to imagine a rupture and address the crisis at its root causes, shifting the focus from a mere return to normality or 'business as usual' to an act of repair of damaged 'naturalcultural' ecologies" (29). "Furthermore," Xausa explains, "the novel breaks away from tiring visions of the future that refuse to explore the indeterminacy of the present and point toward a recovery of the previous *status quo*" (29; emphasis in original). The structural work of the novel, therefore, in its careful, balanced fulfillment of Kora and Kirilow's narrative of supporting one another through threats brought on by lingering patriarchal and capitalist ideologies and to its restorative conclusion, in which Kora becomes the

"Starfish Tree" 156 years after the main events of the novel, and who passes on knowledge and experiences to a new generation of young Grist sisters. This future is one of recovery, yet, significantly, it also does not seek to erase the past: "*You must remember my pain, as I remember yours*," Kora tells her young audience (326; emphasis in original). Worth reiterating, too, as critic Mónica Calvo Pascual does, echoing Xausa, is that "history and transgenerational memory seem to be inscribed in the body" in the case of Kora Tree.

Of course, this data can also be read alongside close readings of individual chapters themselves, particularly those in which both women begin to appear together in Part III and which are at the heart of the eruption that comes later. In Part III, Kora and Kirilow feature together in Chapters 28, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, and 36. In Chapter 28, which also holds their very first encounter in the novel, Kirilow amputates Kora's infected hand, an act that fittingly leads to the eventual discovery that Kora is a starfish. This initial incident thus, in a way, ensures their narrative fate. One of the most compelling chapters in the sequence that follows, structurally, is Chapter 34, in which Kirilow and Kora are captives of the latter's brother, K2, and the Tiger men: the chapter contains eleven fragments that document their confinement at patriarchal hands over a certain period of time—for Kora, especially, she comes to terms with the true role of the men in her family in producing the narrative's titular pandemic and all the while being imprisoned by her brother. This relationship between brother and sister is another that speaks to a broader social system in the patriarchy, one that is a legacy even from a past that lingers in the narrative present—especially upon learning of this horrific family lineage—and that persists in collective ideologies that in reality build but end up outlasting nationalism in the aftermath of a speculative apocalyptic event. Chapter 34 is also an affective exercise in remembering, documenting, and narrativizing—the acknowledgment of past and present systemic injustices. Interestingly enough, as Figure 5 shows, Kirilow is diligent and regular in this exercise by way of her mental journal to which readers are privy; even though she does not always document which day of captivity it has been, we have enough clues based on the number of fragments, or "entries," and the total number of days revealed in the final entry:

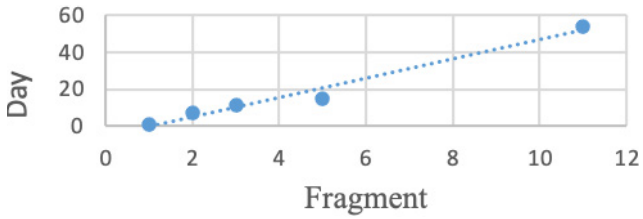

Figure 5: Chapter 34 Narrative Breakdown

This sequence is significant: it documents the trials and solidification of Kora and Kirilow's relationship, as recounted by the latter with as much dedication as difficulty. It also marks—or attempts to mark—the passing of time without the telltale orbits of Eng and Chang, which hold important roles as temporal markers throughout the rest of the narrative. What is also curious for such a meaningful chapter is that it opens and closes with important references to and discoveries about the satellites Eng, controlled by the great inventer, Isabelle Chow, and Chang, taken over by the leader of the Tiger men, Marcus Traskin. In the opening fragment of the chapter, Kirilow wonders whether her "Old Glorybind [is] alive and well at Quay D'Espoir on Eng with Kora's mother and father," eventually concluding that "[i]t's more likely she's a captive on Marcus Traskin's Chang" (232). The implication in Kirilow's thinking is that of a gendered threat, where Traskin's Chang holds "captives"—of course, at the end of the chapter, her premonition is proven correct when Kora deduces that, once the Grist sisters are uploaded to Chang, their bodies become the fish that the two prisoners had been eating while captives themselves.

The satellites are crucial for a number of reasons. Because of the powerful figures that own them respectively, they are inherently gendered—celestial bodies that represent the ongoing conflict on Earth, reinforcing the patriarchal struggle framed by the flu. But the satellites are also constants, reminders of these social systems that endure beyond the apocalypse; their orbit measures the passing of time in an ongoing cycle. In fact, Eng is mentioned a grand total of 72 times in the novel, while Chang is invoked a whopping 92 times. As Kirilow even mentions during their captivity, with a hint of unwitting irony: [w]ithout the light of Chang or Eng, it's hard to understand the passing of time. We mark the days by the fish dinners that come through the grate, two each per day" (235). Ironic because, as readers learn, consciousnesses can be uploaded and downloaded to and from Eng and Chang, and the fish that Kora and Kirilow are eating are what becomes of the Grist sisters as they are being uploaded to Chang.

The satellites symbolize a legacy persisting—a kind of continuance of patriarchal cultural memory and influence—from pre- to post-apocalypse, the survival of people, certainly, but moreover of the constructs of power that were rebuilt out from relationships to social collectives. The following figure demonstrates the distribution of Eng and Chang mentions over the course of the novel, in which Chang, the satellite that Traskin has overtaken, that is controlled by the Tiger Men, and that painfully transforms the Grist sisters into fish that Kirilow and Kora eat, clearly and steadily looms as a threatening presence, even if not overwhelmingly:

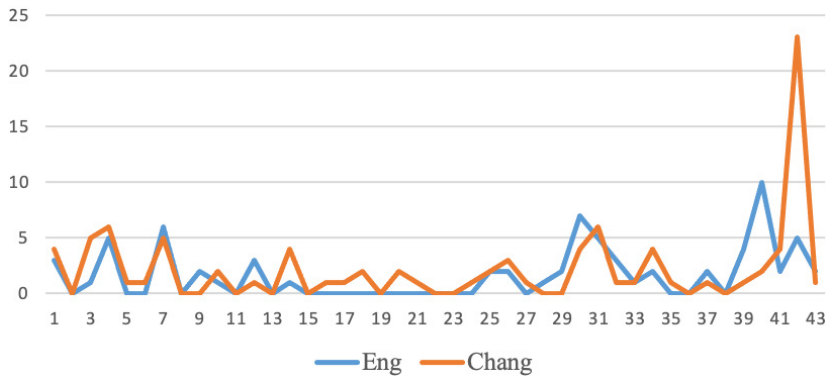

Figure 6: Eng versus Chang Mentions per Chapter

Even with the majority of the men dead or sickly from the flu, in a world in which women can clone themselves, the patriarchal struggle for power thus continues and causes chaos and new types of threats to women, once again revealing the ways in which western, social, hierarchichal constructs are the real power underlying nationalist agendas since they survive beyond the collapse of nations in this speculative future.

These technological endeavours speak to other issues that already preoccupy humanity, as well. "In Lai's novel," Mónica Calvo Pascual argues, "the enhancement of human beings through technology centers on control over knowledge or intellectual enhancement. The inhabitants of Saltwater City no longer cultivate their minds and memories by means of reading or studying; instead, they purchase implants of different prices that they can insert in their skulls and other body parts in order to remotely access the information stored in Chang and Eng" (103). One of the key problems, here, is that the race for the dominance over technology, of transhumanism or the cybernetic-transcendence of the human—the body, in particular—is merely a continuation of the current pursuit, one that also breeds social hierarchies based on exploitation and accessibility. Meanwhile, Calvo Pascual sees the Grist Village as a collective form of critical posthumanism that stands in "clear contrast to this technologized, money-driven scenario" (104). "Critical posthumanism," for Calvo Pascual, and based chiefly on Braidotti's work, "denounces this fantasy of human dematerialization, while defending the notion of embedded embodiment, or corporeality as embedded in an environment that includes and considers vegetable, animal, human, and mechanic lives at the same level" (105). This focus on embodiment, as I have argued, is a recurring theme in Lai's novel and critical writing—one that she seems to believe can perturb social power systems that underscore nationalist power structures.

In any case, what *The Tiger Flu* illustrates is that we can imagine devastating apocalyptic futures which wipe out nation-states and governments, but also that to erode the pillars that support them—in this case, patriarchal, white supremacist systems, especially—in this imagination is nearly impossible to do. They live on, replicate through memory and relationships. In turn, such representation reflects back on our current realities with respect to the influence of the nation: national and governmental platitudes have the potential to deceive and distract us so that the actual systems of power remain in place and in control. Yet, as Lai's novel and criticism also inform us, speculative fiction, and perhaps especially apocalyptic works, have the ability to cause eruptions that can interrupt these systems and our understanding of our place within them.

Conclusion

While this paper has merely traced a particular trajectory in dealing with the current "nation-trap" that continues to threaten to lull us into complacency so that systems of power may persist, in addition to a brief demonstration of new ways to break down and visualize texts, it offers potential in terms of innovative research approaches. The speculative, apocalyptic genre and its temporal paradigm, in particular, empower writers to imagine futures that have altered or been stripped of present geopolitical systems, "unveiling"—almost in a Book of Revelations sense—inner power dynamics, how deeply rooted they can be, and how nation states can thrive on them. Digital tools, combined with our expertise as humanists, is simply one means of identifying these dynamics and better understanding how they operate at present, especially at a time when technology is growing rapidly to include its own hierarchies that exploit and influence society and national operations of surveillance and oppression while promoting accessibility and connection.

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"Civilizing" the "Barbaric" Child: The Case of the Khadrs

Sharifa Patel

shpatel@mta.ca

Mount Allison University, Canada

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ABSTRACT
In this article I explore the Khadr family through shifting Canadian news media representations and the CBC's documentaries, "Al Qaeda's Family" and "Out of the Shadows." Omar Khadr and his parents, Maha Elsamnah and Ahmed Khadr, came to be framed as a "bad" Muslim family as a result of supposed failed (Muslim) parenting. I interrogate how media attach Omar Khadr's acts of violence to orientalist images of the violent (terrorist) Muslim family, and framed Elsamnah and Ahmed Khadr as foreign and un-Canadian parents, unable and unwilling to socialize their children within the Canadian state order. When Omar Khadr was released from prison, it was only under the guidance of his white lawyer, Dennis Edney, that he could be rehabilitated and brought back into Canadian society in Canadian news media framings. In order for Khadr to be portrayed as worthy of reentering Canada, images of him practicing his religion, wearing non-Western clothing, and even speaking Arabic were subdued. It is within the images of Khadr in the Edney home, severing his relationship with his family, that the Canadian public could be reassured that Khadr would be able to reinvent himself as a Canadian citizen, a child soldier, rather than a Muslim terrorist.

Keywords
Omar Khadr; Family; Canada; Terror; News Media; Race; Gender; Adoption.

On 11 October 2001, *The Globe and Mail* published an article titled, "Muslim Militant or Family Man: Terrorist Suspect has Many Faces" (Stackhouse A4). The article is about Omar Khadr's father Ahmed Said Khadr, whom media frequently describe as the "patriarch" of the "first family of terrorism in Canada" (Blatchford, "The Rule of Law, Upheld" A21; Blatchford, "Sitting Down for the Judge" A6; Greenberg A16; "Unleashing CSIS" A11; Ziyaad D8). What is striking about this article's title is the word "or," as if fatherhood and violence are mutually exclusive. That the senior Khadr could be a Muslim man involved in militancy and have a family is newsworthy.[1] What exactly makes fatherhood and violence incongruent with one another? There seems to be a disconnect between fatherhood and violence, and there also seems to be a leap in popular media where fathers who are accused of terrorism are connected to violence within the home and therefore disconnected from Canadian fatherhood. In a Canadian context, Canadian fathers are often imagined as non-violent; theories around the home as a space that is conceptually safe and comforting informs myths about normative Canadian families, even though feminist analyses of the "home" illustrate that this space rarely meets this ideal (Hill Collins 68).

In order to delve into how family and parenting are conceptualized in connection to portrayals of Muslim families in Canada, I examine Canadian news media's shifting representations of Omar Khadr and his parents, Maha Elsamnah and Ahmed Khadr, to explore how they came to be framed as a "bad" Muslim family as a result of supposed failed (Muslim) parenting.[2] As a result, when Omar Khadr was released from prison, it was only under the guidance of his white lawyer, Dennis Edney, that he could be rehabilitated and brought back into Canadian society in Canadian media and state framings. For Khadr to reintegrate into Canadian society and exist as a Canadian citizen who is not

1. Another example is when CBC's *The National* released "Al Qaeda's Family." The *Washington Post* published an article soon after titled, "TV Film Portrays Bin Laden as Father." The article states, "A Canadian television documentary about a family closely linked to Osama bin Laden portrays the al Qaeda chief as a family man who banned ice in drinks, loves volleyball and has trouble controlling his children" (Ljunggren). In the CBC's *The National*'s interview, Zaynab Khadr and Abdurahman emphasized that bin Laden was a "normal human being," a "father," and "a person," and that he made time to read poetry with his children, and played sports and games with the children in the communities (McKenna, "Al Qaeda's Family").

2. I draw on the concepts of "good" and "bad" Muslims, and further, "good" immigrants and "bad" immigrants, from Mahmood Mamdani's work; Mamdani argues all Muslims are assumed to be "bad" until proven to be "good" (15). Mamdani explains that "good Muslims are modern, secular, and Westernized, but bad Muslims are doctrinal, anti-modern, and virulent" (24).

perceived as a threat to the public, Canadian law demanded that he distance himself from his family. This is evident in some of his bail conditions which not only required Khadr to live with the Edneys, but also indicated that he could only leave Alberta to go to the Edneys' vacation home in B.C., and that he could only speak to his family in English under Dennis Edney's supervision.

I examine how shifting media representations of the Khadrs draw on the family's incongruences with normative understandings of Canadian families as non-violent and how such representations demonstrate parallels between race and the "good" family. Canadian media portrayals raise doubts about Ahmed Khadr and Maha Elsamnah's parenting which open up questions about normative "safe" homes and normative motherhood and fatherhood. Media portrayed how Elsamnah and Ahmed Khadr, framed as foreign and un-Canadian, produced and nurtured children who were prone to violence. In the latter half of this article, I explore how the Canadian state becomes the saviour of Omar Khadr. The image of the violent Muslim home relies on the image of the "good" Canadian home and orientalist perceptions of Muslim motherhood and fatherhood. As a result, in much of the news media coverage of Khadr being unable to reconnect with his family, the question of loss does not arise as a negative repercussion of being placed in the Edneys' home in media narratives. What Khadr loses in terms of his kinship, religion, and culture are not framed as losses that should be mourned.

Images of "dangerous Muslim men" and "imperiled Muslim women" (Razack, *Casting Out*) bleed into the private sphere and inform framings of supposedly violent Muslim families. The image of the "bad" Muslim family is measured against the image of the "good" Canadian family: while the "bad" Muslim family is constituted as patriarchal, polygamous, prone to domestic violence, and encourages children to put culture and religion first, the "good" Canadian family is egalitarian, monogamous, safe, and allows children to be individuals. The purportedly "bad" Muslim family is imagined as the reproductive site of "terrorist pathology" (Bhattacharyya 56-57; Puar, "Genealogies of Terrorism" par. 4; Razack, "The Manufacture" 63-64), and is associated with images of the "terrorist" father who is an "Oriental despot" (Razack, *Casting Out* "Monster Terrorist" par. 1). The image in popular media of the Western father (which is closely linked to how white Canadian fathers are conceptualized) as heroic, protective, self-sacrificing, and never violent towards his partner and children emerges in opposition to images of the Eastern father, who is authoritarian, hostile, a patriarch, and who rules his home employing violence against his wife and children. The Eastern home in many Western representations is associated with "custom" and "tradition," a space rife with generational conflict, where children must reproduce the ideologies that their parents supposedly impose on them (Ahmed 134-135). Even prior to 9/11, media tended to focus

on women of colour specifically if they discussed the abuse they experienced at the hands of those in their communities (Jiwani, "On the Outskirts" 60). Sunera Thobani explores in depth how the immigrant family in Canada (with whom the Muslim family is often associated) is "constituted as hyperpatriarchal at best, and pathologically dysfunctional at worst" (109). In popular depictions of immigrant families, we see how breaking from their family and tradition helps to align immigrant women and children with the Western nation (Ahmed 148).

With that said, the imagined "good" Canadian family can also include Muslim Canadian families. For Muslim women to be read as "good," for example, they must reproduce the ideologies of the Canadian nation. Jasmin Zine argues that women covering their heads or faces are not only seen as undesirable immigrants and citizens, but they are also portrayed as a threat to the nation itself (147). Muslim women who are anti-hijabi and publicly express their gratitude for the West's attempts to "liberate" Muslim women are portrayed as "good" Muslim women, while purportedly "bad" Muslim women continue to veil themselves (Thobani 237), and resist the West's philanthropic interventions to "save" them. "Bad" Muslim women are viewed as being oblivious to the male dominance in Muslim communities, and they are seen to embrace Islam without simultaneously embracing Western norms and values (Thobani 237). Gargi Bhattacharyya argues that the "extremist mother" emerges as a figure who "conflate[s] motherly love and filial duty with celebrations of violence," and is willing to sacrifice her children in the name of culture and/or religion (53). The figure of the "extremist mother" is said to facilitate in reproducing terrorist violence that finds its roots in failed parenting, which is evidenced in the lack of "affective family relations" that purportedly produce balanced citizens in the West (53). Muslim women's supposed capacity to reproduce children that will pursue extremist Muslim religious ideologies and violence means that the figure of the "bad" Muslim woman can literally give life to the terrorist.

Disassociating the normative "egalitarian" Western home from the purportedly violent and "despotic" Eastern home that forces (violent) "culture" and/or religion on children, works to reaffirm the "goodness" of white Canadian parents and the Canadian state, as well as affirm the "goodness" of ethnic bodies that adhere to normative family dynamics through processes of assimilation that leave traditions "behind." Affirming orientalist framings of the "dysfunctional" Muslim family (assumed to be immigrants) helps to consolidate the white Canadian family in media narratives as the "good" family, that is nuclear, hetero/homonormative, and nonviolent, where children are able to be individuals who can choose who they want to be and are not attached to tradition or religion.

In a Canadian context, one can cite numerous examples of how the nation reproduces images of the "good family," even if these ideals are not consistently performed by Canada's citizenry. The state shapes the rhetoric around family

and ties it to nation building (Beaman 13), and deciphers which families are named as worthy of the rights of Canadian citizenship because they are presented as conforming to Canadian family "values," such as those who are heteronormative and middle-class, produce non-violent and consistency children, and adhere to dominant marriage and kinship norms. Franca Iacovetta's work on the International Institute of Metropolitan Toronto illustrates that this Institute operated in the post-WWII years and counsellors encouraged clients to pursue a "stable family environment," which ideally consisted of working husbands, and moral and loving mothers who kept house (Iacovetta 272). "Financial success" was viewed by the Institute's director as necessary for immigrants to adjust in Canada (Iacovetta 272). Thobani argues, too, that in the post-WWII era, the emergence of the welfare state facilitated the reconstitution of Canadians as compassionate and caring citizens, and their families, by extension, were constructed as egalitarian despite the existence of classism and heterosexism within them (108). The traditional, nuclear, middle-class family ideal is central to the formation of the Canadian nation, which necessarily differentiated the experiences of Indigenous families and families of colour (Thobani 113). The state dictates which family formations are legitimate, and which types of families are healthy for children, that is: which families will foster children's growth as future consistency citizens?

Leti Volpp argues that in the post-9/11 era, nationalist discourses have reinscribed Western gender roles (which are linked to traditional Canadian family formations) through the masculine citizen-soldier, the patriotic wife and mother, and the properly reproductive family (1590). Catherine Scott, too, explains that media narratives in the post-9/11 era depicted the Taliban and Saddam Hussein as using their power to indoctrinate youth, while media depicted U.S. soldiers as "restoring kids' worlds in ways that look similar to US kids" (102). Scott states that, even though women served in the U.S. military in record numbers after 9/11, media narratives still focused on male soldiers protecting families in the U.S. and a domestic sphere mostly made up of women and children back home (110). In this way, the War on Terror was also depicted as a fight to maintain the traditional family structure, where protecting domestic life seemed natural (Scott 110). Thus, the War on Terror secured Western (white) male identity as it (re)asserted the male citizen as the protector of women and their bodies (Rygiel 151).

Methodology

Since Omar Khadr's incarceration in 2002, he has garnered intense media attention. Using "Omar Khadr" as the keyword searches in both *The Globe and Mail* and *The National Post*, it became evident quickly that the coverage of Omar

Khadr frequently referenced his father. I also chose to include an analysis of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's (CBC)'s documentaries "Al Qaeda's Family" and "Out of the Shadows" because so much of what is written about the Khadrs, both within news media and academic analyses, include references to the former documentary. "Out of the Shadows" was Omar Khadr's first public interview after his release from Canadian prison. Though "Out of the Shadows" is seemingly sympathetic to Omar Khadr, the documentary illustrates how the Canadian state disciplines racialized bodies into adhering to the state order, and it is through this adherence that portrayals of Omar Khadr shift from the "terrorist child" of a "fundamentalist family" who should be evicted from the nation, to the misguided child soldier who should be saved by the nation under the supervision of his white lawyer, Dennis Edney, and his family.

Omar Khadr

In 2002, news broke that U.S. military forces had detained Ahmed Khadr's second youngest son, Omar Khadr. Omar was detained at the age of 15 for allegedly throwing a grenade that killed a member of the U.S. military, Sergeant Speer, in Afghanistan. It is still unclear whether he was actually responsible for the death of the U.S. soldier.[3] He was held in Guantanamo Bay for ten years where he was interrogated by CSIS officials without legal counsel and subjected to various methods of torture. In addition, these agents knew that he had been subjected to sleep deprivation, and that the information gained would be shared with the U.S. In 2010, Omar accepted a plea bargain; he pled guilty to war crimes before a military commission so that he would be moved to a Canadian facility to continue an eight-year prison sentence. In 2012 he was moved to a Canadian maximum security prison and was released in Spring 2015 on bail, after which he lived with his lawyer, Dennis Edney. In 2017 it was leaked to the public that the Canadian government quietly offered Omar Khadr an apology and a $10.5 million settlement for violating his human rights under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This leak led to a frenzy of media attention debating whether or not Khadr was "deserving" of an apology and settlement, and what alternatives the government could have pursued. Omar Khadr was the last Western national left in Guantanamo Bay, and many argued that he should have been treated as a child soldier.

3. For example, there are changes in the battle report that originally state that the person who threw the grenade had died. See Shephard, "At Omar Khadr Hearing, U.S. Officer Explains Changing Battle Report," and Williamson (10-12).

Khadr Family Background

Ahmed Said Khadr immigrated to Canada from Egypt in 1975 and married Maha Elsamnah, a Canadian citizen from Palestine (Shephard 18-20). The couple had seven children, one of whom died in early childhood (Shephard 31). In 1985, during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, the Khadrs moved to Peshawar, Pakistan, and Ahmed Khadr worked for Human Concern International, a Canadian charity that helped Afghan refugees (Shephard 38). The family travelled back and forth between Pakistan and Canada, sometimes making more than one visit a year (Shephard 26). Ahmed Khadr began to appear in Canadian media when he was accused of financing the November 1995 bombing of the Egyptian embassy in Islamabad. Pakistani police took Ahmed Khadr into custody that December when he was interrogated for five days by both Egyptian and Pakistani officials, and was blindfolded, threatened, and had his hair pulled (Shephard 48-49). Pakistani authorities held Khadr without charges, and Elsamnah sought the help of the Canadian High Commission in Islamabad. In January 1996, then Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and Team Canada went on a trade mission to Pakistan, and it was there that Elsamnah pursued Team Canada, held a press conference, and met with Chrétien. Chrétien took up Khadr's case with the Bhutto government, and he was assured that Khadr would be granted a fair trial (Shephard 54). Pakistani authorities ended up charging Khadr, but, within three months of Chrétien's visit, he was released on bail and the charges were eventually dropped. Publicity about Ahmed Khadr's connection to Osama bin Laden in 1998, and further news media reports about this connection in 2001, would help to create what is now known as the "Khadr Effect." The "Khadr Effect" often refers to the reluctance of many politicians, including Chrétien, to advocate for Omar Khadr because of Chrétien's intervention for Ahmed Khadr, who turned out to be potentially involved in terrorism (Khan, "Politics Over Principles" 54; Kielburger 88; Macklin 222).

What the media chose to include in stories about Ahmed Khadr in their coverage of Omar Khadr is of central importance to this analysis. That certain aspects of Ahmed Khadr's life were repeatedly stated in Canadian media while other aspects of his life were not mentioned helped to construct Ahmed Khadr as a father who is a "Canadian of convenience" (Friscolanti, "Lawsuit to Target Khadrs" A1; Greenberg A16; Martin A14), and helped to disconnect him from Canadianness, and therefore, Canadian fatherhood. For example, Canadian media frequently mention that he and his family used the Canadian healthcare system while living abroad, but, while *The National Post* and *The Globe and Mail* mention that Ahmed Khadr went to the University of Ottawa, not once do they state that he held a master's degree in Engineering from the University. Media reports often note that the Khadrs went long periods of time without living in

Canada, which suggests to readers that the Khadrs did not attempt to Canadianize. Instead, politicians and media, throughout Omar Khadr's detention, excavated Ahmed Khadr and Elsamnah's history of accessing Canadian healthcare services. For example, in 2002, *The Globe* ran a story where they interviewed a family friend of the Khadrs. The article states that the Khadrs "gave up their quiet, middle-class existence after the Russian army invaded Afghanistan." The friend recalls "that the family returned to Ottawa a few years later to take advantage of Canadian health care" because Ahmed Khadr hurt his arm during a bombing (Freeze and Boyd A1). That Ahmed Khadr, once a middle-class father, moved his family from Canada, suggests that even those who appear to be "good" immigrants can be influenced by extremist Islamic ideology.

The Khadr family appears as Canadian in citizenship *only*, and not Canadian in terms of values or lifestyle choices. In another *Globe and Mail* article, Ahmed Khadr is named the father of a "viperous clan" and states that he "long exploited his Canadian citizenship and CIDA [Canadian International Development Agency] funding to support al-Qaeda's global jihad, only returning to Canada for free health care and to raise money in the mosques" (Grady, "From far and wide"). In this article, Ahmed Khadr is again represented as having abused the Canadian healthcare system and Canadian charity funds and exploiting the goodwill of Canadians. Khadr is not portrayed as a father who makes an honest living and raises a "respectable" family; rather he is portrayed as taking advantage of Canadian generosity. As a result, in these depictions, Canadians emerge as generous and kind, and the "bad" Muslim family emerges as abusing the system and the kindness of fellow citizens.

Maha Elsamnah: Framing the "Mother of Terror"

Elsamnah is a key figure in the imagining of the "bad" Muslim family that does not assimilate to Canadian customs. Historical narratives of "good" mothers in Canada inform media framings of Elsamnah as a mother who has led her children to the violence of terrorism. Mariana Valverde traces how feminist ideologies in Canada, particularly first wave feminism, were based in the eugenics movement and ensured that the "mothers of the race" were racially pure (Anglo-Saxon and Protestant), but she also argues that often race was not specifically named. Valverde explains that rather than naming race as a physical characteristic that made women of colour less suited for motherhood, it was suggested that they came from cultures that made them less fit as mothers (20). The Canadian government also attempted to regulate the sexuality and fertility of women from "non-preferred" races because they were said to pose a threat to the "nation's purity" (Thobani 109). To restrict the fertility of women

that supposedly threatened the state's "purity," sterilization of economically disadvantaged women, Indigenous women, and people with disabilities were conducted so that they would not reproduce citizens who were thought to be "unfit" (Stote 125). Therefore, immigrant women (with whom Muslim women are often associated) have historically garnered state attention for their pivotal role in ensuring that their children assimilate and become "productive" members in Canadian society.

The Khadrs are portrayed as having too many children, denying their children adequate education, and passing on anti-West ideology to their children. Frequent references in Canadian news media to the number of Khadr children are noteworthy as concerns about immigrant women's fertility are heavily connected to ideologies around racial purity ("A Quick Sketch"; Bell, "FBI Hunts" A1; Bell, "Khadr Does not Want" A1; Bell, "Khadr Killed" A1; Bell, "Khadrs Reveal" A1; Bell, "RCMP Fears Return of Family" A4; Freeze, "Black Sheep" 1; Freeze, "CSIS Watches" 1; Freeze, "Khadrs Backed" 1; Mackinnon and Freeze 1; Vincent A1) . Elsamnah's fecundity is also portrayed as troubling because she is represented in numerous news articles as having instilled a hyper-misogynist Muslim culture in her children. There were reports in Canadian news media, for example, that she wanted her sons to be "Islamic warriors" (Freeze, "Khadrs Backed" 1), training camps in Afghanistan instilled "proper values" in her sons (Freeze, "No Connection" A3), and that raising her children would result in "drugs [use] and homosexual relationships" (Greco, "Keeping up with the Khadrs"). As Enakshi Dua reminds us, white middle and upper-class women were not just responsible for biological reproduction, but also the social reproduction of the next generation of empire-builders (252). Therefore, representations of "good" mothers involve socialization of their children into Canadian "values," such as consistency ideologies, and the Canadian state's narrow definitions of gender equality.

Elsamnah defied normative framings of the "imperiled Muslim woman" (Razack, "A Typical Month" *Casting Out* par. 4), when in 2004 she appeared in the CBC documentary, "Al Qaeda's Family" (which aired on their flagship news program *The National* and was also taken up by *PBS Frontline* using the title, "Son of al-Qaeda"). Her autonomy in this documentary appeared as sinister and disruptive to national narratives of womanhood, where the state encourages women to become part of the imperial machinery. Elsamnah appeared with her eldest daughter Zaynab Khadr in the documentary, both wearing the niqab (6:50-7:45) and they made it clear that they did not reproduce the ideologies of Canadian nationalism. Their criticism of Western interventions in the Middle East in this segment, particularly in the immediate post-9/11 climate, framed Elsamnah as anti-Canadian because politicians and many media presented the invasion of Afghanistan as a mission to save Afghan women from the horrors of the Taliban's patriarchy (6:50-7:45). Elsamnah and Zaynab Khadr attempted

to contextualize their position within a wider system of global politics of resistance, particularly in Afghanistan, which had been plagued by decades of occupation, first by British colonial rule, then by the Russians in 1979, and the United States in 2001. Their statements, however, were often interpreted in both news media and political conversations as supporting terrorism and suggesting 9/11 victims deserved violence, rather than a criticism of U.S. global imperialism. As then President George W. Bush stated: "Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists" ("President Bush Addresses the Nation"), homogenizing any opposition to the U.S. invasion as supporters of the Taliban. Bush's framework ensured that any resistances to the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan would be read as support for terrorism, and within this context, Elsamnah's comments immediately aligned her with terrorist violence in Western media portrayals.

Sherene Razack explores how, even during Omar Khadr's trial, his military lawyer, Bill Kuebler, brought up Elsamnah and Zaynab Khadr's comments in "Al Qaeda's Family," and took up the argument that the Khadr family should be held responsible for Omar Khadr's circumstances; it was not the justice system that had wronged Omar Khadr, it was his family (69). Omar Khadr's alleged acts of violence were framed as connected to his mother's comments and as something for which he should be held responsible. Omar Khadr was unable to be disaggregated from his parents' actions. Elsamnah and her eldest daughter Zaynab's statements were frequently referenced in media reports as proof of the Khadrs' disloyalty to the West, and Canada specifically. Elsamnah is framed by news media, and also frames herself, as an extension of her husband's character. She is represented as willing to submit to patriarchal Islamic ideologies and willing to accept her own subordination and the subordination of her daughters. Such media framings invariably invoke narratives of Canadian benevolence in understanding Elsamnah, as they present Canada as a place where Muslim women are freed from their "patriarchal cultures." But, instead of seeking a "better life," Elsamnah is represented as squandering the opportunities that Canada so generously offered her.

In her analysis of this segment, Yasmin Jiwani explains that Elsamnah appears here as the "extremist mother" (a term she borrows from Bhattacharyya 51-52) ("Trapped in the Carceral Net" 22). She explains that Elsamnah comes to be perceived as a dangerous Muslim woman, a mother figure who is "regarded as inept, fostering irrational hatred in her offspring" (Jiwani 22). Elsamnah was not represented as a grieving mother whose child was detained in Guantanamo Bay, or as a Muslim woman who is the victim of patriarchal religion and culture, and therefore was not portrayed as "worthy" of the viewer's compassion (Jiwani 378). As a supporter, or even an active participant, in a religion, culture, and family that is deemed hyper-misogynist and supportive of terrorism, she emerges as the extremist mother, and, like her children, she is seen as

someone who must be contained (Jiwani 378). Elsamnah was presented, and in some respects presented herself, as everything a purportedly "good" Canadian mother should not be: a strain on social services, homophobic, against Western interventions (particularly to "save" women), and the mother of many overly violent and hypermasculine children. Canadian media and politicians ensured that Elsamnah's statements would remain at the fore of Omar Khadr's case. Media reference this footage repeatedly when reporting on Omar Khadr, so that some have argued that Elsamnah and Zaynab Khadr's interview negatively affected Omar Khadr's circumstances (Kielburger 88; Macklin 222).

The Metaphorical Adoption

Omar Khadr was deemed a terrorist by most Canadian media, but more recently has received some sympathetic media coverage. In 2015 Khadr was released on bail from prison in Canada, and went to live with his lawyer, Dennis Edney. Shortly after his release, the CBC aired a new documentary, "Omar Khadr: Out of the Shadows," where the Canadian public had the opportunity to hear from Omar Khadr himself. Dennis Edney appears at the beginning of the documentary in his home with his wife, Patricia Edney, as they discuss Khadr's case prior to his release. Dennis Edney lets reporters know that Khadr will not have a "lengthy conversation" with them but explains that Khadr needs to address the Canadian public (Reed 00:3:20-3:40). Khadr stands outside the house and speaks to reporters; he is jovial at times as he jokes with reporters and Dennis Edney (00:04:10-04:44). Dennis and Patricia Edney appear as guardians to Omar Khadr, as he stays in their home and attempts to reestablish his life outside of detention. This documentary is in stark contrast to the images of the Khadr family to which the Canadian public were exposed in 2004 in "Al Qaeda's Family" where we see the Khadrs doing interviews in dark rooms and confined spaces; the Edney home, conversely, appears bright and airy. In "Out of the Shadows" the Edney home is quiet with birds chirping in the background (00:42:23), and this differs significantly from the prison footage of Omar Khadr (00:24:00-25:45), and the images of Omar Khadr's father in Afghanistan (00:16:41-17:40). In "Out of the Shadows" Omar Khadr is also literally out of the shadowy spaces of the Khadr family and in the light of the loving embrace of the Edney home. It is here that he develops a new kinship relationship with the Edneys, represented as a move away from his biological family. For Khadr to reinvent himself to the Canadian public as unthreatening and a respectable member of Canadian society, his family must also be reinvented: he must settle into a suburban life with his white lawyer, a life of vacation homes, two pet dogs, and bacon and eggs for breakfast (00:19:26).

Dennis Edney is represented as a paternal figure in this documentary, and indeed a paternal figure in much of the media coverage of Omar Khadr in the few months leading up to, and after, Omar Khadr's release. Patricia Edney explained in an interview with CBC's *As it Happens* that Dennis Edney, "has seen Omar grow from a young injured man—boy—to a tall confident, talented man" ("Patricia Edney" 00:03:36). Patricia Edney describes their life with Khadr, including going bike riding, shopping, and buying clothes together ("Patricia Edney" 00:0:45-1:10). This news media coverage of Khadr being taken into the home of the Edneys and adjusting to a new lifestyle (that is, the Edneys' lifestyle) brings Khadr closer to Canadianness by demonstrating his ability to assimilate into a new life, and a new *family*. Taking on a new family is what the Canadian state legally demanded of Khadr if he wanted to leave prison, but the Canadian state here also intervenes to "protect" Khadr from his family. His childhood, in "Out of the Shadows," is fraught with violence, wars, and foreignness, inhabited by people wearing non-Western clothing and speaking foreign languages—this part of his life is portrayed as something other than Canadian (00:10:15-11:00; 00:11:20-11:35; 00:12:00-14:00). In "Out of the Shadows" Khadr is not shown practicing Islam and he is always in Western garb. He speaks eloquently about the employment and education that he wants to pursue, bringing him in closer proximity to the normative Canadian young adult (00:41:00-00:42:10). It is also noteworthy that Dennis Edney is originally from Scotland, and Khadr from Canada, but it is Dennis Edney who brings Khadr closer to Canadianness. In this way Canadianness gets tied to whiteness and white bodies, as we witness benevolent white parents intervene when parents of colour are said to "fail" their children. For example, as Khadr and Dennis Edney sit outside the Edneys' home in the documentary, Dennis Edney states: "I was aware that every adult figure that you had come in touch with had misused you, including your father" (00:27:45-27:55).

The documentary has an affective quality, where the Edneys' bright home is frequently inhabited by smiling or laughing people. Sara Ahmed describes how the feeling of happiness becomes associated with particular objects (25), but she also argues that certain objects also "come to embody a good life" (33). Happiness teaches us to be affected by objects in the "right way" (Ahmed 36) and Khadr's proximity to the happy objects in the documentary make him appear as though he is also in close proximity to a "good life," that is, a Canadian life. If family life is supposed to be a space of happiness (Ahmed 45), in "Out of the Shadows, the Edneys offer Khadr the happiness that his own family did not. This happiness comes through the images of a happy *Canadian* family where children can make choices and be free individuals. As Ahmed argues, in the West it is assumed that people are individuals who can be whoever they want (134). If audiences are to believe that Khadr is no longer the terrorist other,

and really is in the process of rehabilitation, viewers must see Khadr as being integrated into Canadian multicultural ethos where his racial and cultural differences are subdued.

In this documentary, Khadr is surrounded by a middle-class life of comfort, choice, and consumption, where he is free to choose what he eats for breakfast, shop for the clothes that he likes to wear, or go on a hike or bike ride. While representations of Khadr once situated him within a family that forced him into a life of jihad, there is a shift in the documentary that reframes the Canadian state as providing him with the choice to pursue a life of happiness. Khadr, in other words, in "Out of the Shadows," can be an individual who is not influenced by his family's religious ideology and hatred for the West; as Ahmed argues, "Freedom takes form as proximity to whiteness" (135). What remains unaccounted for are the political, social, and economic factors that produce the "happy" Canadian family, but that also produce the conditions of war that created the purportedly "bad" Muslim family.

Other Canadian media reproduced this narrative of rehabilitation through Khadr's association with the Edneys as well. Khadr's supporters often agreed with his separation from his family so that he could be rehabilitated and reintegrated into Canadian society, which reifies normative white Canadian identity and fails to challenge how these discourses draw on the systemic injustices that many "hyphenated" Canadians experience every day (Mackey 120-121). For example, *Maclean's* ran a story titled, "Omar Khadr's Next Home" which includes an interview with Dennis Edney. The article states that Omar Khadr was "shuttled between Pakistan and Afghanistan" (but not Canada), where he once lived on a compound with Osama bin Laden (Friscolanti, "Omar Khadr's Next Home"). The article actually states that Omar Khadr has little connection to Canada: "Khadr will walk into a home—and a world, for that matter—he has never seen. Even before he was locked up, he had little connection to the West; though born in Canada, he lived here only a few weeks before 9/11, when an uncle took him to a Toronto Blue Jays game" (Friscolanti). The mention of 9/11 discursively links Omar Khadr to the attack, and there is no mention of Khadr's grandparents who live in Toronto, nor is there mention of the Khadr family moving back and forth to Canada. Disconnecting Khadr from Canada and the West implies that the Edney family will be what (re)connects him to Canada. Home for Khadr now, the article tells us, will be "an upscale Edmonton neighbourhood, where he will share suppers with his lawyer's family and walk their dogs (Jasper and Molly, both labs) around the block" (Friscolanti). We see this emphasis on the Edneys' dogs in "Out of the Shadows" as well, where the camera frequently pans to the dogs (00:01:24; 00:18:42; 00:19:27: 00:20:25; 00:26:39; 00:36:18; 00:40:14). These images of dogs in the Edney home help to illustrate the homeliness of the space where even the animals are happy. It is also noteworthy that

permitting dogs in the home is a controversial topic in Islam, and therefore, many Muslim households do not allow dogs inside the home.[4] Dogs, then, become a marker of a home that is not stereotypically a Muslim home, thus, shifting the portrayal of Khadr away from Muslimness and bringing him closer to a home that is not depicted as "tainted" with Islamic ideology.

The *Maclean's* article quotes Dennis Edney: "He can look forward to a loving household and solid family…A family that has good values, a family that talks to each other, a family that hugs and kisses each other. I say it with a bit of pride: Our family is not a bad place to start" (Friscolanti, "Omar Khadr's Next Home"). Including this quote marks the Edney family as everything the Khadr family is not: a family that loves, shows affection, but most importantly has *good* values; whatever "good" values are, the Khadr family does not possess them in this statement because it is the Edney family that is stated to be providing the "start" of this kind of family life for Khadr. We do not see images of the Khadr family's displays of affection toward each other, but we see Patricia Edney hug Omar (00:18:51), and Dennis gives him a kiss on the forehead in "Out of the Shadows" (00:42:24). There is an attempt in this scene to tame difference. In such representational frameworks, Khadr's integration into Canadian society, and his ability to be Canadian comes through the Canadian state's and the Edney family's redirection of Khadr towards whiteness. Dennis Edney makes this clear when he says that Khadr can sleep in any bedroom he chooses, but he will encourage him to sleep on the second floor so that he can better "integrate into [their] family" (Friscolanti, "Omar Khadr's Next Home"). The article continues, "Khadr's real family, long linked to al-Qaeda, will be allowed to phone but Edney is clear: 'My home is open for Omar. It's not for the Khadrs'" (Friscolanti, "Omar Khadr's Next Home"). In this media framing, it is in this home where Khadr will/can reestablish himself in a "good" Canadian family as a rehabilitated Canadian citizen, distanced from his family and Muslim ideology. That is, Khadr can be allowed back into the Canadian public realm only after he has successfully and publicly replaced his Muslim birth parents with surrogate white parents.

The relationship between Khadr and the Edneys appears genuine in the documentary, but there are colonial and imperial power relations between white parents and racialized children that inform Canadian media representations of families that emphasize racial hierarchies. Given the histories, and the racial differences between white adoptive parents and racialized children, it

4. Although it is contested, dog ownership is not necessarily forbidden in Islam, but there are a number of Hadiths that discourage Muslims from keeping dogs in their houses (Subasi 42-56).

is difficult to analyze media narratives of Khadr and the Edneys' relationship outside the colonial encounter, as it reproduces some of the dangerous tropes where white parents "save" racialized children with the assistance of the Canadian state. David Eng analyzes how transnational and transracial adoption can involve loss but expressing loss is read as ingratitude to the white benevolent family that receives the racialized child (21). In "Out of the Shadows" it is implied that Khadr should be grateful that the Edneys are willing to take him into their home, and thankful that the Canadian state (and public) "gave [him] a chance" and allowed him to stay with the Edneys (00:40:40). The arc of the narrative in "Out of the Shadows" seems to imply that Khadr should be thankful for the opportunity to be incorporated into a white middle-class household.

Adoption in Canada is fraught with a long and violent history of removing Indigenous children from their homes in order to facilitate processes of assimilation. Removing children from Indigenous families in Canada is, and was, viewed as necessary for the project of empire. For example, the Canadian state frequently removes Indigenous children from their parents and places them in the custody of, often, white families. Contemporarily, there is an overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the child welfare system in Canada (Choate et. al. 2). Historically, the Adopt Indian and Metis Program of the 1960s was a method of removing many Indigenous children from their families and placing them in white homes, even when other family members could have adopted them. These adoptions facilitated the erasure of Indigenous cultures, histories, and languages through processes of assimilation (Sinclair 9). In the case of Indigenous children specifically, Allyson Stevenson states that, "The Sixties Scoop and contemporary child welfare legislation continue to erode kinship as a way of eliminating Indigenous nationhood" (quoted in Longman 16). It is often through assimilating children (through loss of language, culture, religion, and kinship) that Canadian nationalist ideals can be reproduced. While the instances of non-Indigenous children of colour and Omar Khadr are absolutely different than the circumstances of Indigenous children in Canada, there remains an attempt to produce children that will continue the project of empire. In the case of non-Indigenous children of colour in Canada, who are encouraged to assimilate, they must only display aspects of their cultures and religions that can be depoliticized and coopted in the interests of multiculturalism, in order to facilitate in continuing the colonial project of dispossessing Indigenous people of their land and resources. The relationship between the Edneys and Khadr does not erase the colonial encounter. There are racial power imbalances because Khadr will always be read as a marked body, and the circumstances that produce children like Khadr remain intact.

Conclusion

The media's focus on Ahmed Khadr and Maha Elsamnah repeatedly implies that terrorist violence is rooted in disturbed Muslim families. These narratives eclipse broader questions about what produces terrorism and, instead, acts of terrorist violence connected to unassimilable terrorist families lend themselves to anti-immigration policies and racist assumptions about Muslim families. Even narratives that are sympathetic to Omar Khadr still link his alleged act of violence to his parents' supposed indoctrination. Focusing on Ahmed Khadr and Elsamnah's parenting in media narratives exonerates the Canadian state and the Canadian public from their complicity in Omar Khadr's mistreatment. Once Khadr was released from prison, "Out of the Shadows" represented the Canadian state as able to reassert itself as the protector of children by ensuring that Khadr would be distanced from his family and placed in a home where he could be assimilated and reproduce the characteristics of normative Canadian citizenship.

Khadr distancing himself from his family and reestablishing himself in the Edney home in "Out of the Shadows" is represented as a positive shift for him. The trauma of Khadr's inability to communicate with his family without surveillance after years of detention is overshadowed by the representations of the affection shown to him by the Edney family. In order for Khadr to be portrayed to the Canadian public as a worthy citizen who should be permitted to reenter Canada, images of him practicing his religion, wearing non-Western clothing, or even speaking Arabic were subdued. The Canadian public, too, had to be reassured through the imagery in "Out of the Shadows" that Khadr would be able to reinvent himself as a Canadian citizen, a child soldier, rather than a terrorist through severing his relationship with his biological family and settling into the Edney home. It is only within the Edney home that the Canadian state decided that Khadr could be rehabilitated. In Khadr's portrayals in "Out of the Shadows," it is also within this home that Khadr can be assimilated and become a neoliberal citizen who will continue the Canadian state order. Khadr is not portrayed as upset or angry with how he was treated by the Canadian government, but is instead shown to be moving away from his family and their religious ideologies and settling into the Edney's *Canadian* lifestyle.

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Contributors

José V. Alegría Hernández is a PhD candidate at the University of La Laguna. He also holds a BA in English Studies from the University of La Laguna, and an MA in Comparative Literature from the University of Amsterdam. His PhD dissertation focuses on the representation of (un)happiness in Indigenous speculative short fiction, for which he has been granted a pre-doctoral contract (FPI) which is funded by the Ministry of Science and Innovation through the research project "The Premise of Happiness: The Function of Feelings in North American Narratives" (PID2020-113190GB-C21) and the research network "TransCanadian Networks" (RED2018-102643-T).

Matthew Cormier is a SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of English at the University of Toronto Scarborough. His current research intersects the digital humanities, memory studies, affect theory, and contemporary apocalyptic writing in Canada. The author of *Sieve Reading Beyond the Minor* (forthcoming UOttawa Press) and co-editor of *Digital Memory Agents in Canada* (under review U of A Press), his diverse work appears in several books as well as in journals such as *Studies in Canadian Literature*, *English Studies in Canada*, *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, *Canadian Poetry*, *American, British and Canadian Studies*, and *Canadian Review of American Studies*.

Alexei Perry Cox is a writer, teacher and organiser. Her poetry collection ~~*PLACE*~~ is now available (Noemi Press 2022) and her novella *coda: choice(s)* is forthcoming with Flint. She is the author of the full length poetry collection *Under Her* (Insomniac Press 2015) and three chapbooks, *Finding Places to Make Places* (Vallum 2019), *Re:Evolution* (Gap Riot Press 2020), and *Night 3* (Centre for Expanded Poetics 2021). Her work has been featured in journals such as *Denver Quarterly, Journal Safar, Moko, Arc Poetry Magazine* and many others.

Coral Anaid Díaz Cano is a researcher at the University of La Laguna. She holds an English Studies Degree and a Master's degree in Gender Studies, both from the University of La Laguna. In 2021 she received her PhD with a Thesis on

the representations of disability and illness in North American graphic narratives. She is a member of the research project "The Premise of Happiness: The Function of Feelings in North American Narratives" (PID2020-113190GB-C21) and the research network "TransCanadian Networks" (RED2018-102643-T). Her research interests include contemporary North American graphic narratives, disability studies, and crip theory.

Denisa Krásná is a doctoral candidate at the English Department of Masaryk University. She holds a Master's degree in North American Cultural Studies. Her research interests are Indigenous literatures and critical animal studies with a focus on the intersections between colonial gender violence and the exploitation of nonhuman animals and Indigenous lands. In her dissertation, she theorizes the emerging frameworks of anarcha-Indigenism and decolonial animal ethic that she also applies to literary analysis. Her case studies include decolonial artivist movements in Mexico, Canada, and Hawaii. She has published her research in international academic journals and edited collections and has presented at international conferences across North America and Europe.

Claudia Isabelle Miller is an Early-Career Researcher (FPI) at the University of La Laguna working on the representations of Arctic climate change in Inuit life writing for her doctoral dissertation under the auspices of a Predoctoral Contract of the Gobierno de Canarias, Consejería de Economía Conocimiento y Empleo with funding from the Social European Fund. She is currently part of the research project "The Premise of Happiness: The Function of Feelings in North American Narratives" (PID2020-113190GB-C21) and the research network "TransCanadian Networks" (RED2018-102643-T).

Sharifa Patel is the W.P. Bell Postdoctoral Fellow in the Canadian Studies Department at Mount Allison University. Her research explores news media and political conversations that portray Muslim homes as spaces of violence. Her work examines the settler colonial histories of contemporary Canadian policies that aim to prevent immigrant Muslim families that participate in non-normative family formations from entering Canada. Sharifa Patel is also one of the co-managing editors for the journal *Feral Feminisms*.

Janice Vis-Gitzel is a PhD Candidate, teaching assistant, and writing tutor at McMaster University. She is currently living, working, and learning in the territories of the Mississauga and Haudenosaunee Nations, where she spends most of her days lost in a forest or lost in a book. Her academic work sits at the intersections between environmental humanities, critical animal studies, and composition theory. She is also a creative writer, working primarily in creative non-fiction.

Florian Wagner is a research associate at the Institute for English and American Studies at Friedrich Schiller University Jena, where he completed his M.A. in North American Studies in 2018. He is currently writing his PhD thesis entitled "Revisiting the Environmental Imagination: Planetary Poetics in Contemporary Canadian Poetry" (wt), in which he is reading contemporary Canadian (eco-)poetry through a planetary lens. His work is situated at the intersection of ecocriticism, Marxist/post-capitalist criticism, and postcolonial and decolonial theory.

Emma Charlotte Weiher recently graduated from Philipps-University Marburg with a Master's Degree in North American Studies, having specialized in Canadian women's writing and contemporary poetry. She is currently preparing her dissertation as part of the International Graduate School "Resonant Self-World Relations" at Erfurt University. Her thesis will discuss the writings of female poets from Canada and the US and focus on the disembodied and impersonal self in contemporary North American poetry.

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