

**43rd Annual Conference of the
Association for Canadian Studies in
German-speaking Countries (GKS)**

February 17-19, 2022

**Emerging Scholars Colloquium
Ongoing Research Projects**

Booklet of Papers



**Organized and Edited by
Johanna Lederer and Manuel Sousa Oliveira**

***Emerging Scholars' Forum of the
Association for Canadian Studies in German-speaking Countries***





Gesellschaft für Kanada-Studien e.V.

**Beschreibung des Kolloquiums / Description of the Colloquium /
Description du colloque iv**

Artikel / Papers / Articles 5

 Settler Colonial Myths in the Coastal GasLink Conflict 5
 Frederik Blank

 Indigiqueer Homemaking: *Upcycling* Domestic Processes and *Becomings* in Queer
 Indigenous Literatures..... 16
 Elena Cortés Farrujia

 “They Were Not Human”: Rethinking Binaries, Bioethics, and Eco-realities in Selected
 Works of Margaret Atwood and Larissa Lai 22
 Sababa Monjur

 Revisiting the Environmental Imagination: Planetary Poetics in Contemporary Canadian
 Poetry 28
 Florian Wagner

Teilnehmer*innen / Participants / Participant.e.s 33

Organisator*innen / Organizers / Organisateur.rice.s..... 34

**Beschreibung des Kolloquiums /
Description of the Colloquium /
Description du colloque**

The *Emerging Scholars Colloquium: Ongoing Research Projects* hopes to offer a space for emerging scholars to share and discuss their ongoing research projects with peers and experts. We asked participants to prepare a 10-minute presentation of the main ideas of their MA or PhD projects, and of the key questions they would like to see discussed. Additionally, we asked them to write a longer paper that would allow for an in-depth look at issues that could not be addressed during their brief presentations. These papers are collected in this booklet. The contributions go beyond the overall conference topic of ecology, environmental studies, and ethics to address other issues relevant to the field of Canadian studies, such as queerness and Indigeneity.

To ensure that the exchange between emerging scholars, peers and experts is a fruitful one, the emphasis of the colloquium will be on the dialogue between participants and attendees. This exchange should allow participants to gain insightful new perspectives regarding their own projects. As such, we invite you to read the papers collected in this booklet and to participate in the ensuing discussion.

Settler Colonial Myths in the Coastal GasLink Conflict

Frederik Blank

John F. Kennedy Institute, Freie Universität Berlin

Introduction

Canada is commonly portrayed as “the better America” and seen as a friendly and welcoming place. Many people regard Canada as a region for adventurous outdoor trips and the country advertises its seemingly “peaceful” and “untouched wilderness.” The country is promoting human rights and gender equality, and has a “cool” Prime Minister – could Canada be the most liberal country in the world? In fact, these attributions conceal a very dark side of Canada and need to be put aside. The country of Canada evolved from a settler colonial project which committed genocide and pursued brutal assimilation tactics against the Indigenous populations. While the state of Canada publicly announces the will for reconciliation with Indigenous peoples and appears to show contrition for the crimes committed against Natives, settler colonialism has not ended in Canada.

To understand these realities the concept of *settler colonialism* will be applied. The focus of this research will lie particularly on one aspect of the concept of *settler colonialism*: *settler colonial myths*, or what Travis Woyt and Erin Morton call *tautologies* and *pioneer lies*. I argue that the Coastal GasLink (CGL) conflict between the Wet’suwet’en Nation and Canada exposes and reproduces settler colonial myths which are woven into the fabric of Canadian national identity. Accordingly, the concept of settler colonialism will be explained using examples of Canadian settler colonial practices. Then, some of the most common Canadian settler myths will be discussed. Subsequently, the Coastal GasLink conflict will be outlined, and it will be analyzed how these myths relate to the conflict which caused “Shut Down Canada” – the name under which solidarity actions throughout Canada became known.

Settler Colonialism and Canada

Settlers do not aim for Native labor or resources but land (Wolfe “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native” 387). Unlike migrants, settlers found new political orders

and carry their sovereignty with them, disregarding the existing sovereignties they encounter (Veracini, *The Settler Colonial Present* 40). The ultimate goal of settler colonialism is to eventually overcome colonialism and to establish a new (settler) society. Settlers operate in a space which is theorized as frontier which implies a “movable state of exception” (Rifkin) for Native peoples. The frontier moves along with the settlers until the territorial limit is reached. The frontier then turns inwards towards the land, and the formation of reservations begins. The core feature of settler colonialism is not “exploitation but replacement” and settler colonization is an ongoing and defining “structure not an event” (Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology* 163) of settler societies.

In the 19th century, “clearing the land” and advancing the frontier to the West took place by building a railway – the Canadian Pacific Railway (Maher). In contrast, pipelines are the railroads of the 21st century which are built through the remaining Indigenous territories, and “open Indigenous lands to increasing exploitation as well as playing a key role in the pre-emption of aboriginal title through their construction” (Barker et al. 159). Canada’s 21st century frontier has become an “energy frontier” where environmental disasters like oil spills and the destruction of Indigenous lands lead to violent removal of and high cancer rates among the Native population.

The injustices committed against Native peoples confront settlers with an uncomfortable truth, and they wish to rid themselves of their “settler guilt.” They meet this “difficult reality” with “moves to innocence” (Tuck and Yang 9). These moves include purposely changing narratives of the past and present by creating *settler myths*. Settler colonial myths are “strategies to maintain the colonial status quo” (Rotz et al.). First, settlers try to physically erase Indigenous people, and then they attempt an erasure on the symbolical level by hiding settler colonialism behind an established mythology.

Terra nullius

Terra nullius is a Latin term meaning land belonging to no one or nobody’s land. The term was used as a legal concept in the history of European settler colonialism to justify the conquest of allegedly empty Indigenous territories. Part of *terra nullius* was the *Doctrine of Discovery* which claimed that Europeans had “discovered” Indigenous territories (Denis 36). However, the land was not “empty” or “uncivilized wilderness;” the land was inhabited by

Indigenous peoples who had non-European understandings of property and a different relationship with nature. “The land the settlers conquered was cultivated to different degrees; it was a cultivated land, a historical landscape, not nature” (Mamdani 603–04). The concept of *terra nullius* continues to be entrenched in Canadian law and the myth is regularly used to assert territorial sovereignty of the Canadian state in conflicts of resource extraction when Indigenous land claims are challenging this alleged sovereignty.

“Peaceful frontier”

The “peaceful frontier” is a settler colonial myth that states that settler colonialism was gentler in the region which is now called Canada compared to e.g., the United States (Veracini, *Settler colonialism* 89). Therefore, historical narratives are created that mythologize settler colonialism as a non-violent event in which the frontier becomes an “intercultural contact zone” and Indigenous-settler relations are declared cooperative. In Canada itself there is even a further division of the “peaceful frontier” myth as French-Canadians claim that French colonialism was less violent than British imperialism (Wysote and Morton 1–2).

Part of this myth is the denial that genocide has been committed against Native peoples in Canada (Woolford and Benvenuto). Regarding physical genocide, half or more of the Indigenous inhabitants in what is now known as Canada died of diseases following contact with Europeans (Miller 49). Cultural genocide is also an ongoing threat to Indigenous peoples throughout Canada as assimilation efforts continue.

The “Mountie mythology”

Almost every Canadian child knows the figure of the “Mountie,” the nickname of the idealized Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) officers on horsebacks in their scarlet uniforms. They stand guard at the parliament and join the national anthem ceremonies at ice hockey games. Several movies and novels praise the police officers and the RCMP even signed a marketing contract with Walt Disney (Dawson 130-31). The RCMP is the fourth most important national symbol for Canadians, even before hockey (Statistics Canada). The public image of the Mounties is “very much a story of selective amnesia and successful public relations” (Dawson 129). The RCMP strategically shaped their public image and created a positive narrative which leaves out the force’s central role in the expansion of Canada’s western and northern frontiers. “Today’s RCMP is a direct descendant of the North-West

Mounted Police [NWMP], which was created in 1873 in order to promote the efficient colonization of Canada's newly acquired territories" (Dawson 130). This meant clearing land for settlers and confining Indigenous peoples to reservations (Steward). Today the RCMP still is the frontier police force "serving" 600 Indigenous communities (Dawson 130). This brings continuous racism and violence to these communities and Mumilaaq Qaqqaq calls death by RCMP a "common thing in Nunavut" (Forest-er, "Death by RCMP").

"The savage"

Referring to a Native person as "the savage" is a common racist attribution which transports the idea of the cultural superiority of "civilized" Europeans in contrast to the "savage" Natives. In this context, settlers are envisioned as superior, and portrayed as rational and strategic individuals. Conversely, Indigenous people are supposedly "irrational" and "impulsive" (Veracini, *The Settler Colonial Present* 72).

Attributed "savageness" refers to different genders in very different ways. Portrayals of Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQA¹ people as victims, docile, compliant, or as willing sexual objects for the taking are highly problematic (Ryan). Since hyper-sexualized images of Indigenous women* and girls persist in places like Canada, sexual violence against these groups is disproportionately more common than against other groups (Morin). The camps along worksites of Canada's resource extraction industry often house many men from outsider communities who carry these stereotyped images of Indigenous people with them. The structural relationship between man camps, where these workers are housed, and the *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* (MMIWG) genocide was acknowledged by a national inquiry in Canada (Gehl; Ridgen).

"The rule of law"

The phrase "rule of law" is weaponized in discourses on Indigenous-settler relations. When settlers use the phrase, they only refer to their own law and ignore Indigenous legal systems; "settlers frame Indigenous peoples as devoid of law – as lawless" (Rotz et al.). However, Indigenous legal systems have already existed for a very long time and "predate the arrival of British or French law in Canada by an order of magnitude so vast that it is

¹ 2SLGBTQQA stands for Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex and asexual.

difficult to grasp” (Raibmon). Conflicts of resource extraction ultimately circle around the question of land rights and are thus also land conflicts. Canadian law, and Canada’s acclaimed sovereignty and legitimacy originate from the “doctrine of discovery” a concept from European colonialism. Settlers are “hiding behind the myth of one ‘rule of law’” (Raibmon) which is based on white supremacy.

Band Councils

A band in Canada is legally a group of Indigenous people defined by settler authorities (Vowel 31). Band councils are governing units within the bands. “Band councils were created from the 1876 Indian Act and designed to undermine and replace centuries of traditional governments across Canada” (George-Kanentiio). Consequently, the system was imposed on Indigenous peoples who were sometimes arbitrarily put together in bands while their traditional group affiliations were not taken into account. The notion of “band councils” is used as a strategy to conquer and divide Indigenous peoples. Settlers claim that Indigenous communities are divided because traditional forms of government such as the hereditary chiefs of the Wet’suwet’en seem to stand in conflict with band council governments (Turner and Seatter). However, the band council has jurisdiction over the reservation only, and the hereditary chiefs e.g., of the Wet’suwet’en “oversee the management of traditional lands and their authority predates the imposed colonial law” (Cousins). The Coastal GasLink pipeline is to pass through the traditional lands the hereditary chiefs have jurisdiction over, as confirmed by the Canadian Supreme Court in 1997 (Forester, “The Delgamuukw Decision”). Subsequently, band councils cannot sign agreements on resource extraction projects on lands they do not have authority over. Conquer and divide is an old colonial and settler colonial strategy which relies on myths or lies about the jurisdiction of band councils.

Settler colonial myths in the Coastal GasLink Conflict

The proposed route of the Coastal GasLink pipeline is to run through several Indigenous territories in British Columbia including the lands of the Wet’suwet’en Nation. While many band council leaders have signed agreements with Coastal GasLink, five hereditary chiefs of the Wet’suwet’en fear that the pipeline would pollute their drinking water and raise concerns that the approximately 1,000 workers who are supposed to build the pipeline on Wet’suwet’en territory will pose a threat especially to Indigenous girls and women* (Ridgen; Cecco).

In early February 2020, the RCMP started to move against land defenders who had set up camps at the designated pipeline construction sites to prevent access for construction workers already since 2009 (BBC; Cecco). The violent raid by the RCMP led to #ShutDownCanada, and included nationwide blockades of roads and rails, protest rallies and sit-ins at offices of responsible politicians. The blockades and the feared economic impact forced Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to cancel planned state visits, and to call in the “Incident Response Group,” which is only convened in the event of a national crisis (Forester, “The Delgamuukw Decision”).

The aforementioned myths can be found within the Coastal GasLink conflict and discourses on it. Firstly, the land of the Wet’suwet’en is not empty; it is no *terra nullius*. European conceptions of land usage are held onto in an almost religious way by settler commentators: “we have effectively lost the ability to enforce the systematic organization of property rights on which every functional society, Indigenous or non-Indigenous, depends” (Kay).

Secondly, the conflict or invasion in Wet’suwet’en territory can be seen happening in the frontier region. Given the measures employed by the RCMP against the freedom of the press (Cox and Seatter) and the plan to use “lethal force” (Dhillon and Parrish), it becomes evident that the “liberal and democratic” settler rule of law is not effective in this region and the only law that applies is the law of the strongest.

Thirdly, the RCMP’s violent actions against Native people demonstrate that the police force is still clearing land for settlers. RCMP officers are not the idealized friendly “Mounties” from a Disney movie helping people. The myth of the “peaceful frontier” is untrue not only for the past but also for the present: clearing the land is not peaceful, it is violent. Moreover, there were cases of vigilantism from civil society against Wet’suwet’en solidarity protests (Boutillie; Djuric). Settlers took and still take the law into their own hands in order to commit violence against Indigenous people while governmental institutions stand idle. The *frontier* still exists in Canada and is the space of ongoing violence and dispossession of Indigenous people.

Fourthly, myths like stereotypes of Wet’suwet’en as “savage” and as “lawless” may help to explain how settler institutions treat them, and also serve to understand threats towards them once construction work starts on their territories. This concerns sexual violence against Indigenous women* and girls, in particular.

The myths of “the rule of law” and “band councils as legitimate representatives of Indigenous peoples” were mainly articulated by politicians or in newspaper comments (Iverson). By referring to band councils, traditional governments and band councils are pitted against each other to make Indigenous peoples appear disunited by using the method of conquer and divide. The myth of “the rule of law” was also a present trope in the comment sections (Burney; LeDrew).

Conclusion

The Coastal GasLink conflict functions as a myth buster. Myths utilized in discourses on the conflict show how racism and paternalism persist in attitudes of Canadian settler society towards Indigenous people. The concept of *settler colonial myths* and also the particular six suggested myths can be identified in and be applied to other conflicts of resource extraction in Canada as well, and help to better understand Indigenous protests against environmental damage and economic exploitation.

The conditions under which the Wet’suwet’en live are not an isolated case – the cooperation between the police and companies who jointly clear Indigenous lands is the norm in Canada. Indigenous people have to make way for profit and the benefit of the settler society. These conflicts share the outlined mythology, and all the small myths amount to the Canadian meta-myth of apparently being the better America.

Works Cited

- Barker, Adam J., et al. “Settler Colonialism and the Consolidation of Canada in the 20th Century.” *The Routledge Handbook of the History of Settler Colonialism*, edited by Edward Cavanagh and Lorenzo Veracini, Routledge, 2016, pp. 153–68.
- BBC. “The Conflict That Brought Canada’s Rails to a Halt.” *BBC News*, 20 Feb. 2020, [bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-51550821](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-51550821). Accessed 9 May 2020.
- Boutilier, Alex. “Calls for Vigilante Actions Against Wet’suwet’en Blockades Are Growing in Far-Right Circles, Anti-Hate Group.” *Toronto Star*, 20 Feb. 2020, [thestar.com/politics/federal/2020/02/20/calls-for-vigilante-actions-against-wetsuweten-blockades-are-growing-in-far-right-circles-anti-hate-group-says.html](https://www.thestar.com/politics/federal/2020/02/20/calls-for-vigilante-actions-against-wetsuweten-blockades-are-growing-in-far-right-circles-anti-hate-group-says.html). Accessed 9 May 2020.

- Burney, Derek H. "Enough Is Enough. Clear the Blockades, Restore the Rule of Law." *National Post*, 17 Feb. 2020, nationalpost.com/opinion/derek-h-burney-enough-is-enough-clear-the-blockades-restore-the-rule-of-law. Accessed 10 May 2020.
- Cecco, Leyland. "Pipeline Battle Puts Focus on Canada's Disputed Right to Use Indigenous Land." *The Guardian*, 11 Jan. 2019, theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/11/canada-pipeline-indigenous-trudeau-treaty. Accessed 9 Feb. 2020.
- Christie, Gordon. *Canadian Law and Indigenous Self-Determination: A Naturalist Analysis*. University of Toronto Press, 2019.
- Cousins, Ben. "Wet'suwet'en: What's the Difference Between the Elected Band Council and Hereditary Chiefs?" *CTV News*, 14 Feb. 2020, ctvnews.ca/canada/wet-suwet-en-what-s-the-difference-between-the-elected-band-council-and-hereditary-chiefs-1.4811453. Accessed 14 May 2020.
- Cox, Ethan, and Erin Seatter. "Ricochet Journalist Detained for Eight Hours While Covering RCMP Raid." *ricochet*, 8 Feb. 2020, ricochet.media/en/2919/ricochet-journalist-detained-for-eight-hours-while-covering-rcmp-raid. Accessed 9 Feb. 2020.
- Dawson, Michael. "Mountie." *Symbols of Canada*, edited by Michael Dawson, Catherine Gidney, and Donald Wright, Between the Lines, 2018, pp. 129–37.
- Denis, Jeff. *Canada at a Crossroads: Boundaries, Bridges, and Laissez-Faire Racism in Indigenous-Settler Relations*. University of Toronto Press, 2020.
- Dhillon, Jaskiran, and Will Parrish. "Indigenous People Outraged at Canada Police's Possible Use of Lethal Force." *The Guardian*, 24 Dec. 2019, theguardian.com/world/2019/dec/24/indigenous-people-outraged-at-canada-polices-possible-use-of-lethal-force. Accessed 9 Jan. 2020.
- Djuric, Mickey. "No Charges After Car Drives Through Wet'suwet'en Supporters in Regina." *Global News*, 12 Feb. 2020, globalnews.ca/news/6526331/car-drives-through-wetsuweten-supporters-regina-1/. Accessed 8 May 2020.
- Forester, Brett. "The Delgamuukw Decision: When the 'Invisible People' Won Recognition." *APTN News*, 7 May 2020, aptnnews.ca/2020/03/10/the-delgamuukw-decision-when-the-invisible-people-won-recognition/. Accessed 7 May 2020.
- . "'Death by RCMP' a Common but Complex Thing in Nunavut, Says NDP MP Qaqqaq." *APTN News*, 30 June 2020, aptnnews.ca/national-news/death-by-rcmp-a-common-but-complex-thing-in-nunavut-says-ndp-mp-qaqqaq/. Accessed 4 July 2020.

- Gehl, Lynn. "Seven Key Learnings from the MMIWG Legal Analysis on Genocide." *Briarpatch Magazine*, 19 Mar. 2020, briarpatchmagazine.com/articles/view/seven-key-learnings-from-the-mmiwg-legal-analysis-on-genocide. Accessed 5 May 2020.
- George-Kanentiio, Doug. "The Myth of Band Councils as First Nations." *Toronto Star*, 24 Feb. 2020, thestar.com/amp/opinion/contributors/2020/02/24/the-myth-of-band-councils-as-first-nations.html. Accessed 11 May 2020.
- Iverson, John. "John Iverson: The Millennial Eco-Activists Stopping Trains Are the New Colonialists." *Vancouver Sun*, 18 Feb. 2020, vancouver.sun.com/opinion/john-iverson-the-millennial-eco-activists-stopping-trains-are-the-new-colonialists/wcm/abb82aeb-a44b-46b2-92e2-f32928a1d9d9/amp. Accessed 8 May 2020.
- Jang, Brent et al. "Wet'suwet'en Chiefs, Blockades and Coastal GasLink: A Guide to the Dispute over a B.C. Pipeline." *The Globe and Mail*, 9 Mar. 2020, theglobeandmail.com/canada/british-columbia/article-wetsuweten-coastal-gaslink-pipeline-rcmp-explainer. Accessed 9 May 2020.
- LeDrew, Stephen. "Canada Should Enforce the Law with Wet'suwet'en Anti-Pipeline Protests." *National Post*, 11 Feb. 2020, nationalpost.com/opinion/stephen-ledrew-canada-should-enforce-the-law-with-wetsuweten-anti-pipeline-protests. Accessed 10 May 2020.
- MacDonald, David B. "Canada's History Wars: Indigenous Genocide and Public Memory in the United States, Australia and Canada." *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2015, pp. 411–31.
- Maher, Stephen. "The 'Iron Road' That Brought Ruin and Death." *Macleans*, 17 Feb. 2020, macleans.ca/opinion/the-iron-road-that-brought-ruin-and-death/amp. Accessed 14 Apr. 2020.
- Mamdani, Mahmood. "Settler Colonialism: Then and Now." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 41, no. 3, 2015, pp. 596–614.
- Miller, J. R. *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Native-Newcomer Relations in Canada*, 4th ed., University of Toronto Press, 2018.
- Morin, Brandi. "Indigenous Women Are Preyed on at Horrifying Rates. I Was One of Them." *The Guardian*, 7 Sep. 2020, theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/sep/07/canada-indigenous-women-and-girls-missing. Accessed 8 Sep. 2020.

- Raibmon, Paige. "Hiding Behind the Myth of One 'Rule of Law'." *The Tyee*, 7 May 2020, theyee.ca/Opinion/2020/02/18/Hiding-Behind-One-Rule-Of-Law-Myth-Wetsuweten. Accessed 7 May 2020.
- Ridgen, Melissa. "What Effect Could Work Camps Have on Indigenous Women Once Construction on CGL Pipeline Starts in B.C.?" *APTN News*, 10 May 2020, aptnnews.ca/2020/03/04/what-effect-could-work-camps-have-on-indigenous-women-once-construction-on-cgl-pipeline-starts-in-b-c. Accessed 10 May 2020.
- Rifkin, Mark. "The Frontier as (Movable) Space of Exception." *Settler Colonial Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2014, pp. 176–80.
- Rotz, Sarah, et al. "The Settler Playbook: Understanding Responses to #Shut-DownCanada in Historical Context." *Active History*, 18 Feb. 2020, activehistory.ca/2020/02/exposing-the-settler-playbook-responses-to-shutdowncanada-in-historical-context. Accessed 18 Feb. 2020.
- Ryan, Tess. "Calling Out the 'Promiscuous' Narrative of Indigenous Women." *NITV*, 7 Dec. 2017, sbs.com.au/nitv/article/2017/12/05/can-we-pay-homage-culture-without-sexualisation-indigenous-women-1. Accessed 13 June 2020.
- Statistics Canada. "General Social Survey: Table 1 Perception of National Symbols as Very Important to the Canadian Identity, by Province." 1 Jan. 2013, www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-652-x/2015005/t/tbl01-eng.htm. Accessed 14 Oct. 2020.
- Steward, Gillian. "Is It Past Time to Rein in the Mounties?" *Toronto Star*, 15 June 2020, thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2020/06/15/is-it-past-time-to-rein-in-the-mounties.html. Accessed 16 June 2020.
- Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, and Society*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2012, pp. 1–40.
- Turner, Jerome, and Erin Seatter. "Untangling the 'Rule of Law' in the Coastal Gas-Link Pipeline Standoff." *ricochet*, 5 Feb. 2020, ricochet.media/en/2904/untangling-the-rule-of-law-in-the-coastal-gaslink-pipeline-standoff. Accessed 12 Feb. 2020.
- Veracini, Lorenzo. *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- . *The Settler Colonial Present*. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015.
- Vowel, Chelsea. *Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Métis & Inuit Issues in Canada*. HighWater Press Portage & Main Press, 2016.

- Wolfe, Patrick. *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event*. Cassell, 1999.
- . "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native." *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2006, pp. 387–409.
- Woolford, Andrew, and Jeff Benvenuto. "Canada and Colonial Genocide." *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2015, pp. 373–90.
- Wysote, Travis, and Erin Morton. "'The Depth of the Plough': White Settler Tautologies and Pioneer Lies." *Settler Colonial Studies*, vol. 9, no. 4, 2019, pp. 1-26.

Indigiqueer Homemaking: *Upcycling* Domestic Processes and *Becomings* in Queer Indigenous Literatures

Elena Cortés Farrujia

University of Barcelona

I have not only been removed from my homelands, I have also been removed from my erotic self and continue a journey back to my first homeland: the body. "We were stolen from our bodies, we were stolen from our homes."

— Qwo-Li Driskill, "Stolen from our bodies" 53

Writing is the place to feel all senses commingle and cohabit, bringing forth something new, giving birth to words, to beings that will inhabit story, that are story. This is what spirits bring - verdant sensuality, lush panoply, a garden.

— Beth Brant, "Writing Life" 118

Home, defined by Alison Blunt as an ambiguous space wherein both material and affective realities coexist, as a space in which "belonging and alienation, intimacy and violence, desire and fear" conflate, and identified by "everyday practices, lived experiences, social relations, memories and emotions" (506), is certainly one of the central axis present in the above quotations. Both authors set forth to strive for the retrieval and reinhabitation of different kinds of "homelands." Identifying these "homelands" of which they have been dispossessed as either physical/material homes, natural landscapes, geographical territories, and the body itself; or more "imaginative/mental" realms, such as traditions, memories, and stories; (Two-Spirit¹ and Queer) Indigenous² authors have foregrounded the importance of the undertaking to shape a homely place in writing that will survive over time.

¹ In the 1990s, the term Two-Spirit was coined in the Third Annual Inter-tribal, Native American, First Nations, Gay and Lesbian American Conference to drop the outdated, pejorative Euro-American term: "berdache."

² The term "Indigenous" is used in this paper as a collective identifier for the Native peoples that expand across and beyond the United States, as its use conveys a transcultural integration of diverse and multiple native communities under the same umbrella term; however, I do not mean to generalize the range of individual communities and experiences under (neo)colonialism as the same.

It has become evident that Indigenous literatures, and namely Two-Spirit, Queer Indigenous literatures have – finally – started with a bang³ to disrupt the white, cis-heteropatriarchal, settler-colonial literary panorama that had consistently depicted them as unidimensional beings "trapped" outside modernity, as Mark Rifkin argues in *Beyond Settler Time* (2017). Rifkin clarifies how by establishing modernity as a specific "sort of temporal experience that appears intimately connected to the decimation of Native peoples" (8), the representation of Indigenous people – and hence everything connected to them – appears as "either having disappeared or [as] being remnants on the verge of vanishing" (5). In this same line, the displacement of Indigenous peoples from modernity may be connected with Zygmunt Bauman's *Wasted Lives* (2003), namely the sociologist's label of "wasted humans," as they have been pushed towards "redundancy" for the benefits of "economic progress" (5): "To be declared redundant means to have been disposed of because of being *disposable* . . . 'Redundancy' shares its semantic space with 'rejects', 'wastrels', 'garbage', 'refuse' – with *waste*" (12, original emphasis). Furthermore, as David Morley introduces in "Borders and Belongings" when discussing Cohen's analysis of the domestic metaphors that unveil the symbolic ways in which the Others - "those who are held to belong within the public domains of the body politic" . . . have 'already broken and entered the gate . . . [and] invaded the privacy of the master bedroom' as well as having 'occupied and laid waste desirable residential areas'" (Morley 218, my emphasis). Hence, Queer and Two-Spirit Indigenous peoples are also re-signifying domestic spaces and its objects (Ahmed).⁴

This paper sets off with the idea that Two-Spirit, Queer Indigenous literatures are contesting this "redundancy" by staring back at the settler-colonial gaze towards what is considered "waste" and deploying it with new aesthetical values that escape modernity's precepts while at the same time promoting a conversation on the colonial, cis-heteropatriarchal idea of home and how it is being decolonized from within. As Morley

³ (Queer) Indigenous literatures have always been undoubtedly around, since oral storytelling has persisted in spite of the constant acculturation processes which Indigenous peoples have been forced to undergo. However, it must also be mentioned that there has been an exponential growth in (mainstream) recognition over the past few years; for instance, Joshua Whitehead's *Jonny Appleseed* (2018) was awarded the 2021 Canada Reads' prize, and has since appeared as one of the best-sold novels in Canada, as well as Cherrie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* (2017), and the works of Joy Harjo (after becoming the 23rd Poet Laureate of the U.S. – though her career has always been renowned).

⁴ Understood in Sara Ahmed's terms, not only concerning the material object themselves, but also the signifiers connected to them, such as the "unspoken" rituals of gender, class differentiation, cultural backgrounds, and social strata, sexuality, etc. See Ahmed.

demonstrates in "At Home with the Media" while commenting on Shunya Yoshimi's work on post-war Japan,⁵ the "processes of modernization of the home and the nation [are] intertwined," as Yoshimi notes that there has been an explicit urgency to "'remov[e] all waste from home, taking away all ornaments [and] introducing more rationalization' as a way of promoting 'efficiency in the activity of the nation'" (qtd. in Morley 88).

In this context, Queer Indigenous writers, like Beth Brant herself or Chrystos, and Two-Spirit writers such as Qwo-Li Driskill or Joshua Whitehead – among others – have foregrounded the significance of Two-Spirit, Queer and Indigenous homemaking devices and practices in the midst of settler capitalism, aiming for *survivance*, proposed by Gerald Vizenor as an "active presence" (15);⁶ and by displaying what Driskill has appointed as the Sovereign Erotic, that is: "[the] return to and/or continuance of the complex realities of gender and sexuality that are ever-present in both the human and more-than-human world, but erased and hidden by colonial cultures" (56). Thus, the home serves as the stage where different processes of identification occur, where non-human entities, spirits and stories intermingle and cohabit with the human inhabitants of the household, blurring the lines, borders and frontiers between home and nation, home and nature, and home and modernity.

The present paper is no more than a keyhole into what constitutes a multilayered, holistic approach to Queer Indigenous homes, given the fact that different factors come into play: such as Indigeneity, queerness, gender, and class – and all its intersecting ramifications and definitions. Furthermore, the following pages aim to unveil the underlying dynamics encountered in Indigenous literary homes, taking Beth Brant's *Writing as Witness* (1995) and Joshua Whitehead's *Jonny Appleseed* (2018)⁷ as the keys to dwell in the different rooms, so as to approach the diverse strategies to deconstruct what has been considered to be waste,

⁵ Morley later expands Yoshimi's concerns with modernity and the home to 1950s and 1960s America, emphasizing the role that television and electronic appliances had in the technological leap into "future modernity" and contemporary stages of capitalist consumerism (89-93).

⁶ Gerald Vizenor's concept of "survivance" is further approached as resistance requiring not only physical activism but "imaginative and poetic transformation" as examined in Breinig.

⁷ This is still in the early stages of research. Other authors and texts will be added and included in the corpus to be analyzed. In the same way, what is here included is a very introductory journey into the complexities encountered in each of the rooms that constitute the project.

as previously commented; or as this paper argues, to *upcycle*⁸ the homing devices in question.

As a starter, *upcycling* the kitchen must begin by considering its primary purpose: cooking, which as an everyday task reacquires pivotal importance both to Indigenous cultures and to the authors themselves. For instance, Brant in her essay "Writing Life" describes how her writing career began and developed throughout the years, as well as the importance of her calling to narrate the stories of her kin and devise new possibilities and prospective futures in her creations while recounting the process of baking bread from scratch. The author, who has found herself stuck with her writing for a while, reconnects with herself at every level – physical, mental, with her relatives, with the spirits, with her sexuality – while mixing and kneading the dough: "I knead the dough and hum 'Ode to Joy.' I never planned on being a writer" (106); "Grandma taught me manners, how to make corn soup and fry bread, and the idea of what women are supposed to be – strong, fierce protectors of family and land" (111).

Upcycling the bedroom would entail considering both the waste produced by humans while having sexual intercourse, such as it occurs in Whitehead's *Jonny Appleseed's* bedroom in the city where he has sex with his best friend Tias, his girlfriend and many strangers onscreen – because Jonny works as a cybersex worker: "I lay back in my bed and traced the imprint of Tias's body with my finger. It still smelled like him" (31). Furthermore, this rooting of same-sex relationships into the realm of heteronormativity, the bedroom, would also entail a re-evaluation of its orientations (Ahmed). Thus, the Two-Spirit inhabitants of Whitehead's novel and his peers explore an "erotic geography" that connects his identity to pre-colonial mappings, and situates Two-Spirit identities at the centre, erasing any Christian shame or guilt on Indigenous sexualities (Siepak).

Finally, *upcycling* the garden would consist of de-domesticating it, setting forth a relationship between home and nature that would not be based on possession of the land, on fences and planned landscaping, but rather on the symbiotic, free, *natural* relationships towards the land. For instance, Brant remarks that her idea of home, and her connection to the land follow her grandparents' teachings (110), whereas Whitehead's novel explores the

⁸ *Upcycling*, also known as "creative reuse", is defined by Merriam-Webster as a process which transforms "a discarded object of lesser value," like by-products, waste materials, useless or unwanted products into new creations of greater/higher quality, such as artistic and environmental valuable objects.

connection of the NDN home to a flower - a dandelion, to be more specific. The dandelion, which has ended up being considered a pest that always survives in the harshest soils, enables Whitehead to revalue the 'waste' flower and its potential to decolonize the idea of home (Cortés Farrujia).⁹

To conclude, the present paper has attempted to introduce the ongoing work of initiating a conversation on, and of examining how Queer Indigenous authors are *upcycling* what White-settler epistemologies have attempted to erase and acculturate – “waste” that in a globalized, "modern" world is consumed by late capitalism and no longer deemed of value. The work of these authors is shifting at every level the white, heteronormative ideas of home as a "pure, clean and pristine" environment only inhabited by themselves, and disrupting the lines and the very foundations of history since it brings the ghosts and the memories of the past into the walls of a long considered "homeplace" (hooks).

Works Cited

- Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Duke University Press, 2006.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts*. Blackwell Publishers, 2003.
- Blunt, Alison. "Cultural Geography: Cultural Geographies of Home." *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 29, no. 4, 2005, pp. 505-515.
- Brant, Beth. *Writing as Witness: Essay and Talk*. Women's Press, 1995.
- Breinig, Helmbrecht. "Native Survivance in the Americas: Resistance and Remembrance in the Narratives by Asturias, Tapahonso, and Vizenor." *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*, edited by Gerald Vizenor, University of Nebraska Press, 2008, pp. 39-60.
- Cortés Farrujia, Elena. 'An NDN Home Is Like a Dandelion': *Queer Indigenous Orientations in Joshua Whitehead's Jonny Appleseed (2018)*. 2021. University of Barcelona, master's thesis.
- Driskill, Qwo-Li. "Stolen from Our Bodies: First Nations Two-Spirits/Queers and the Journey to a Sovereign Erotic." *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2004, pp. 50-64.

⁹ This was the core analysis of the master's thesis that I presented in 2021 about to be made available on the university's repository.

- hooks, bell. "Homeplace a Site of Resistance." *Yearning*. Routledge, 2014.
- Morley, David. "At Home with the Media." *Home Territories: Media, Mobility, and Identity*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2000, pp. 86-104.
- ."Borders and Belongings." *Home Territories: Media, Mobility, and Identity*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2000, pp. 204-224.
- Rifkin, Mark. *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination*. Duke University Press, 2017.
- Siepak, Julia. "Two-Spirit Identities in Canada: Mapping Sovereign Erotic in Joshua Whitehead's *Jonny Appleseed*." *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia*, vol. 55, no. 2, 2020, pp. 495-515.
- "Upcycling." *Merriam-Webster*, [merriam-webster.com/dictionary/upcycle](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/upcycle). Accessed 25 January 2022.
- Vizenor, Gerald. *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*. University of Nebraska Press, 2008.
- Whitehead, Joshua. *Jonny Appleseed*. Arsenal Pulp Press, 2018.

“They Were Not Human”: Rethinking Binaries, Bioethics, and Eco-realities in Selected Works of Margaret Atwood and Larissa Lai

Sababa Monjur

Philipps University Marburg

Speculative Fiction and the Hope for a Better Future

The ecological crisis is indeed a scientific problem but, apart from scientific solutions, it demands transformation in ideologies of exploitation as well. Speculative fiction as a genre plays a vital role in this regard as the blending of science with imaginary worlds allows for such issues to be explored in a more poignant and meaningful way. The unique thought experiments estrange the known world by shedding light on the dangers posed by the Anthropocene, a world that does not consider the ramifications of its own development on the ecosystem, or the consequences of an unethical use of biotechnology and genetic engineering that affects humans and sub/non-humans alike. Hence, employing an ecofeminist approach, my dissertation showcases how the biopolitical regimes normalize the gradual dehumanization of people, introduce trans-species commodification, and justify the exploitation of nature and ‘natural’ others. My close reading of Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* duology (1985-2019), *MaddAddam* trilogy (2003-2013) and *The Heart Goes Last* (2015), and Larissa Lai’s *Salt Fish Girl* (2002) and *The Tiger Flu* (2018) suggests that these speculative fictions can function as the theoretical testing grounds for both worst- and best-case scenarios. I am of the opinion that both Atwood and Lai initiate epistemological rethinking by problematizing human-centered thinking and challenging the Anthropocene discourse, on the one hand, and by relocating agency through critically interrogating the boundary-making practices, on the other. Calculating the plausible planetary drifts that might take place in the near future, these speculative fictions promote a revised and reconstructed practice of harmonious cohabitation with the planetary partners. Hence, I argue that the authors envision a political ecology with insightful strategies that centralize environmental ethics, resource management, and non-anthropocentric realities where all living beings – be it naturally occurring or genetically engineered ones – are protected within and beyond a North American context.

Objectives

Broadly speaking, ecofeminism combines the core elements of feminist and environmental movements, and challenges both. Reflecting upon the political and intellectual intersection of biopolitics and bioethics, ecofeminist theories, and speculative fiction, my dissertation intends to elaborately discuss a set of questions. First, how effectively the authors address all forms of domination while recognizing and embracing the interdependence and connection between human and non-human entities. Second, what the future looks like when the authors take current ecological reality seriously, and how taking environmental concerns and sub/non-human creatures into account may intersect with and expand ecofeminist theory and the ethics that it champions. Third, in an environmentally degraded techno-capitalist world, how the biopolitical regimes normalize unethical use of biotechnology and genetic engineering that categorize the citizens endlessly (thereby, ensuring the docility of the population for the sole purpose of corporate-profit). Lastly, how a close reading of the selected texts from an ecofeminist perspective may enhance a clearer understanding of the current ecological crisis and may inaugurate dialogues in order to move towards a sustainable future where all life forms would be protected regardless of their sub/non-human status.

An Ecofeminist Approach: From Anthropocene to Chthulucene

In a variety of ways, environmental discourse remains heavily gendered, and this gendering is further projected onto the earth, which is cast in the feminine spectrum and is subject to the exploitation by the masculine techno-capitalist society. Although the concept of ecofeminism has come to mean quite different things to different ecofeminists, Greta Gaard states that “ecofeminist theory has developed its analyses from initial insights linking various objects of oppression to an analysis of the structure and functioning of oppression itself,” and adds that “there is not merely a linear progression but more specifically a dialectical relationship between these two analytical approaches” because this “process of recognizing the various objects of oppression, the systems of oppression, and the way those systems are interlinked is a process that describes the history and development of most feminisms and ecofeminisms” (127). On a similar note, Karen Warren acknowledges that ecofeminism is based on the following claims: (i) connections between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature; (ii) understanding the nature of these connections is necessary to any adequate understanding of the oppression of women and the oppression

of nature; (iii) feminist theory and practice must include an ecological perspective; and (iv) solutions to ecological problems must include a feminist perspective (4-5). Noting the deterioration of the global ecological crisis, Val Plumwood explicates that despite being technologically well-equipped and having the necessary means “to accomplish the changes needed to live sustainably on and with the earth,” policymakers are not taking effective measures. This indicates that the “problem is not primarily about more knowledge and technology; it is about developing an environmental culture that values and fully acknowledges the non-human sphere and our dependency on it and is able to make good decisions about how we live and impact on the non-human world” (3). Since the human-centred thinking fails to ensure a sustainable future, Donna Haraway proposes a new name that allows for a rethinking of the (im)possibilities facing the Anthropocene: the ‘Chthulucene,’ where humans must build kinship with the sub/non-human. Drawing on these theories, I argue that reading the selected works from an ecofeminist perspective may challenge exclusionary thinking, and offer a new way of seeing the interwoven, non-hierarchical, symbiotic mode of harmonious cohabitation of the human and the sub/non-human others.

(Un)Ethical Use of Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering in Biopolitical Regimes

Biopower is the process of regulation, and, as Michel Foucault contends, it is “an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations” (140). Hence, biopower can be apprehended as a social field of power where the government intervenes with the vital aspects of human life (ranging from health to sexuality to death) and the production of discourses, such as ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ to manipulate and control an entire population. In the futuristic worlds of Atwood and Lai, the corporate-controlled nation-states not only invent various modes of surveillance and mechanisms of incarceration to create a docile population, but also use biotechnology, neurosurgery, and genetic engineering unethically for the sole purpose of profit-making. Thus, merging the insights of Foucauldian political theories with Francis Fukuyama’s work on bioethics provides a useful framework to examine the negotiation of ethics and identities within the biopolitical regimes.

Subversive Bodies and Unruly Desires: Reclaiming Identity and Agency in Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl*, and Margaret Atwood's *The Heart Goes Last* and *The Handmaid's Tale*

When nation-states start protecting corporate interests at the expense of citizens, and normalize privatization and commodification of public bodies to ensure their docility, freedom becomes nothing but an empty word. Pivoting around the dichotomy of freedom/imprisonment, the corresponding chapter of my dissertation will explore the portrayal of docile bodies in Lai's *Salt Fish Girl*, and Atwood's *The Heart Goes Last* and *The Handmaid's Tale*. Within the gated communities of the novels, public and private spaces are controlled and constantly monitored by authorities, biomaterials and body parts are traded, illegal cloning of humans is normalized, ritualistic rape and forced motherhood is justified, and authorities can unilaterally decide who lives and who dies. Hence, employing a Foucauldian approach, I will discuss the biopolitical practices of entrenched exclusion, systemic violence of incarceration, dehumanization, and mass-killing of those who are dubbed by Rita Wong as 'extra-legal' – people who are either unregistered and undocumented (as they are clones, thereby, denied 'human' status) or structurally downtrodden (as they are labeled as either criminals or marginalized). This chapter of my dissertation will encounter the disobedience of subversive and queer desire of the exploited women. I will enunciate how Evie as a human clone in *Salt Fish Girl*, Jocelyn as the co-founder of the Positron Prison in *The Heart Goes Last*, and Aunt Lydia as the trainer of the handmaids in *The Handmaid's Tale* use their 'insider' status to move between center and margin, and to orchestrate the downfall of violent biopolitical regimes by exposing the fragility of the system. The chapter will further question whether, as counterparts to Evie, Jocelyn, and Aunt Lydia, the protagonists of the three novels – Miranda, Charmaine, and Offred, respectively – can truly reclaim their freedom from their exploiters, and if so, how far they are allowed to go from the contaminated nation-states.

The (Im)Possible Inhabitability of the Planet: Exploring Eco-realities in Larissa Lai's *The Tiger Flu* and Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*

In our empirical reality, the environment and the ecosystem are being destroyed, and scientific evidence regarding this ongoing crisis is either being discounted or ignored by policymakers. Even though world states are not entirely run by the corporations, contemporary tech-giants are nevertheless only interested in profit-making, thereby taking the rich/poor divide to an obscene level. Threatened by the anthropogenic crisis,

marginalized persons tend to question what it means to be human in a world where identities are not fixed, bodily autonomy and agency are non-existent, and the future seems far from familiar. In response to calculated risks and plausible biotechnological advancement, the two novels challenge the Anthropocene discourse and foreground ways of recovering in critical times by taking sub/non-human agency into consideration. This chapter of my dissertation will demonstrate how Atwood and Lai have borrowed from our contemporary ecological crisis in *The Year of the Flood* and *The Tiger Flu*, respectively. I wish to examine the uncharted, pandemic-ridden futures in the context of what Haraway has dubbed the 'Chthulucene.' Reading through an ecofeminist lens, this chapter will scrutinize how the interweaving notions of race, gender and ecology call for attention to the building of a better world where the collective good should be the utmost priority. In addition, this chapter will critically analyze how the Grist sisterhood of cloned women in *The Tiger Flu* and the religious sect called God's Gardeners in *The Year of the Flood* reframe faith-based ideologies, embrace revelatory knowledge forms, and work towards building a more inclusive future by living harmoniously with the sub/non-human.

The Child of the Future: Redefining 'Paradise' in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, *MaddAddam* and *The Testaments*

As a symbol of shared experience and a locus of inscribed meaning, motherhood has been portrayed by Margaret Atwood in varied shades: either as a source of fascination or disgust, of manipulation or liberation, of abuse or reclamation. As Ortner puts it, the male "creates relatively lasting, eternal, transcendent objects, while the woman creates only perishables – human beings" (75). With the emergence of biotechnology and genetic engineering, the concept of motherhood and reproduction dramatically changes. Moreover, the new children of futuristic SF worlds not only transgress the human/non-human binaries but also reconfigure the wider spectrum of kinship as complex assemblages and entanglements. This chapter will be invested in analyzing the insubordination of the more/less-than-human children of the future who seek to disrupt and/or transcend heteronormative and anthropocentric hierarchy, and to create kinship in unexpected ways. Borrowing the words of Haraway, I will argue that "the symbiont children developed a complex subjectivity composed of loneliness, intense sociality, intimacy with nonhuman others, specialness, lack of choice, fullness of meaning, and sureness of future purpose" (149). On the one hand, as 'symbiont children,' the genetically engineered Craker children in

Oryx and Crake, and the human-Craker babies in *MaddAddam* defy the human/non-human binaries and challenge the human-centred hierarchy. On the other, Baby Nicole from *The Testaments* is synonymous with freedom, and destabilizes the phallogocentric hierarchy. Either way, these children of the future can re-establish the lost paradise for the human and the more/less-than-human.

Conclusion

I expect that my ongoing transdisciplinary dissertation, in offering a primer on the unethical use of biotechnology and genetic engineering, and an intersection of environmental justice and literature, would be helpful for a diverse group of scholars. Both Atwood and Lai use the genre of speculative fiction to challenge the Anthropocene while enabling the theorization of an expanded notion of ecofeminism that accommodates and embraces the other-than-human entities and transforms the existing exclusionary practices into a more inclusive ideology. This dissertation is socio-politically relevant in how it addresses the urgent ecological crisis, and academically relevant in how it takes advantage of contemporary SF research trends in order to initiate useful dialogues that are capable of bringing change in the treatment of the sub/non-human creatures.

Works Cited

- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*. 1976. Translated by Robert Hurley, Pantheon Books, 1978.
- Gaard, Greta. "Vegetarian Ecofeminism: A Review Essay." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, vol. 23, no. 3, 2002. pp. 117-146.
- Haraway, Donna. *Staying with the Trouble*. Duke University Press, 2016.
- Ortner, Sherry B. "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?" *Woman, Culture, and Society*, edited by Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, Stanford University Press, 1974, pp. 67-87.
- Plumwood, Val. *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason*. Routledge, 2002.
- Warren, Karen. "Feminism and Ecology: Making Connections." *Environmental Ethics*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1987. pp. 3-20.

Revisiting the Environmental Imagination: Planetary Poetics in Contemporary Canadian Poetry

Florian Wagner

Friedrich Schiller University Jena

The last few years have seen the emergence of the planetary as a critical-theoretical category in the humanities and the social sciences, which functions as an umbrella term to summarize various propositions for rethinking and reconceiving how the human and the non-human interact in relation to the larger entity of the planet. Amy J. Elias and Christian Moraru have termed this recent shift 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 conditions of living in the 21st century. Consequently, Elias and Moraru theorize a transition from the 'human condition' to the 'planetary condition' and try to stake out a claim for the potential of the planetary 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 conceive of the planetary as a way to "recalibrate our critical instruments and aesthetic-critical vocabularies" and the planetary turn as a "decisive reorientation toward the unfolding present and its cultural paradigm" (viii) that is the planetary. Drawing on recent scholarship on the planetary and planetary thinking, my dissertation looks at the role of the poetic imagination in 'recalibrating our critical instruments' and in creating such alternative vocabularies by theorizing a *planetary poetics*, which I understand as an ethico-aesthetic mode of response to the demands of the planetary condition. In this short contribution, I aim to outline some of the core tenets of the planetary condition and planetary thinking before in a last step briefly alluding to the poetry collections I analyze in my project.

Any discussion on the planetary necessarily has to begin with the postcolonial and feminist scholar Gayatri Spivak's concept of *planetarity*, which she originally proposed at the first *Mary Levin Goldschmidt-Bollag Memorial Lecture* on refugee policy and the politics of global migration by the Swiss Stiftung Dialogik in 1997. In her lecture entitled "Imperative to Re-Imagine the Planet," Spivak initially suggested planetarity as a way of re-imagining and

re-conceptualizing the planet that ruptures the smooth appearances and surfaces of neoliberal globalization. Looking back on her lecture, she writes in *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (2012):

In that era, then, of breakneck globalization catching up speed, I proposed the planet to overwrite the globe. Globalization is achieved by the imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere. It is not too fanciful to say that, in the gridwork of electronic capital, we achieve something that resembles that abstract ball covered in latitudes and longitudes, cut by virtual lines, once the equator and the tropics, now drawn increasingly by other requirements – imperatives? – of Geographical Information Systems. The globe is on our computers. It is the logo of the World Bank. No one lives there; and we think that we can aim to control globality. (338)

Spivak's description of the alienating, assimilating, and homogenizing tendencies of capital is a familiar critique that resonates well with the larger tradition of Western Marxism and its critiques of globalization, for example ranging from Marx and Engels's prediction of globalization and the creation of a world market in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), Fredric Jameson and David Harvey's analyses of late capitalism and postmodernity in *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) and *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry in the Origins of Cultural Change* (1989), respectively, to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's analysis in *Empire* (2000). The reference to these particular works here is grounded in their thorough analyses of two important aspects that are a direct result of the political and economic transformations of the late twentieth century, namely conceptualizations of space and time under global neoliberal capital, as well as capital's capacity to encroach on and to an increasing extent control the production of social life, and life in general, which are echoed throughout Spivak's lecture.

Against the homogenizing tendencies of globalization and as a way of potentially unsettling and rupturing the dominant logic of neoliberal capitalism and capitalist subjectivity, Spivak extends an invitation to "imagine ourselves as planetary accidents rather than global agents, planetary creatures than global entities" (339), hinting at a *planetary poiesis* as an 'imaginative making' of possible postcolonial and postcapitalist futures. In *The Planetary Turn*, Elias and Moraru similarly take up Spivak's invitation when they write about the critical and aesthetic dimensions of the planetary. They describe the planetary turn, for instance, as a "new *structure of awareness*, . . . a methodical receptivity to the *geothematics of planetariness*" (339, original emphasis). For them, as for Spivak, the planetary displaces the ongoing spatialization of neoliberal capitalism and its homogenizing cultural logic with a

horizontal mode of “*relationality*, namely, by an ethicization of the ecumenic process of coming together or ‘worlding’” (339, original emphasis).

While Spivak’s concept of planetarity remains primarily focused on the redefinition of the subject against the background of the planet’s alterity – Spivak speaks of the planet as a “catachresis for inscribing collective responsibility as right” (341) – Elias and Moraru cast a broader net that also takes into consideration the emergence of environmental movements, the development of ecocriticism as a critical lens, as well as the recent awareness of and scholarship around the Anthropocene. The planetary turn then constitutes an openness towards reconceptualizing the planet as a “*living organism, a shared ecology*” (xii, original emphasis) along which to restructure human and non-human relationships, indicating a resurgence of what Elias terms a “world commons” in her contribution (xviii). The planetary, thus, in their words, becomes a “*multicentric and pluralizing, ‘actually existing’ worldly structure of relatedness critically keyed to non-totalist, non-homogenizing, and anti-hegemonic operations typically and polemically subtended by an ecologic*” (xxiii, original emphasis), meaning that the planetary presents itself as an *ethico-onto-epistemological* framework – to borrow Karen Barad’s term – with which to think the planet as the planet of all others.

Scholars quickly recognized the potential of the planetary. Consequently, there is “already a considerable number of authors and research centers that practice planetary thinking” (13, my translation),¹ as Frederic Hanusch, Claus Leggewie, and Erik Meyer remark in *Planetar Denken: Ein Einstieg* (2021). In the introduction to *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (2021), Dipesh Chakrabarty, for instance, posits that “ours is not just a global age; we live on the cusp of the global and what may be called ‘the planetary’” (3), and argues for a “new ‘commons’, a new anthropology, as it were, in search of a redefinition of human relationships to the nonhuman, including the planet” (20). Attempts at planetary thinking can also be found in Ian Baucom’s *History 4° Celsius: Search for a Method in the Anthropocene* (2020), Lukáš Likavčan’s *Introduction to Comparative Planetology* (2019), as well as in Achille Mbembe’s later works *Necropolitics* (2019), *Out of the Dark Night: Essays on Decolonization* (2021) and *Brutalisme* (2021), in which he consistently works towards understanding community on a planetary scale, suggesting that “[t]he political in our time

¹ „Schon eine beträchtliche Zahl von Einzelautorinnen und Forschungszentren übt das planetare Denken ein.“

must start from the imperative to reconstruct the world in common” (“Thoughts” n.p.). Similarly, Martin Arboleda writes in *Planetary Mine: Territories of Extraction under Late Capitalism* (2020) that “the shift from the global to the planetary is . . . understood as a steppingstone toward novel formations of collective consciousness and of collective agency” (ch. 1).

Taking these works as my foundation, my dissertation asks how a *planetary poetics* introduces a paradigm shift from unifying theories of globalization to planetary multitudes and multiplicity and works towards possibilities of a collective reinhabitation of the planet by constructing alternative visions based on a sense of relationality. This requires simultaneously thinking with, across, and through different environmental, economic, cultural, social, and political imaginaries that fundamentally resist the ongoing commodification of life under neoliberal globalization and take into consideration and actively develop other ways of being in the world. To show this, I look at three contemporary Canadian poets and their works: Kaie Kellough and his Griffin-prize winning collection *Magnetic Equator* (2019), Billy-Ray Belcourt’s *NDN Coping Mechanisms: Notes from the Field* (2019), and Rita Wong’s *forage* (2007). These works, I argue, prove highly productive in terms of a planetary poetics because of the multiple ways in which they are closely attuned to global processes and planetary forces, as well as through the various ways in which they establish a relational and translational subject position through a planetary lens.

To situate my project within a specifically Canadian context, I turn to Erin Wunker’s suggestion in her article “Toward a Planetary Poetics: Canadian Poetry after Globalization” (2016), in which she outlines the current trajectory of Canadian poetry and the ways it is being influenced by globalization. Referring to Jeff Derksen, who argues 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 94), Wunker writes that poetics “embody their signification process and make it possible to trace not only other histories that challenge dominant discourses, but those that make space for the possibility of acting otherwise in today’s world” (92). Her overall aim is to “demonstrate 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). Employing Spivak’s concept of planetarity, which “becomes a means of thinking of the self and political action across a range of scales, so that rather than opposing a monolithic,

totalizing force, action takes place at local, transnational, or global scales” (94), Wunker analyzes the works of Nicole Brossard, Dionne Brand, and Sina Queyras. What emerges from her analysis of these poets are the specific ways in which they think and write across multiple spatial and temporal scales, and in which they engage with the ethical implications of living in a globalized world, as well as the different ways in which they reconstruct the subject in relation to global processes. Similarly, the poetry collections I analyze are all critically engaged with the effects of neoliberalism within a Canadian and a global context. Through their resistance to essentialized accounts of the self, these works, however, also open up towards multiple temporalities and pluriversal epistemologies that resist the unifying tendencies of the global while enunciating positions of collective responsibility for the future of the planet and its human and non-human inhabitants, and consequently cultivate visions of shared planetary futures.

Works Cited

- Arboleda, Martin. *Planetary Mine: Territories of Extraction under Late Capitalism*. E-book, Verso, 2020.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*. The University of Chicago Press, 2021.
- Clark, Nigel and Bronislaw Szerszynski. *Planetary Social Thought: The Anthropocene Challenge to the Social Sciences*. Polity Press, 2021.
- Elias, Amy J. and Christian Moraru. “Introduction: The Planetary Condition.” *The Planetary Turn: Relationality and Geoaesthetics in the 21st Century*. Northwestern University Press, 2015, pp. xi-xxxvii.
- Hanusch, Frederic, et al. *Planetar Denken: Ein Einstieg*. Transcript, 2021.
- Mbembe, Achille. “Thoughts on the Planetary: An Interview with Achille Mbembe” *New Frame*, 05 Sept. 2019, newframe.com/thoughts-on-the-planetary-an-interview-with-achille-mbembe.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*. Harvard University Press, 2012.
- Wunker, Erin. “Toward a Planetary Poetics: Canadian Poetries after Globalization.” *The Oxford Handbook of Canadian Literature*, edited by Cynthia Sugars, Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 92-109.

After completing his bachelor's degree in History, Politics and Sociology at Potsdam University, **Frederik Blank** is currently pursuing a master's degree in North American Studies at Freie Universität Berlin. Before starting his studies in 2017, he lived in Quebec, Canada for one year and only learned in detail about Canada's troubled colonial past and present after attending a seminar on settler colonialism at Potsdam University. Since then, Canadian settler colonialism has been his academic focus. Moreover, he is interested in colonial history and legacies, and the public debates on these topics. This also includes questions of memory and public history in Canada, Germany and beyond.

Elena Cortés Farrujia is a post-MA (soon to be PhD) student at the University of Barcelona. She earned an MA degree in "Construction and Representation of Cultural Identities," which enabled her to pursue her primary area of interest, Queer Indigenous literature(s), from a holistic approach. Since then, she has participated in some symposiums, such as the AIW "Sovereign Erotic" conference or the international conference "Queer Temporalities." She became passionate about this field while writing her BA thesis at the University of La Laguna in Tenerife, where she graduated with an English Studies degree. In the future, she strives to continue with this line of research to pursue a PhD revolving around the Queer Indigenous spatio-temporal orientation(s) in connection with affect and waste theories.

Sababa Monjur is a Ph.D. candidate in Canadian Studies at Philipps University, Marburg. She earned her MA in North American Studies from the same institute in 2019. Her general research interests are popular culture, gender studies, queer theory, environmental studies and ecofeminism. The latter area is the focus of her doctoral project.

Florian Wagner is a research associate at the Institute for English and American Studies at Friedrich Schiller University Jena. He is currently writing his PhD thesis entitled "Revisiting the Environmental Imagination," in which he is reading contemporary Canadian poetry through a planetary lens. His research interests are situated at the nexus of ecocritical, decolonial, and postcapitalist thought. Together with his colleague Jaime Hyatt he has recently published a special issue of *COPAS* entitled "Embracing the Loss of Nature: Searching for Responsibility in an Age of Crisis."

Johanna Lederer holds an MA in North American Studies from the University of Bonn and a BA in Multilingual Communication (English and French) from the University of Applied Sciences in Cologne. She is a PhD candidate in the RTG “Practicing Place: Socio-Cultural Practices and Epistemic Configurations” at the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt. During her master's program, her research on representations of Indigenous activism in Canadian media earned her the Jürgen and Freia Saße Award which brought her to Toronto for a research stay. Her dissertation project with the working title “Making Place for Indigeneity: Imaginative Practices in Speculative Fiction and Artivism” explores how Indigenous literary and artistic placemaking practices in a Canadian context expand our understanding of what constitutes storytelling.

Manuel Sousa Oliveira is a PhD candidate at the University of Porto, and a Doctoral Research Fellow at the Centre for English, Translation, and Anglo-Portuguese Studies (CETAPS) with funding by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) (ref. UI/BD/151368/2021). His doctoral project is a comparative study of Ursula K. Le Guin’s and Margaret Atwood’s literary utopias with a focus on ethics. Recently, he earned his MA degree in Anglo-American Studies from the same institution with a dissertation on Paul Auster. He has been a trainee at the ALIMENTOPIA – Utopian Foodways research project, and a team member of the Junior Researchers in Anglo-American Studies (JRAAS). He is currently the international spokesperson for the Emerging Scholars’ Forum of the Association for Canadian Studies in German-Speaking Countries (GKS). He received two Margaret Atwood Society Awards, most recently in 2021.



**The Emerging Scholars' Forum of the Association for Canadian
Studies in German-speaking Countries**