New Sociology
Journal of Critical Praxis

2 Vol. 2
Issue

Becoming (Un)Productive
Grieving Death, Reclaiming Life

Cover art by Puneet Sidhu

New Sociology:
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Cover Artist Statement

My work represents the relationship between colour and world issues. Red, yellow, and blue: the three primary colours that can be mixed to create millions, if not billions, of colours, just like the billions of people on this planet. Each of us very different: from the colour of our skin to our hair, to our religion. The tone of blue I chose is symbolic of depression (a bluish gray, acknowledging the darkness we feel), but also representative of the waters that join the lands and earth together - waters that are also an issue across the world, especially in so-called Canada, a country that is deemed to have the freshest water, and yet, many Indigenous peoples' water supplies have been tainted due to pipelines, factories, and roads containing their land. I chose to add black streaks to this blue to represent the tainted waters, and red to symbolize blood, the blood we all share as living being. The blood is also representative of Black and Indigenous folx who have lost their lives due to the past and present abuses of colonialism, anti-blackness, and white supremacy. Coronavirus has also shown us how the colour of our skin – often in correlation with socioeconomic status – gravely affects who gets to live and who does not. A small strip of yellow represents hope, in reclaiming ourselves, through all the trials and tribulations. While it is small, and not always entirely visible, with the help of an entire community of people, there is always a chance to see this hope.

Cover Artist Biography

Puneet is completing her final year of her Bachelor of Arts degree in anthropology at York University, Tkaronto, Kanata. As a woman of colour from a white, conservative space, she is happy that more Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour and allies are voicing their opinions about racial violence and sharing their stories. She considers herself an appreciator of the arts (from a very young age in fact, every vacation she has ever taken, has included a visit to a local art gallery or museum) – rather than an artist – but she still enjoys dabbling in painting and photography here and there. She does not have a specific style, but she has always enjoyed louder colours, cultural expressions, and deeper meanings in an artist's work – especially when it is personal. Puneet loves questioning everything, and hopes her art provokes people to do the same, specifically by getting them to question why she chose to make that piece of art she did. In her spare time (when she has any), you will likely catch her reading (probably something dystopian), cooking, or spending time with her family.

BECOMING (UN)PRODUCTIVE: GRIEVING DEATH, RECLAIMING LIFE (VOL. 2)

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The image that undoubtedly captures the embodied reality of living in the 'post-pandemic' world as a Black grad student is the viral blurry Mr. Krabs meme surrounded by an angry mob—yeah, that one! I have no idea what's going on academically—I haven't fully recovered from the plague of Black death that has become 'the newly designated disposable bodies of the pandemic' –my world has shaken. This meme encapsulates the disorientated state I currently occupy. The once urgent and ignited public discourse regarding systemic police reforms are now stagnant, thwarted by state and public debates of the vaccinated vs. unvaccinated that places responsibility on BIPOC to stop the spread of COVID-19. In the 'post-pandemic world', death and freedom are immutably interwoven; the freedom to die is set above the unfreedom of containment and 'forced' vaccinations—and the freedom to live longer; relatively free, is through the unfreedom of mobility. So, what does life feel like as a Black grad student navigating social media/public feeds that choose to strip colonial, racist, and imperialist histories from strict biopolitical regimes of COVID-19 containment in Canada and at York University? It feels suffocating—it is violent.*

- Beatrice Anane-Bediakoh, Chief-Deputy-Editor

These days, COVID-19 is consistent background noise, while the movements for racial justice are distant memories. We're so distracted by technology; we don't hear the stories of tragedy or hear the politicians lie casually when they promise change passionately – do those ideas ever really come to life? Time passes and the masses' attention turns to the next day, but the next day brings Black, Indigenous and People of Colour dying in daylight. So much pain, too many emotions, and just to listen, is a fight. Time is life and these days that's a luxury. So today, I sit here daydreaming and realize that tomorrow brings the best yet to come. So tonight, I lay here dreaming of an otherwise that fights the tragedy of reality. All while thinking of my son, holding him close, so I don't let him drown, so I don't let him down.

- Giovanni Carranza- Hernandez, Chief-Deputy-Editor

I don't know what time is. I have long joked that "time is a construct." It's an occupational hazard to make such philosophical declarations. But now, I feel the words in my marrow. Was it not a minute ago, that everyone cared about the state sanction killing of Black and Indigenous folx and PoC? Was 2019 not last week, a few sleepless nights away? When was it, that my home went from a mundane reality to an uncanny fact of life? When did today stop being tomorrow? Being Brown, a grad student, queer, enby, femme, it's always timeless, but now, time is the chokehold of staying still and propelling simultaneously. I am me tomorrow, yesterday, today. I am the construction to which I used to attribute time.

- Jade Crimson Rose Da Costa, Founder/Editor-in-Chief

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

As we did with the first volume of the issue, we begin this volume with three epigraphs from the senior editors of *New Sociology*: Beatrice and Giovanni, our Chief-Deputy-Editors, and me, Jade, the founder and Editor-in-Chief. But this time, we are postCOVID[1], writing from places of prolonged exhaustion, of slow death, and of an unwavering commitment to justice nonetheless soured by time – Beatrice's piece, reminds us that the state will always find a way to mutate or forget public interest in racial justice; that is *has* found a way to reify anti-Blackness and white supremacy– a global social currency so easily erased and consumed within and by our postCOVID imaginations and discourses; in our dystopia masquerading as futurity. Giovanni's piece, on the other hand, reckons time against the (now false, or perhaps, wavering?) promise and demand that inspired our issue, highlighting our simultaneous need and inability to dream of an otherwise, of a new tomorrow, so that our children, our future, will not drown in the death of today, of yesterday. And in a similar vein, my piece is the words of someone who fears the relevance and futurity of our authors' visions will be immediately archived in a world defined by the white settler's fantasy of linear progress and development, of endless productivity and loss.

Unlike with our first volume, these epigraphs are not intended to mirror the exhaustion and resiliency pulsating throughout the pages to follow. On the contrary, they are meant to highlight the gap between the cultural urgency and intensity that had only a year and a half ago brought the pieces of our latest issue, *Becoming (Un)Productive: Grieving Death, Reclaiming Life*, forward, and the dying hum of performative activism and COVID-19 CareMongering in which the second volume of the issue has now emerged. Both this volume and the issue writ large has become a falsity in time, a thing conceived both decades and moments before it was brought into existence – a constellation of art and vision intended to declare that racial justice and COVID and all the social abuses we cared so deeply about this time last year, are not over.

We continue to imagine, dream, and hope for an otherwise, for a world beyond productivity and death, but now, we lace that vision with an exhaustion that we intentionally gift you, the reader, with, wrapped in a reminder that the death, toxic productivity, and state sanction killing that inspired our second issue, in both incantations, is still alive, rampant, and in need of extinction and transformation. Time may be a construct, but something still has to give. Too tired to think of an otherwise is a chronic battle for tomorrow, and being just.so.drained is violence.

With that, I will introduce the pieces of the second volume of our second issue, hoping that you carry forth our refusal to arrest these words in time and, like us, refuse to pretend that shit is okay now, because it is not – as the authors, artists, and creatives of the volume will remind you. Akin to part one, the second iteration of *Becoming (Un)Productive: Grieving Death, Reclaiming Life* is broken into three parts, once again organized by one overarching theme. However, this time, each theme (or section) contains three to four pieces, with a book review at the end. The three themes are: *Academic Outsider*, *Artologies*, and *Dear Academia*. The first theme, inspired by Audre Lorde's formation *the sister outsider*, denotes those of us, particularly Black, Indigenous, and Women of Colour (BIWOC), who, as a result of letting our embodied belief in social justice guide our work, are at once inside and outside academia – a place the purports to advocate for social change but, in reality, merely uses it as a

[1] As before, we mean postCOVID in the same way Ryan Kanté Jobson means the term postpandemic, as implied by their tweet: "So the "post" in postpandemic is the same as the "post" in postcolonial, no?" Accessed June 14, 2021. Available at: https://twitter.com/RyanCecilJobson/status/1401909046391853061?s=20

brand to guise its obsession with whiteness and wealth. The scholars of this section, all Black and Brown women, are academics in the ways we yearn for, not in the ways we typically confront, and are thus outside the traditional bounds of academia, both in the literal sense of being excluded from it but also in the figurative sense of being beyond it; better than it; they are the promise, not the lie.

The section begins with the featured piece of the volume: "Pandemagogy and Online Teaching: A Case for Online Teaching". Composed by scholar-educator Shehnoor Khurram, this reflection essay, peppered with screen shots of real online communications between educators and students, is a testament to a reality known to many teacher's assistants who have struggled, since March 2020, to effectively teach online in a world where internet access and education are as inequitable as health care and vaccine distributions have proven to be. Written with the same sincerity and dedication Khurram illustrates in her commitment to teaching amongst a global health pandemic defined both by digital learning and profound injustice, *Pandemagogy and Online Teaching* is a relatable, striking, and intelligent exploration of how pandemics contort and mutate our commitment to critical pedagogy into something else, into pandemagogy.

The second piece under *Academic Outsider* is a reflection piece by emergent scholar Natalie Stravens, entitled "The Memeification of Black Women's Trauma". Here, Stravens reminds us of the power of extending academic critique beyond "traditional" data sources and exploring the political meaning and impact of social media on our everyday lives. Specifically, Stravens examines how online discourses casually promote, or "memeify", the pain of Black femmes and non-binary people and the irony and hypocrisy of this fact in the wake of the second wave of the Black Lives Matter movement – a movement generally mobilized by Black women/femmes/enbys. A brilliant exploration of how misogynoir has come to plague the online sphere the same way it defines the material world, and the subsequent ways Black feminists fight back, online and in person, this reflection essay is unrivaled in its cleverness and insight.

The last piece of the section is a thoughtful, honest, and methodologically impressive reflection essay entitled "'Say Their Names': Uncovering A 'Good Story' Among Protestors", which is written by scholar and local community organizer Melissa P. McLetchie. In this essay, McLetchie draws on her firsthand experience of a prisoner rights protest in Lyndsay, Ontario, using the grace and wisdom only possible for academics who are genuinely connected and committed to the issue at hand, to explore Dr Katherine Bischoping and Dr Amber Gazso's notion of a "good story" within the activist scene (from their book *Analyzing Talk*). A blend of narrative and analysis itself, *Say Their Names* is both a powerful testament and an intriguing examination of the power of storytelling within academic analysis and critique.

The next section of our second volume is entitled *Artology*. The pieces under this theme all show the diverse critical and analytical power of art, whether by showcasing the raw political energy of poetry, exploring the affective resonance of fiction, or highlighting the sociological prowess of modern sitcoms. Piece one, entitled "My Life Matters: The Cost of Being a Black Youth", is a poem by scholar-creative Fiona Edwards. Detailing the complicated reality of being Black and young, abject and hopeful, haunted and wonderous, Edward explores what it means for Black youth to live and evolve in a world (still) defined by whiteness and anti-Black racism. Following this, is a reflection essay by emergent scholar Celia Ringstrom, entitled "For the Insane in the Insane World". A blend of cultural critique and narrative, Ringstrom engages in an auto-ethnographic analysis of their mental health experiences under COVID-19 and pre-existing biomedical ontologies through a reading of *My Brilliant Friend* (and the associated quadrilogy). Most striking, is her use of the novel, disability theory, and the newfound chaos of COVID-19 to reframe time as circular – perpetually nourishing

and always evolving and forever complicated – and, in so doing, provides a brilliant critique of our racial-ableist capitalist society that demands linear productivity and the forward marching of time in service of the settler's fantasy.

The last piece of the section is a reflection essay entitled "In Defence of #blackAF's Celebration of Mediocrity", which is written by writer and independent researcher Aharon Joseph. Most impressive about this piece, is not only Joseph's welcomed refusal to fall into the academic trap of "critiquing for critique's sake" but his concerted ability to go beyond the tired eyes of academia and engage Kenya Barris' Netflix series #blackAF outside woke culture. Specifically, Joseph draws out the either seemingly buried or willfully ignored critical potential of the show to expose the hashtags #blackexcellence and #supporteverythingblack for what they are: ideological blankets masking the unfortunate reality of Black life under late western modernity. Framed and decorated in philosophical references, clever metaphors, and strong critical analysis, this essay adopts a well-formed and cleverly jargonistic academic frame to explore something "established" academics would self righteously dismiss as meaningless pop culture and, as a result, truly embraces the name of the section in which it appears: *Artology*.

The last section of the issue is called *Dear Academia*, and, keeping in line with our anti-academic yet still academic approach, this theme is a nod to the Netflix show *Dear White People*, whereby "White People" is replaced with "Academia" to illustrate the intimacies between the two. This section, unlike the other two, is united by tension, bringing the raw poetry of two non-white femmes and the political reflections of two white researchers together in diametrical juxtaposition. The first piece of the section is a reflection essay by scholar Amber-Lee Varadi, entitled "a collective grievance, a collective acquiescence: Rememberings and hauntings in our pandemic of racialized violence". In this piece, Varadi explores how our present world is haunted by an insidious past of anti-Black racism and settler colonialism but, instead of posing these insights as novel, uses them to critically invite other white academics to engage the presence of racial haunting within academia and the meaning of "allyship". Following this, is a short but powerful poem by scholar-creative Kwene Appah, entitled "so Black, so Angry". This poem is a visceral incantation of the realities facing Black women within white academia; within western society; within cis-heteronormative and androcentric Black spaces; within a world that, even post-2020 and, as previously described, the public's heighted (and now discarded) interest in Black Lives Matter, demands their silence, death, and literal and symbolic erasure.

The next piece under *Dear Academia* is a reflective essay entitled "Reflections on Conducting Community-Engaged Research during COVID-19", by emergent scholar Peter Duker. Drawing on his own Master's research on (international) community-engaged scholarship, which he conducts as both a privileged white man and a disenfranchised graduate student, Duker illustrates how COVID-19 has underscored the importance of researchers to check ourselves. In his thoughtful evaluation of his need to reconceptualize time, re-evaluate his project, and embrace flexibility and accountability, Duker at once exposes the institutional abuse of universities towards graduate students as well as the need for the more privileged of us, such as white men like himself, to advocate more than ever on behalf of research participants.

We conclude the section and the issue with a poem by emergent scholar and poet Gloria Park, entitled "Affections and Afflictions with You". This piece is an emotionally honest and raw engagement of how white beauty standards and interpretations of worth affect Asian women's sense of love, belonging, and becoming, highlighting the genuine intimacies of white supremacy on the soul, mind, and body, thus revealing it for the plague that it is. Taken together, the pieces of this section remind us that

white scholars should take on the work of calling out (*not* in) their white peers, and to amplify racialized and Indigenous voices, while we all most do the work of never letting white voices speak louder than the raw insight, pain, beauty, and talent of BIPOC: those most impacted by and committed against racial injustice. Then, to wrap up the volume/issue, we have our first ever book review, a two-page engagement with the book *Dealing in Desire* written by emergent scholar Patara McKeen, whose obvious love of the book is only matched by his commitment to write a thoughtful and enticing review of it for our journal.

As stated in the last volume, and in an intentional effort to be redundant – both to hammer the pulse and continued relevancy of our whole issue home and to save us some labour – we declare once more: as an issue born out of the trauma, heartbreak, exhaustion, violence, and resilience of the COVID-19 pandemic, we hope you find parts of yourself in the poetics, artistry, stories, thoughts, critiques, and visions of the words and images that radiate throughout *Becoming (Un)Productive*. This issue was a labour of love in the truest sense of the phrase, and we could not be more thankful for and proud of our contributors: thankful for their contributions, proud of their survival (and/or lack thereof). These stories are a testament to the power of those ignored, overlooked, and exploited by academia. We bring them to the center of knowledge in the face of collective trauma and profound social reimagining. We bring them to the center in the face of the endless calls to be productive despite the death, loss, and anxiety surrounding us. We bring them together to challenge academia's (not so) hidden white supremacist-capitalist-cis-heteropatriarchal-ableist social fabric. *We bring them together to say – again, still – fuck you, productivity, fuck you, racial capitalism, fuck you, academia,* we'd rather keep resting, surviving, creating, and simply existing. We *have* continued resting, surviving, creating, and existing.

We would like to thank the authors, creatives, and dreamers who contributed to the volume. A special thank you also goes to our peer reviewers, editorial team, advisory board, York Digital Journals, York University Printings Services, and the York University Sociology Department. As always, we especially acknowledge Audrey Tokiwa for her unconditional support. Finally, we would like to thank Erika Mulder for designing the two poem proofs and the cover of the issue and Brittany Myburgh for not only designing the remaining nine proofs but once again for being a pillar in a chaotic and ever-changing time. Thank you to all the people who make this journal a possibility and believe in the power of critical praxis; in the power of Femme, Queer, and Trans/Black, Indigenous and People of colour students and creatives.

Jade Crimson Rose Da Costa, NS Founder and Editor-In-Chief, with Beatrice Anane-Bediakoh, NS Chief-Deputy-Editor, and Giovanni Carranza-Hernandez, NS Chief-Deputy-Editor.

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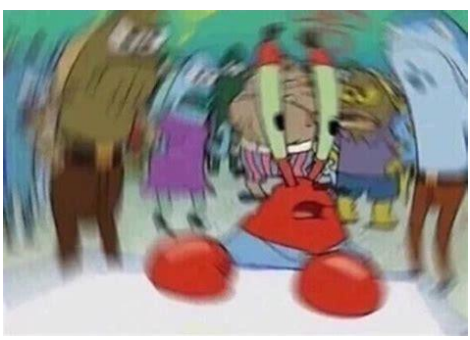


Academic Outsider

NS?

Pandemagogy and Online Teaching: A Case for Public Internet

Shehnoor Khurram

Abstract

The Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) is not merely a medical crisis; it is also a social one. It has paralyzed all aspects of public life, leading to closures of all "non-essential" public spaces, chief among them, schools. Universities across Canada have shut down and moved online in an attempt to halt the transmission of the deadly virus. What many initially thought would be remote learning for just a few weeks, turned into months. Now, for the foreseeable future, remote learning will be the new normal. However, this poses unique challenges for educators and students, because there is no universal access to high-speed internet in Canada, which means that those who have access to it can transition online with ease; while those who do not have access are left behind. In an effort to work through these challenges, this reflection paper offers an autoethnographic account of online learning and its associated challenges during COVID-19. It makes the case for public internet and pandemagogy.

Keywords
COVID-19, Internet Access, Public Internet, Digital Divide, Critical Pedagogy, Pandemagogy, Online Teaching

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has had extensive consequences beyond the transmission of the disease itself; and the measures employed to mitigate its spread carry significant social, political, and economic ramifications. The multi-layered strategy of public health emergency responses has paralyzed all aspects of public life. The closure of all "non-essential" spaces, including schools, has been one component of this approach. Millions of students have had their education disrupted by the deadly virus, as universities across Canada have shut down and moved online in an attempt to lower the staggeringly high contagion rates of COVID-19. What many initially thought would be remote learning for just a few weeks, has turned into months. Now, for the foreseeable future, remote learning will be the new norm.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the fore a crisis that has been quietly brewing in Canada for many decades: the digital divide. With the widespread disruption to everyday life, the internet has emerged as a panacea to tackle all education-related issues. But this poses unique challenges, because there is no universal access to high-speed internet in Canada, meaning that those who have access to it can transition online with ease, while those who do not are left behind.

Migrating Online

I am a fourth-year doctoral candidate and teaching assistant in the department of Political Science at York University. In March 2020, I received an email from my department's chair announcing that in-person instruction would be cancelled for the rest of the winter semester, and that all classes will be moving online. I have been an educator for many years now and during this time, I have dealt with various kinds of crises; but never before have I felt such an acute sense of dread and uneasiness. Transitioning to virtual learning, especially during times of indefinite uncertainty, is no easy feat. For educators, this crisis is a challenge of adaptation, revision, and transformation, because there is no manual to guide the process. We must design and create responses in the moment, as the pandemic wreaks havoc on all.

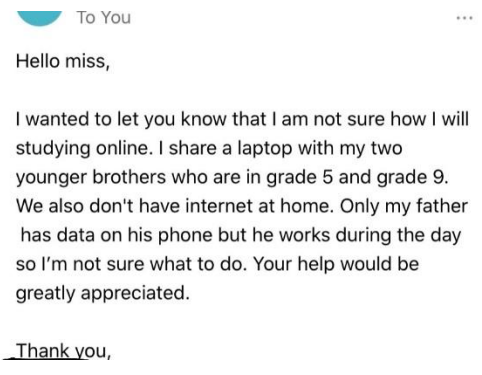
I am deeply committed to public education. Teaching forms the very basis of my revolutionary politics. Inspired by the works of Antonio Gramsci, Frantz Fanon, Paulo Freire, bell hooks, Henry Giroux and others, I believe that education is "coming to know, act, and engage the world" (Dei and Simmons, 2010: p.3). Education is political and has the potential to transform oppressive relations of domination and subordination. It can be emancipatory because it develops a critical consciousness, which can empower students to take action to build a more just world. I teach first- and second-year courses on Canadian politics with the explicit aim of sharing Canada's violent histories of genocide, racial slavery, settler colonialism, anti-Black racism, neoliberal capitalism, and more. I encourage students to consider the present in light of the past, to make sense of the current state of Canadian politics by locating its historical origins, and considering how broader structural movements impact their everyday lives. My aim is to urge students to think about structures of oppression, alienation, and exploitation at the level of praxis in ways that put their lived experiences in conversation with theory and history.

A vital facet of this process is getting students to reflect on their positionalities, and tackle issues of inequality, difference, and power through the lenses of class, race, gender, ability, Indigeneity, religion, sexuality, and more. For many students who have thus far only received the province-approved middle and secondary school curricula, critical learning can be shocking. It is together as a class that we do the difficult work of unpacking these legacies of violence, questioning institutionalized power and privilege, and discussing the limitations and possibilities of politics. Engaging in these sorts of conversations requires building relationships of trust and compassion in the classroom. In addition to the contexts, cultures, histories, and meanings that they bring to the classroom itself, the critical education that my students and others at York University receive promotes civic courage and social responsibility. This has the possibility of igniting bravery within them to realize that they have the power and the duty to challenge the existing unjust status quo, and to dream of new worlds.

With the transition to online teaching, I initially questioned how I would accomplish any of these goals when digital learning platforms add major communication barriers that make it hard to know when to talk or how to read important non-verbal communications, like body language and facial expressions. I wondered how I would inspire students to come together and share the vulnerable parts of themselves in service of cultivating solidarity and community when we are not even in the same room.

Getting students to participate in difficult conversations is already a challenge under ordinary circumstances; but it is intensified tenfold during remote learning. I worried that the authentic moments of connection that I have come to value as an educator would become few and far between. I worried that teaching and learning would become a solitary and detached responsibility, rather than a shared human experience in which we could all lean on each other. I worried I wouldn't be able to feel their palpable rage or discomfort when discussing issues in Canadian politics, like racism and white supremacy, in the ways I used to during in-person instruction. I worried that teaching would now feel hollowed out and empty.

All of these concerns swirled in my head, until I received an email from a student a few days before my very first online tutorial. The email read:


To You

Hello miss,

I wanted to let you know that I am not sure how I will studying online. I share a laptop with my two younger brothers who are in grade 5 and grade 9. We also don't have internet at home. Only my father has data on his phone but he works during the day so I'm not sure what to do. Your help would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you,

Immediately, I realized that my worries about teaching online were secondary to the real concern: digital access. Questions of critical pedagogy in the online classroom are useless if students cannot even log on.

The Digital Divide

Like most things, the jarring social inequalities within the Canadian society were exposed in the first few days of the pandemic: online learning is not universal, and students face a host of systemic barriers that prevent them from attending their new mode of schooling. My above student, for instance, struggled to keep up with coursework because he could only access the internet during certain times of the day, and through his parent's cell phone. Additionally, he shared a laptop with two other siblings, all of whom were learning at multiple levels. The consequences of these factors led to his continued absence from tutorials, and lengthy delays in submitting class assignments. Unfortunately, his experience is not unique, and similar situations are unfolding nationwide.

The pandemic has unveiled the longstanding technological gulf that exists in Canada. Students who lack the resources that they now need to learn are facing serious long-term academic disadvantages – this is referred to as the digital divide. The concept of the "digital divide" is a reference to the growing gap between various socioeconomic groups and regions with or without access to communication technologies (i.e., laptops) and the internet (Steele, 2019). Canada does not have a national broadband plan; and class, race, gender, disability, citizenship status, and geographic location, among other things, impact a person's ability to access digital connectivity, tools, and skills (Campana, 2020). For students, access to eLearning is dependent on a host of factors, such as personal and familial financial means, geographic location, and intersecting social identities. Many people don't have access to high-speed internet. These people are disproportionately poor and rural (Stewart, 2020).

Limited or no access to technology creates serious impediments for students; but even those who have access to technology encounter many critical challenges. This is because the digital divide is also embodied and physical. For students with physical disabilities, learning disabilities, and/or mental health disabilities, remote learning can pose significant questions of accommodation and accessibility (Peter, 2020; Weissman, 2020). In the scramble to shift to online learning, barriers to disability supports have increased, compounded by the fact that many online course designs are simply not accessible. Assistive technology is unreliable and irregularly used by educational institutions who purport to be accessible, and learning is made harder through the use of anti-cheating software and proctored exams (Leoppky, 2020). For some, asynchronous learning has facilitated greater independence and self-accommodation by allowing them to learn without leaving their homes and created more flexible schedules. For others, it has been inaccessible in new or worse ways. Given that technological design and use do not centre inclusion and accessibility, the internet is now becoming a new means of increased discrimination in the university and beyond (Kent, 2015; Anderson, 2020).

Further, it is troubling to note that students with disabilities in Canada have been advocating for remote accommodations for many years; but they

have faced insensitive opposition from university administrators, on the basis that such a transition would purportedly be too expensive and time-consuming, and it would require educators to undertake additional training (Anderson, 2020). However, it is ironic that when the university needed to shift to online teaching for its own survival during the pandemic-induced lockdown, suddenly a transition to eLearning not only became a real possibility but also took a short week to accomplish. What this demonstrates is that although many students with disabilities are benefitting from this transition, it is clear that the increase in access is completely unintentional, and not designed to accommodate their specific needs.

The combination of these factors has created a situation where students who lack the resources to learn at home cannot fully participate and engage in online schooling (Campana, 2020). With the digital divide dictating who can and cannot access remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, we are effectively creating a two-tier stratification of the educational system in which marginalized students needlessly suffer. Previously, students without access to Wi-Fi at home could go to the library, community centres, coffee shops and/or other restaurants for internet access (Vargas, 2020). But with all non-essential spaces closed to limit contagion, the issue of the digital divide becomes a pressing and urgent complication that must be dealt with quickly and systematically, factoring into every governmental emergency planning.

The Case for Public Internet

While the total shift to virtual learning is new, the inequitable access to technology (internet access and devices) has been an enduring feature of Canadian society for decades. Previously, the internet was a luxury, a place for those who could afford it to watch funny cat videos, shop from the comfort of their homes, and play games with others. But 2020 has demonstrated with stark clarity that the internet is now a necessity for all of us living in this highly digitalized world. Access to the internet is now as important for our well-being as is electricity (Vargas, 2020). The internet has become a permanent fixture in our everyday lives; a medium through which we work, learn, communicate, entertain, and relax. This is especially true of the pandemic, when the internet has helped us maintain our collective well-being during a period of prolonged isolation brought on by social distancing and lockdown.

The internet has become so vital that in 2016, the United Nations (UN) declared internet access a fundamental human right (Vargas, 2020). An amendment was made to Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to include, "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers" (Equality and Human Rights Commission, n.d.). This article is also concerned with "the promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet", through which it tackles the global digital divide and provides 15 recommendations for member countries, including Canada, to implement (Howell and Darrell, 2016).

The Canadian government quickly followed suit with the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) announcing that broadband internet access is a right for all Canadian citizens[1] (Pedwell, 2016). However, there is a significant difference between recognizing access to the internet as a human right and ensuring that everyone has access to it. While it has been recognized as crucial, it has yet to become truly accessible for all (Vargas, 2020). Despite creating plans, the Canadian government has thus far been slow to act on it. The pandemic is now demonstrating that the gap between these two realms of access is ever-expanding, with government rhetoric in misalignment with government action. Although, in the 2019 federal budget, the Liberal government devoted $5-$6 million for a Universal Broadband Fund, with the aim of achieving 100 per cent connectivity across the country by 2030, the crisis is unfolding now – waiting until 2030 is just not an option (CBC, 2020). This difference in the internet landscape has meant that, according to Statistics Canada, 1.4 million households with less than

[1] While CRTC has used the term "citizens", it is important to note that this wording leaves out all those with precarious statuses as well as sovereign Indigenous communities. Further, citizenship itself is mediated through race, class, gender, disability, Indigeneity, and more, and its privileges are not evenly distributed amongst and between different social groups. Given that the internet is now considered a human right, it should not be sought through or limited to citizenship.

$20,000 yearly income do not have landline internet (Sharpe, 2020). Sixteen per cent of all households in Canada do not have access to high-speed internet; and the number jumps to 63 per cent for rural households. High-speed internet connectivity is a human right that must be readily available and accessible to everyone, not just those who are able to afford the unreasonably expensive prices set by the telecommunication industry's giants.

Despite its necessity during the current crisis, the federal government has not included high-speed internet in any government relief package. Various municipalities and individual schools have attempted to combat the issue. In Toronto, the city announced their #ConnectTO initiative that aims to expand internet access to underserved residents by using existing resources like fibre cables, and to have new resources provided by private sector partners to offer reasonable prices (Rocca, 2021). This includes Wi-Fi installment in 25 private residential neighbourhoods for a year; however, the installment itself will take quite some time (Vargas, 2020). York University has set up a laptop borrowing service that allows registered students, faculty, and staff who are in good standing[2] to access a university-owned laptop. But these measures still leave many behind, and do not address the situation systematically. At best, these solutions are temporary, and therefore do not challenge the inequitable access to the internet in meaningful and wide-reaching ways.

It is also abundantly clear that the private sector is not going to close the digital divide. Not only will they not close the divide, but they are actively working to exacerbate it. They have lobbied for deregulations that would intensify the rift, treating the internet as an "exploitable luxury good" (Bode, 2019). The Big Three of the Canadian telecoms industry, Bell Canada, Telus Communications, and Rogers Communications have a de facto monopoly on the internet in Canada; and they are protected by state-enforced restrictive foreign ownership rules that aim at eliminating competition. This has led to outrageously high prices, low consumption rates, and uneven connectivity (Jackson, 2018). In response to the pressures created by the COVID-19 pandemic, the two largest internet providers in Ontario (Bell Canada and Rogers Communications) have both removed data usage caps on home internet plans; but they have neither offered to drop overage charges on cell phones, nor created unlimited mobile data plans (Sharp, 2020).

Ultimately, our outdated national internet infrastructure is incapable of withstanding a crisis of this nature. We need a more inclusive arrangement. Everyone deserves dependable, high-speed internet; and access to it should not be mediated based on location, social identity, or ability to pay. It should not be a price-gouging, profit machine for corporations. We must break up the monopolies of the big telecom providers, and move towards publicly owned and democratically controlled, open-access broadband networks (Gilbert, 2020; Moreton, 2020). We must treat the internet as a necessary public utility that everyone deserves as a fundamental human right. Alejandra Ruiz Vargas (2020), an advocate with the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) Canada, sketches one possible route to achieve this: expanding the federal government's existing Connecting Families initiative to offer free Wi-Fi in all public spaces and private home plans to be available for just $10 per month.

Pandemagogy: A Note to Educators

In light of the digital divide, there are two points for all educators to consider: first, internet access is yet another realm of COVID-19 in which the government has failed to act, leaving people struggling to find solutions. The federal government's stimulus package does not even address the digital divide, even though nearly all Canadian universities and colleges are physically closed. Governance in Ontario has demonstrated that what matters most to them is corporate Canada's needs and interests, rather than those of students. We cannot rely on these policymakers to step up to the challenge. It is up to us as educators to apply pressure from below that can lead to change from above. We must take decisive steps to prevent the learning gap from further widening. We should include public internet in our demands as a redline stipulation that we are unwilling to negotiate on, as we wage a battle against the Ford government's harmful school re-opening plans. In-

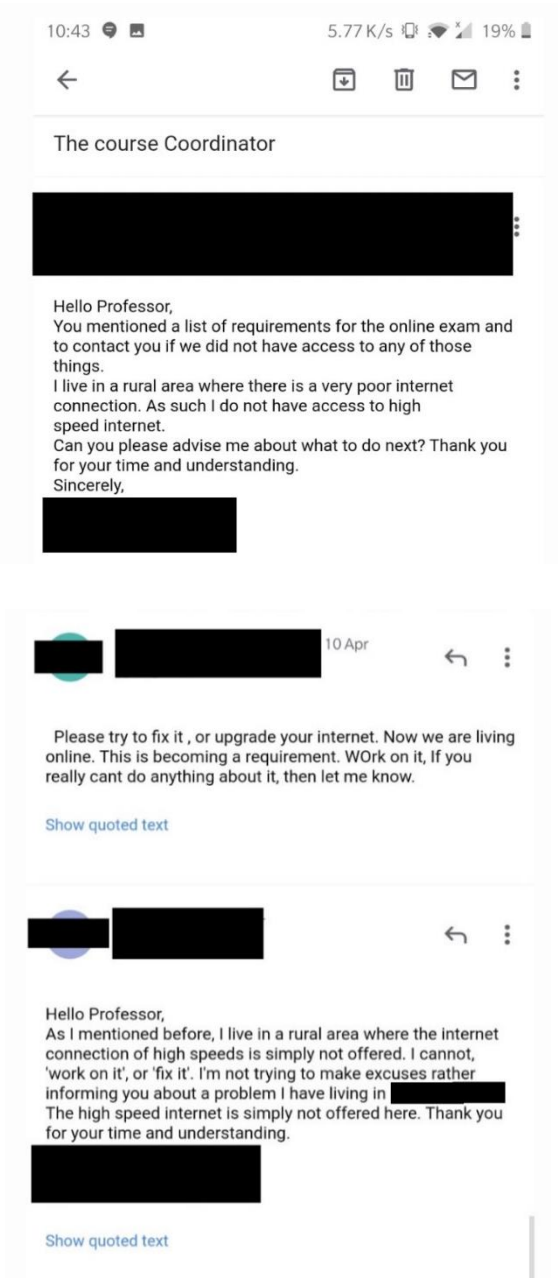
[2] At York University, and beyond, the "good standing" conditionality has historically been used as a punitive measure to target student activists, who are overwhelmingly BIPOC and international students; this was especially evident in the aftermath of the CUPE3903's 2018 strike. Moreover, in order to access such equipment, students and staff have to travel to campus, which is not an option for many.

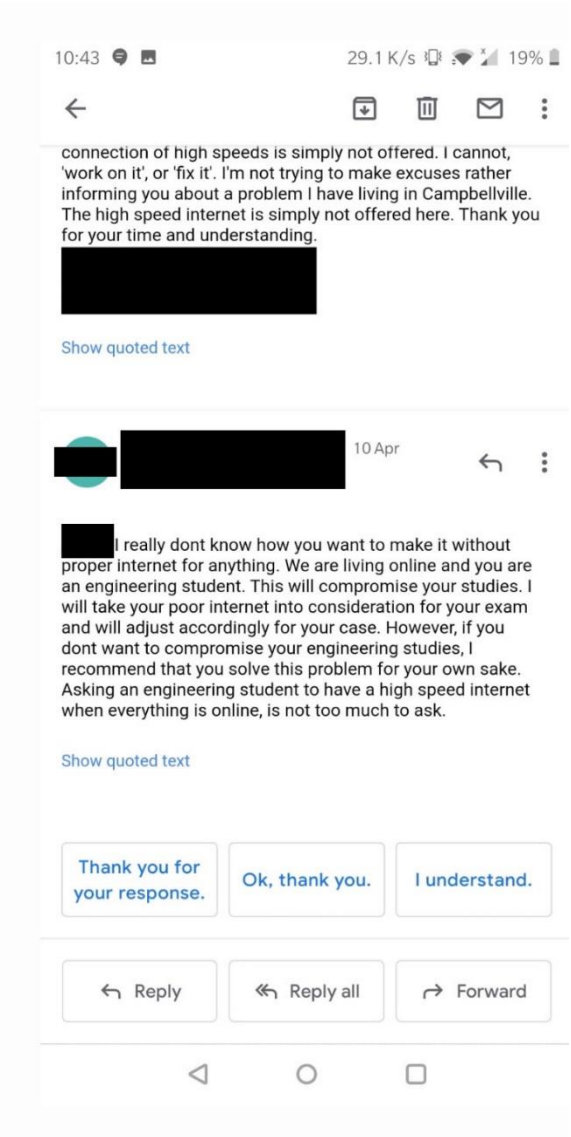
person instruction will likely not resume for another year; and with classes all pivoting online, we need to act immediately to ensure that no student is left offline.

The second factor to consider is pandemagogy. To make sense of this challenging moment, educators have been coming together to have collective discussions and to create a community on Twitter. Out of these conversations emerged the term pandemagogy: pedagogy during the pandemic (Kamenetz, 2020; Morris, 2020). Kamenetz (2002) defines pandemagogy as teaching during extraordinary times, whereby educators must bridge the gap between in-person instruction and online learning amongst the deadly Coronavirus. Sean Michael Morris (2020) argues that previous modes of online learning that were dominant pre-pandemic uphold the neoliberal status quo. Driven by austerity politics and market fundamentalism, these forms of eLearning prioritize technical, behaviourist, and positivist approaches that treat students like customers. Education becomes less about a knowledge community developing critical thinking skills and a deeper understanding of the world, and more about individual students acquiring certain credentials that will make them competitive in the job market. In this equation, students become consumers, and the university becomes a business that can standardize requirements to attain those credentials. The development of critical thinking is undermined to achieve simple benchmarks because it is easier for the university to quantify, transforming higher education into a purchasable degree instead of the acquisition of knowledge. Structural barriers, like the digital divide, are ignored, and success/failure in attaining credentials becomes the responsibility of the individual student. The neoliberal university thus becomes analogous to a factory assembly line that mass-produces uniform students, prioritizing efficiency and output.

This cannot work for pandemagogy. We are in an uncertain state of flux (Ravitch, 2020). Students have novel and unprecedented concerns about their academic plans and career goals. As Sharon Ravitch (2020) argues, there is an urgent need for a humanizing and student-centric educational approach that is founded on kindness, compassion, patience, flexibility, understanding, and solidarity (also see Morris, 2020). Critical pedagogy offers a framework for responding to online teaching during pandemagogy, because it requires the teacher to "read the world and respond/teach accordingly" (para. 4). It encourages responsive, compromising, and flexible learning and knowledge production by creating safe spaces, strengthening mutual trust, and empowering the agency of all in the virtual community. Unfortunately, however, it does not seem that Canadian universities are thus far willing to adopt such a framework around teaching.

To this point, the following is an email exchange between my younger cousin who lives in rural Ontario, and his engineering professor at Ryerson University:





The attitude of this instructor is shameful, appalling, and disgraceful. Such behaviour individualizes the structural issue of inequitable access to the internet. Placing the burden of internet access onto students is unfair and unethical, given that it is often not under their control. Educators who engage in this kind of blame-and-shame behaviour allow the government to evade its responsibility to students to ensure that they have access to the internet. Critically, we must reflect on the socio-economic and political contradictions and tensions that underlie the educational experiences of students during COVID-19 so that we can craft responses that account for systemic inequalities and are attuned to their unique circumstances. The digital divide means that marginalized students are going to struggle the most. We must extend grace to them and assume good faith. We must practice active listening and proactive communication to create a supportive environment in which all students can thrive. Ravitch (2020) highlights numerous pedagogical frameworks and strategies that educators can employ when constructing their courses: trauma-informed pedagogy, brave space pedagogy, and racial literacy pedagogy. A collaborative, student-centric approach to teaching is what's needed now. Asking for compassion during a global health pandemic *is not too much to ask.*

We as educators must also make accessibility a cornerstone of our pandemagogy, ensuring that eLearning is inclusive for students with disabilities, while resisting the ableist discrimination of the university. Educators who use virtual teaching platforms like Zoom Video Communications should use accessibility features such as external text-to-speech software compatibility, screen reader support, and closed captioning (Kent, 2015). Moreover, instructors should take the time to learn about universal design principles, which can aid them in designing inclusive courses and adapting them to the online environment. As a standard, we should aim to make our courses as universally and systemically accessible as possible to reduce the onus placed on students to have to ask for accommodations individually; the latter makes them vulnerable and reliant on professors as generous benefactors.

For those of us committed to critical pedagogy, we must aim at a political transformation for the purpose of justice. We must build the groundwork for a world where every single student and worker has access to high-speed internet, regardless of their social identities. Everyone should have unmonitored, uncensored, and unlimited access to the virtual world. We must seize this crisis as an opportunity to address the digital divide, inside and outside of the classroom.

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The Memeification of Black Women's Trauma

Natalie Stravens

Abstract
This piece discusses the online and offline discourses on the lives and bodies of Black femme and non-binary individuals and the harm that is so casually inflicted upon us. Through popular stories of harm performed around famous Black women, such as with rapper Megan Thee Stallion, I connect the history of Black women in popular culture to current online spaces that continue to minimize and trivialize our trauma. I seek to highlight that these stories are not an anomaly, but rather sentiments rooted in the misogynoir that is so entrenched in western culture and have been expanded and weaponized within the online sphere. In addition, the piece challenges the universality of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in its implementation, criticizing its propensity to forget its feminine victims. It is important to emphasize where it has failed and where it needs to be intentional about the people it has overlooked, as this is a movement that began online, where this harm is currently taking place, and at the hands and energies of Black femmes, the very people getting hurt. This piece has manifested from many conversations already occurring in online Black feminist spaces about our treatment and our needs. It invites others into the fold and seeks to encourage individuals to critically reflect on how Black femme and non-binary individuals are presented on their timeline in-between the numerous BLM posts that claim to protect them.

Keywords
misogynoir, gendered violence, virtual communities, intersectionality, racism

In July of 2020, amongst the second wave of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) Movement, Houston rapper Megan Pete, i.e., "Megan Thee Stallion"was shot in the foot by the Canadian rapper, Tory Lanez (Bero, 2020). The public's immediate response to this story was humour and ridicule instead ofwhat would traditionally be sympathy. After sharing the details of her injury,Pete was met with jokes that sexualized her and hinted at transphobia, thus insinuating that she deserved more violence from both other public figures and the public writ large. From this derision arose the following question in Black feminist internet spaces: "Why is Black women's pain a joke?" (amandabb, 2020; Foster, 2020; Wilson, 2020). This question has been posedin Black Feminists spaces for decades, rhetorically asked in our critiques of the discourses surrounding the dehumanization of Black women, particularly when our pain and trauma is concerned, and have been further highlighted in the online sphere. Moreover, in the larger online world, Black women's trauma has constantly been transformed into a digital caricature, often in the form of memes reminiscent of the minstrel shows of the Jim Crow Era in the United States. I refer to this process as "the memeification" of Black women's trauma, and it constitutes the basis of my following discussion.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that the BLM movement, in its first incantation was popularized online via the hashtag #BLM, was created in response to an important issue for the Black cause: Black people as the uneven targets of police brutality. In many ways, the advent of BLM illustratesthe radical potential for Black activism in the digital sphere. BLM has slowly evolved into a springboard from which conversations about systematic racism more generally can be placed at the centre, opposed to the periphery, of online, academic, and activist spaces, especially in response to the movement's second wave, which emerged after the public lynching of George Floyd by a Minnesotapolice officer in May 2020. Despite the transformative and anti-racist potential of BLM, however, the same online spaces that gave birth to the movement remain as sites of trauma and violence for Black women, as well as our gender nonbinary and masculine trans* peers.

Ironically, the same spaces that mobilized and promoted the idea that Black lives matter can also, at best, ignore Black femme lives and, at worst, chastise us. Even when sticking to the original criteria of police brutality, Black women were – and continue to be – consistently overlooked by the #BLM movement, causing an adjacent movement to arise in the #SayHerNamecampaign (The African American Policy Forum, 2014). However, while this inclusion is important and necessary, it has added insult to injury as it was Black women and nonbinary folx who created #BLM – and yet, the creation of #SayHerName indicates that they were easily sidelined and that our concerns are considered secondary. For example, Breonna Taylor (arguably the most notable recent women victim in which the #BLM movement has rallied behind)only received notoriety on the heels of George Floyd's murder, despite her murder occurring two months before (Cooper, 2020). Moreover, Breonna's tragic story has been reduced to a popular meme all over social media. The use of "Arrest Breonna Taylor's murderers" in online spaces began as a rallying cry for awareness, yet it has increasingly been commodified into a hashtag placed alongside phrases at the placed alongside phrases at the end of selfies, vacation pictures, and other vanity posts (Andrews, 2020).

Dialogues on the topic of race are often focused on the masculine members of our communities. Women's role in Black communities is that of support (while femme trans* folx are often ignored or ostracized),and thus, our needs are placed in the backseat, if noted at all. Early Black feminists, such as Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw and Angela Harris, have criticized the idea of a universal gendered or Black experience due to the unique challenges that occur when oppressive behaviours are compounded across racial, gendered, and class lines (Jones & Norwood, 2017). As Gloria Hull once said, "All women are white, all the Blacks are men, but some of us are brave" (Jones & Norwood, 2017). The frequent exclusion of Black women (as well as Black femmes/ gender nonbinary [or enby] people) as visible icons in social movements is why,moving forward, there needs to be intentionality in the deconstruction of the specific oppressive behaviours that affect Black women, in addition to our mas/ nonbinary trans* peers.

Black femme bodies have been deemed as

unsympathetic. They encountera unique brand of oppression in which racism and sexism feed one another, also known as misogynoir, a term coined by Moya Bailey in 2010. Like our male counterparts, Black women fall outside the realm of "respectability" that is required to be viewed as a true "victim" despite being one of the most vulnerable populations to violence (Thompson, 2020). This is profoundly exacerbated by sexism, which explains the need to understand misogynoir as beyond mere racism plus sexism. Due to the legacy of racial slavery, Westernunderstanding of what is feminine is in direct opposition to what is associated with Black women. Black Women are viewed as too abrasive and strong (Jones & Norwood, 2017; Walley-Jean, 2009), and our natural features do not comply with the idealized feminine beauty standards that have been outlined by white society and are thus positioned closer to the masculine (Madden et al., 2018). Inother words, Black women are not thought of as "innocent" women according to Western gender roles, except, of course, when assuming the Mammie role (Walley-Jean, 2009). Accordingly, Black women are unable to access the social capital of femininity in the same way white (and even some Brown and Asian) women do and are therefore not afforded the same protective sense of nurturing, especially when they are victimized.

An easily recognizable facet of misogynoir in action is the trope of the angry Black woman. This stereotype automatically positions Black women as the aggressor in instances of conflict or tension, regardless of our level of victimization in the proposed situation (Walley-Jean, 2009; Jones & Norwood,2017). The "angry Black woman" trope appears to be universal, even among Black men. Black women's emotions, especially when expressed by and for ourselves, are deemed loud, disagreeable, over the top, and rendered unruly by design. Such rhetoric is an imperialist tool that is used to not only dismiss the issues facing Black women but to manipulate and contort situations in which they experience harm so that they wrongly appear as the agitator (Walley-Jean,2009).

Familiarizing ourselves with even just a *little* bit of Black feminist theorysheds light on why many Black women and femmes are upset but not surprisedby the social media reaction to Megan Thee Stallion's shooting. The internet has not been kind to Black women, and many approaches to our lives within online spaces are reminiscent of historical acts of oppression. For example, let us consider the many forms of harassment that Black woman comedian Leslie Jones received when being cast in a blockbuster film. This harassment included (but was not limited to) constant and degrading acts of violence whereby she was sent pictures of apes and called a man, an act reminiscent of the historicallycoded racist-transphobic language that is often spouted at Black women (both cis and trans* alike) (Madden et al., 2018). The same type of language was used towards Michelle Obama's "manly arms" or Serena Williams' athletic build, which stands in stark contrast to the desirable and delicate white feminineWestern ideal.

On the other side, you have the more "lighthearted" jokes made towards Black women. In 2012, Kimberly Wilkins, also known as the "Ain't nobody got time for that" woman, was a viral sensation and a source of national humour, somuch so that the public completely forgot that her comedic interview response was an honest reaction to having experienced a traumatic fire. The "Hide Your Kids, Hide Your Wife" quote became another online joke, originating from an interview with a Black man by the name of Kevin Antoine Dodson during the recount of his sister's assault. Finally, we return to the Breonna Taylor trend thatis pervasive across the internet as I write this. More often than not, when Black women's tragedy and pain are publicized, it is memeified, manufactured into comedy, as if our lives are viewed as a minstrel show (Foster, 2020).

The popular use of Black women's general social responses as reactionGIFS is the more benign, but no less dismissive, form of this action or memeification. Black women's visceral reactions to lived experience and embodied emotions have been reappropriated as "funny" expressions more than any other demographic. A short survey on GIF keyboards finds that phrases suchas "Black lady", "sassy Black lady", "angry Black lady", "Black fat lady", etc. are some of the most popular searched terms (Jackson, 2017). These GIFS, and the use of them, reinforce the notion that Black women's place in social media is that of the performer, an issue strongly argued in Black feminist spaces. Such memeification has been further escalated by some, often white, individuals who manufacture entire pseudo personas based on pervasive stereotypes of Black women in order to gain an online fame (Jackson, 2017). These social

media personalities recognize that playing up this "minstrel" femme identity isprofitable, regardless of how offensive these depictions truly are. In short, it isprofitable on the internet to mimic and laugh at Black women. The internet is only concerned with Black femme lives as entertainment, not as a site of racial-gender-sexual-classed conflict, strife, and resilience. Whether intentional or not, digital spaces have engaged in the memeification of Black women's pain for at least the last decade (Foster, 2020; Jackson, 2017). As many communities are uncomfortable with Black women as victims, internettrolls, consumers, and tycoons find a way to repurpose this discomfort into popular humour by pointedly making fun of Black women.

Going back to Megan Thee Stallion - she was criticized as *someone who deserved to be shot in the foot*, the inference being that, as a Black woman, she was probably disagreeable and "had it coming" (Foster, 2020; Wilson, 2020). Further, due to her height and build, it was implied that she was assigned male at birth through a series of transphobic tweets, and thus more deserving of violence, a form of bigotry that has been weaponized against cis Black women on many occasions, and which further subjugates Black trans* women, men, and nonbinary people (Madden et al., 2018). Lastly, Megan was publicly dismissed as a liar until she posted graphic images of her injuries. This instance highlights how Black women are rarely considered to be the victims and how our pain is easily consumable, digestible, and objectified. Most uncanny of Megan's story is that some of the same online accounts attacking her had also championed the #BLM movement just weeks before. This cognitive dissonance between claiming the words "Black Lives Matter" and expressing vitriol towards a Black femme victim shows that much more work needs to be done to uplift and center Black women's stories and experiences in Black activist and digital spaces, even in our post-George Floyd and BLM era.

It is important to point out that the most notable sphere to offer immediatesympathy to Megan Thee Stallion was from online Black women's spaces, particularly within Black Twitter. These spaces exist to run in opposition to themainstream internet and have cultivated environments to validate other Black women's (as well as femme's and enby's) experiences (Williams & Gonlin, 2017). These are the spaces that birthed the #BLM movement through our rejection of respectability politics— they were able to accept victims, such as Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Walter Scott, and the like, and channel this acceptance into adeeply political and powerful rage (Hill, 2018). Black women and trans* folx, pioneered the BLM movement, and yet, the world seems to have forgotten (or has never learned) that Black women and non-masculine/non-cis Black people needs support. Until then, the thriving and powerful online community of Black women will have to continue to take care of each other.

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Author biography

Natalie Stravens (she/her) is pursuing an MA in Public Issues Anthropology in collaboration with International Development at the University of Guelph. She received her undergraduate degree from McMaster University with a Bachelors of Honours in Multimedia and Anthropology. Her current research is focused on understanding the dynamics and barriers that affect recent immigrants' access to mental healthcare in Southern Ontario. She is concerned with how structural inequities, social legitimacy, and attitudes of deservingness impact access in political economies of health. At the University of Guelph, she is committed to making a more equitable academic experience for BIPOC students and combating the legacy of racism in Canadian scholarship. She has been a part of strategies to promote BIPOC scholarship through engaging seminars and training sessions. In association with the Dean's office, within the College of Social and Applied Human Sciences, she is working on the development of mentorship opportunities for BIPOC graduate students. Through this program, she hopes to encourage the voices of marginalized groups in academia.

NS?

"Say Their Names": Uncovering A "Good Story" Among Protestors

Melissa P McLetchie

Abstract
Katherine Bischoping and Amber Gazso (2016) use the notion of a "good story" to evaluate how successfully the storyteller conveys their message to the reader. The goal of this observational reflection paper is to explore whether the same criteria of good storytelling (i.e., good reportability, good liveability, good coherence, and good fidelity) can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of narratives told by prisoner rights protestors. I draw on my firsthand experience of a protest outside the Central East Correctional Facility in Lindsay, Ontario to develop my evaluation and conclude that the stories I observed can be analyzed using this criterion.

Keywords
protest; prison; narrative analysis; storytelling

Introduction

For some people, it may seem unreasonable or even downright ridiculous that prisoners would advocate for themselves through acts of "disobedience" that highlight the inhumane and unconstitutional practices that characterize carceral spaces. However, criminality does not exempt anyone from their legal right to not be subjected to cruel and unusual treatment or punishment. Nor does it omit their civil right to equal protection and benefit of the law without discrimination.[1] Yet prisoners, due to their vulnerability and the power imbalances within carceral institutions, are exposed to increased marginalization and oppression. In order to retain some level of legal agency, while also bringing awareness to their systemic mistreatment, prisoners sometimes engage in acts of rebellion and resistance. Further, in an attempt to demonstrate community solidarity with those on the inside, prisoner rights advocates and family members will often host rallies and protests outside correctional centers. As the family member of a previously imprisoned loved one, I make every attempt to support prisoner-led activism and document the presence of this important work within my lived geography of southern Ontario.

Over the past year, I have noticed how storytelling has been effectively used at protests across the city of Toronto, Ontario, where I live, as well as within the province and country, writ large, to covey messages and garner support for a number of political causes. As a result, I decided to explore the technique in the context of prison protests using Katherine Bischoping and Amber Gazso's (2016) notion of a "good story" to frame my analysis. According to Bischoping and Gazso, the storyteller is an author, producing a plot that conveys the meaning of the story; they are the story's performer, responsible for animating it into the world (p. 107). Bischoping and Gazso further establish that for a story to be "good", it must meet a particular criterion: it should have good reportability, good liveability, good coherence, and good fidelity. Their criteria are useful as they enable researchers to reflect on how these common ideas about what constitutes a "good" story may also shape their interview processes and the resultant data (p. 107). Accordingly, I draw on their criterion of "good story-telling" to explore how effectively protestors advocating for the rights of prisoners communicate their concerns, focusing, in particular, on a rally I attended in Lindsay, Ontario in the summer of 2020.

Observations

On June 27, 2020, I conducted observational research at a prisoners' rights rally hosted by the Toronto Prisoners' Rights Project, which is a volunteer organization run by former prisoners, people with loved ones inside, local activists, and other allies, who engage in direct action to shed light on the harms caused by incarceration, while also connecting prisoners with necessary resources.[2] The rally I attended was held outside Central East Correctional Centre in Lindsay, a city on the Scugog River in the Kawartha Lakes region of southeastern Ontario, Canada. The rally was held in support of 100 prisoners at the facility who were on a hunger strike. The purpose of the protest was to:

> Demand justice for all prisoners, former prisoners, and their communities; to hear from family members about their loss; amplify prisoner-led activism, demand mental health supports and reject criminalization; and connect our advocacy to current movements for police and prison accountability, defunding, and abolition ("Rally for Prisoner Justice," 2020).

The prisoners were protesting inhumane living conditions and had several demands, including:

> Free phone calls and more phones, personal visits, access to clean drinking water, access to gym and yard time, end to lockdowns, access to books and programming, clean air and hygienic living conditions, quality nutritious food for all, religious and dietary accommodations, television access, clean clothing, shoes, and toiletries (ibid).

[1] *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, s 15, Part 1 of the *Constitution Act*, 1982

[2] *Toronto Prisoners Rights Project*, 2021.

I attended the protest with the founder of *Think 2wice*, who was scheduled to speak at the event. Founded in 2006, *Think 2wice* is a community-based organization that "provides trauma-informed, culturally sensitive programming that aims to reduce gun violence throughout the Greater Toronto Area through non-traditional harm reduction projects in racialized communities and federal correctional institutions."[3] As one of the first community-based organizations led by individuals who have lived experiences involving the Canadian carceral system, *Think 2wice* is well recognized and highly respected for the programs they facilitate within Ontario jails and prisons. It was my first time returning to the jail since my partner's release on May 27, 2009. The drive to the institution brought back many difficult and pleasant memories. I recalled being pulled over by police in Lindsay on my way to pick my partner up after his five-and-a-half-year prison sentence and feeling upset with myself that I might be late. I did not want him to think that I wasn't coming. But I also recalled how amazing it felt to finally see him and embrace him in the free world after more than half a decade of hugs and kisses under carceral surveillance.

Lindsay, Ontario, which is approximately 132.9 km from Toronto, is a small, rural, and predominantly white European-Canadian town. As we approached the road leading up to the facility, I noticed that it was blocked off by two black police SUV's. I approached the officers to let them know we were attending the rally and they allowed us to pass the barricade. As we got closer to the protestors, I noticed that the other end of the road had also been blocked off by police and there was another SUV blocking the entrance to the jail's parking lot. Needless to say, they knew we were coming.

On the street outside the facility, there was a crowd of approximately 40-50 protestors. Some had signs, and others were wearing t-shirts with names or pictures printed on them. The demographics of the protest were diverse. There were adults present from various ethno-racial backgrounds and age-groups. There were also tables set-up, providing information and free refreshments to protestors. Additionally, there was a coach bus parked at the side of the road, which I later found out was used to transport protestors (free of charge) from Toronto to Lindsay.

The protest was structured around individuals sharing stories of their imprisoned loved ones who had died while in custody. Protestors also spoke the names of the people who they believed had died due to neglect and/or abuse at the hands of correctional staff. They chanted:

Justice for Jordan Sheard!
Justice for Shawn Spaulding!
Justice for Soleiman Faqiri!
Justice for Justin St. Amour!
Justice for Cas Geddes!
Justice for Abdurahman Hassan!
Justice for Moses Amik Beaver!
Justice for Ashley Smith!
Justice for Edward Snowshoe!

Reportability

Bischoping and Gazso (2016) describe a reportable story as one that the narrator can easily defend if they are asked "why" they are telling it. Phrased differently, a reportable story speaks to and encapsulates something that does not seem or feel right to most people, and, as a result, unsettles the presumed order of reason (p. 108). In the immediate context of the June 27th rally, the shared stories of imprisoned folx who have died while in custody satisfies this notion of reportability, as the individuals both narrating and listening to these stories were invested in the belief that all people, regardless of their criminality, have the right to be treated humanely; that they have a right to life. However, it could easily be argued by those who have not been directly impacted by the imprisonment of a loved one that failing to obey the law is enough to exempt someone from their constitutional right to fair and equal treatment. Accordingly, the "reportability" of these narratives varies depending on one's positionality and their relationship to the criminal "justice" system.

Not all stories at the rally were told orally, some protestors used posters, artwork, and custom t-shirts to share the experiences of their loved ones. These "props" are indicative of the techniques used by a skillful narrator to "carry forward the plot at the same time as carrying along the audience's interest" (Bischoping & Gazso, 2016, p. 110). Some protestors used chants during their narration, moments of silence, music, and collective activities, like honking car horns, to keep listeners engaged, which helped promote the reportability of their narratives and thus better spread their message and garner more support.

[3] *About Think 2wice*, 2020.

I was able to gauge whether those listening to the stories were invested by assessing how they gave feedback and showed their appreciation (Bischoping & Gazso, 2016, p. 110). During the protest, attendees would clap in solidarity while family members narrated the harms inflicted against their imprisoned loved ones. They would shout comments like "shame" or "do better" to critique the actions of correctional officers and administrators. This suggests that narrators effectively preformed their story in a way that kept the audience engaged. It also demonstrates that the stories being told aligned with, and supported, the purpose of the protest and that the audience recognized the relevance of the narrations. Moreover, the location of the protest seemed to reflect the attendee's investment in the cause of prisoners' rights. Unlike when attending a local protest in a major urban center where public transport is relatively accessible, the majority of the individuals in attendance at the event had travelled from the city of Toronto to the rural town of Lindsay, thereby indicating that they recognized the importance of the cause beforehand and were willing to sacrifice their time and gas in support of prisoners.

Liveability

According to Bischoping and Gazso (2016), a good story is typically understood to be a liveable one: a story that has a plot and argument that listeners can live with, in which the world being characterized is one that they can bear to live in (p. 111). However, from what I observed, it appears that the opposite is true in the case of prisoners' rights protests. What kept listeners engaged was hearing the unlivable, unconstitutional, and unjust treatment of individuals residing in prisons and jails like the Central East Correctional Centre. The *un-liveability* of their stories challenge master narratives of jails as well-run government institutions. This is not to say that a good story that engages listeners with its un-livability cannot sometimes go too far, taking away from how it is perceived, as is the case when we see violence and human rights violations being sensationalized and mystified by the media. However, it does indicate that we, as sociologists and storytellers/listeners, need to re-examine the role that livability plays in the creation of a "good" story to include its diametrical other: *un-liveability*.

The stories that were told by the family members - the insiders – helped add a level of authenticity and validity to the protest while reigniting the passion of attendees to fight for change. I observed many narrators becoming emotional while speaking of their deceased family members – some cried, some shouted, some paced back and forth. This behaviour can be seen as a example of how "we become discomposed when we lack publicly available language (or a master narrative) through which to compose and tell the story of an experience" (Bischoping & Gazso, 2016, p. 112). The social unacceptability and the stigmatizing residue of imprisonment makes it such that the experiences of those supporting their loved ones on the inside are often silenced. Hence, when presented with the opportunity to openly express their hurt, anger, sadness, and frustrations with the criminal "justice" system, it is easy and not surprising for individuals to be overcome with emotion, which, in turn, affects the emotions of those and the space around them.

One subtle yet powerful example of "discomposure" occurred during a conversation between a young woman whose brother had died in jail, and another protestor, who was their elder. The older protestor was looking at a poster the young woman had created in memory of her late brother. It was clear that a lot of time and effort had gone into its construction. At the top of the poster the young woman had written *"Till We Meet Again My Angle"* clearly misspelling the word "angel." Before the older protestor could comment on the error (which she probably would not have), the young woman stated, "and I know that I spelled 'angel' wrong, but I'm not going to change it because it shows the state of mind I was in when I made this." Here we can see how a lack of composure works to reinforce the trauma experienced by the family members of deceased prisoners, once again adding validity to the movement through un-liveability.

Coherence

The next criterion of a "good story" is that it be believable and coherent. Stories considered "bad" lack plots and/or performances and do not hold together for their listeners (Bischoping & Gazso, 2016). Bischoping and Gazso write: "consider how you as a listener/researcher can be implicated in incoherence and what the impact of that is" (p. 115). To illustrate their point, the two scholars provide an example of asylum seekers presenting incoherent narratives due to language barriers, which resonated with my experience at the protest. Incoherently performed narrations are "bad" stories because they

are difficult to follow and do not translate for the listeners. As regards the protest, I recall having difficulty connecting to one story in particular due to the narrator's difficulty with the English language.

Although neither French nor English were the narrator's first language, he spoke French with greater ease and used it more frequently. Being that I am not fluent in Canada's second official language, it was difficult for me to benefit from his narrative. My ignorance therefore contributed to his incoherence. I also noticed that during his narration, protestors were more active: visiting the refreshment stand, walking around, or socializing amongst themselves. This could suggest that other attendees had a similar difficulty comprehending his story. In contrast to this man's narrative, there was another story that stood out to me as particularly "good" and effective. It was narrated by Angela Vos, the mother of Jordan Sheard. It was her petite stature and emotional recount that captivated the protestors. I was so moved by her passion and pain that I approached her after the protest to thank her for her vulnerability and sharing her son's story with us. These two experiences illustrate the importance of coherence in "good" storytelling: in the first case, language barriers rendered the story incoherent and thus "bad", while in the second case, intense and heartfelt rhetoric rendered the story coherent and thus "good".

Fidelity

The final notion of a "good story" is fidelity, which emphasizes the importance of accounts that are "faithful to experience" (Bischoping & Gazso, 2016, p. 118). This is significant because "when we listen to a story, we make sense of it in part by unconsciously using as a baseline our experience with whatever genre the story seems to fit into, and with whatever case of characters that genre typically involves" (Ibid.). As an observer/listener, I found that my approach to the fidelity of prisoner rights narratives was anchored in the realm of realism, which emphasizes a grounded and stable perspective of social life, due to my ability to personally identify with the stories presented by the narrators and, more specifically, how they closely resembled my direct and indirect experiences with the carceral system.

Under the ontology of realism, a researcher can feel torn between a commitment to get participants to express their "truths" versus the commitment to weigh said "truths" against the collective (Bischoping & Gazso, 2016, p. 119). As regards the rally, I found myself observing how the narrations were being received by other protestors. I used facial and bodily cues, such as facial expressions, voluntary engagement, and attentiveness, to gauge the fidelity of the story from their perspective as attendees. I noticed that, at times, attendees would shake their heads as if to disapprove of the behaviour of correctional staff. At other times, they shook their heads at the mention of Canada's contradictory ideals (i.e., freedom vs. criminalization), which seemed to signify a sort of disappointment in a country that treats prisoners unfairly, yet is globally celebrated as fair, safe, and forward-thinking. However, I often felt reluctant to conclude on the corresponding fidelity, or lack thereof, of the narratives being engaged. As Bischoping and Gazso point out, "researchers anchored in realism generally seek to understand what they mean, or do, for a listener, a narrator, or a community of narrators" (p. 119). Thus, during the rally, I was extremely cognizant of how my non-participatory observations were impacting the protest. Did I make anyone feel uncomfortable with my notetaking? Did my silence in anyway impact what the narrator said or how they said it? Did my presence compromise the data in any way? These questions gesture to the difficultly of truly observing the fidelity of a narrative from a "researcher" or otherwise "outsider" perspective.

Conclusion

Throughout my experiences of attending and participating in various protests across Toronto and nearby cities, I have seen different and unique strategies used by protestors to effectively convey their message. At the protest outside Central East Correctional Centre in Lindsay, Ontario, stories were used to highlight the need for prison reform and/or abolition. Utilizing Bischoping and Gazso's (2016) notions of "good storytelling"; good reportability, good liveability, good coherence, and good fidelity, I was able to show that the stories told there, both orally and through other artforms, can be analyzed using these criteria. When collecting (and embodying) observations to write this reflection piece, I found it extremely difficult to refrain from participating in the protest given my close proximity to the cause. Yet, on the other hand, as a researcher, I felt a sense of duty to accurately report the data in its rawest and "truest" form, as I did not want to tarnish the memory of the deceased or misinterpret the trauma of their loved ones in anyway. To this extent, I do believe that I was successful.

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Author Biography

Melissa McLetchie is a PhD candidate of Caribbean dissent in the department of Sociology at York University. She grew up in the City of Scarborough in Toronto, Ontario and for over 20 years has been in a relationship with a man who has a history of imprisonment. She uses her experiences of supporting her incarcerated loved one to guide her academic research. Her unique social location as an insider/outsider to both street culture and academia gives her work a raw and unique perspective into the collateral consequences of imprisonment and the Canadian "justice" system. Melissa recently completed a Mitacs funded qualitative research study exploring the experiences of women supporting an imprisoned loved one in Ontario during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Artologies

NS?

My Life Matters: The Cost of Being a Black Youth

Fiona Edwards

Abstract

White supremacy presents Black communities with numerous challenges. We are constantly being injured by the anti-black racism that is deeply entrenched in the policies and practices of dominant institutions. These establishments, including, if not especially, the criminal justice system, purport to be responsible for ensuring the well-being and welfare of all, but only ever protect the rich and white. The recent re-mobilization of the Black Lives Matter movement worldwide has reminded the public of the urgency of tackling anti-black racism, but much work still needs to be done if we want future generations of Black people to live freely. Like Black adults, Black youth are not immune from racist encounters. In such a time of racial crisis, the experiences of Black youth need to be centralized in a movement that opposes racial injustice and white supremacy. Accordingly, this poem adopts the lens of a Black youth to speak to the cost of growing up Black immersed in the dominant anti-black culture of our society, underscoring the troubling realities of what it means to be a Black youth in today's world.

Keywords

Black youth, racial injustice, whiteness, systemic oppression

My heart raced as I stumbled upon an unfamiliar place,
Where I saw a multitude of youths from the same race.
Freely enjoying the privileges of their being,
Protected by the color of their skin,
Securely barricaded to keep them in.

These youths are free from the strain of societal pain
That breathes out the superiority of their reign.
Working to maintain a racial claim
Where Blackness is interpreted as insane,
And Whiteness occupies the entire human frame.

I fixed my gaze onto that unfamiliar place
Wondering how to step into this particular space,
To experience life, on the other side, of racial divide.
But suddenly, I found myself in a precarious position
Swimming alone in a bottomless ocean.

Suffocated by the confrontation of Whiteness
I gasp for air, as I slipped into darkness.
Conscious of the despair of my fear
I pleaded against my obstructed breath,
Just to escape an unthinkable death.

In great distress my world became still

As I lay hopelessly without my free will.

In the midst of a raging storm

I can't find a safe place to run,

Not even from the darkened sun.

Why is it so hard to breathe?

I just want to breathe.

To make sense of my own being

In a world that recognizes the colour of my skin,

As something less than a human being.

As a Black youth, I am imprisoned

But the systems fail to listen.

Your silence sustains your invisible chain

That stops the circulation of blood to my brain,

There is something for you to gain.

Can I just breathe and live?

My parents have to believe,

Someday they will have to grieve,

That I may not outlive

This is hard to forgive.

Walk with me and you will learn

The many ways I often get burn.

Everywhere I turn,

Not sure I will return,

This is an everyday concern.

I am not to be feared and brutalized.

My identity should not be criminalized

Neither my experiences trivialized.

I hope you will soon realize

The many ways I have been dehumanized.

Author biography

Fiona Edwards is a Ph.D. candidate in Social Work at York University, Toronto, Canada. She also received a Masters of Social Work from York University in the spring of 2012. Fiona has over eight years of professional experience in the field of child and youth mental health. This experience is the impetus for her doctoral research. Her current research explores the lived mental health experiences of Afro-Caribbean Canadian youth in Southern Ontario urban areas. Fiona's broader research interests include child and youth mental health, the racialization of mental illness, mental illness stigma, mental health and well-being, religiosity, spirituality, anti-oppressive social work, and race, racialization, and racism.

NS?

For the Insane in the Insane World

Celia Ringstrom

Abstract

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are all now living in a world of mass panic, confusion, and isolation that inflicts experiences of mental illness on those not typically considered mentally ill. When, where, and how does identifying "mental illness" come to trap certain people under the stigmatizing identity, while others are able to avoid the problematic medical classification but not the lived experience? As a writer mitigating a long-term struggle between my lived experiences with depression and anxiety, and the outside categorization and medical classification of these "mental illnesses", I realize the current public sentiment has never been more welcoming of my personal musings on these tensions. I have centered an autoethnographic approach that reflects on mental health experiences and critiques of biomedical ontologies through a reading of *My Brilliant Friend* (and the associated quadrilogy). By attending to socially relevant story arcs involving mental health, I use the symbol of book character Lila's "blurred boundaries" to both identify and rethink mental health categorizations and lived experiences that previously differentiated subsets of people prior to COVID-19. My reflection ultimately seeks to address the ways that these once dissimilar groups have converged psychologically through disruptions of time during the current health pandemic.

Keywords

COVID-19, mental illness, time, production, failure

Social media posts in our now COVID-centric world are peppered with nifty mental health coping strategies, gracing the screens of those who have never had to question their mental health before. Ranging from journalistic pieces to viral memes, the mainstream media is contributing to a heightened awareness of something previously relegated to the outskirts of socially appropriate content: the struggles of mental illness. It is almost as though identifying with or admitting to "mental health" problems is becoming stylish, or at least, comfortably relatable. In this scared new world, more people are forced to confront their mortality and reckon with a "self" divorced from external forms of validation, something most of us are not taught to do. Within this context, it makes sense that anxiety and depression are playing a more prominent role in the lives of the public. Now that the mainstream media is casually peddling therapeutic messages for people as if insanity is itself now mainstream, I cannot help but interrogate the experience of mental suffering. When, where, and how does identifying "mental illness" come to trap some people under the stigmatizing identity, while others are able to avoid the problematic medical classification but not the psychological experience?

Before I proceed, I'd like to establish my reasoning for my pronoun choices. I am writing from a position of relative privilege as a white cis woman from a middle-class background. I therefore understand the problematic use of first- and second-person plural when I represent a viewpoint from this position. However, not using "we" or "us" feels much too detached considering the intimacy and vulnerability of the piece. Rather than assuming that I am indeed referring to everyone when I use "we" or "us," I want this choice to act as a sort of invitation for the reader to feel solidarity in reflecting on my realizations or experiences – but only if it is appropriate, and when they choose to do so. I also prefer to mix up my pronoun choices so that there is not the dominance of one type of connection between author and reader over another, and to produce a less cohesive, more messy, and fluid sense of connection. With this in mind, I turn to the literary quadrilogy of *My Brilliant Friend*.

As someone who is suddenly finding her "mental illness" dissolving into the rhetoric of popular media, my thoughts wander to Raffaella (Lila) Cerullo, the second in command of Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan novels, and a literary character with whom I feel an intense solidarity. Through *My Brilliant Friend* (Ferrante, 2012), and the associated quadrilogy, Ferrante shows the life of someone who, through any other mainstream platform, would be defined by mental illness. Rather, Ferrante depicts the strong-willed, resilient supporting heroine in a saga of girlhood friendship who experiences the occasional lapse in reality. These lapses are stated, not in terms of pathology, but rather, within the poetic description of "dissolving boundaries".

Ferrante paints a vivid picture of these "dissolving boundaries", in which Lila's actual visual boundaries dissolve. From this visual perspective, objects become mangled within each other, leaving a convoluted mess of melted objects: "She said that the outlines of things and people were delicate, that they broke like cotton thread... an object lost its edges and poured into another, into a solution of heterogeneous materials, a merging and mixing" (Ferrante, 2015, p. 175). Though the novels only describe these moments as having a negative impact on Lila, I believe that this power to dissolve boundaries should not be considered a weakness, as the invisible side of this ability gives her the determination to triumph over boundaries of a more abstract nature (e.g., socially ingrained hierarchies and norms).

To have the fortitude to dissolve boundaries, it is vital to understand where boundaries will be needed and to ration strength according to which boundaries you should dissolve – and are, in fact, within your power to dissolve. When life becomes solely focused on being triumphant over everything around you, you cannot focus or act clearly because you cannot fight and overcome everything. Without realizing it, you become incapable of recognizing the problems that should take priority because they become camouflaged within the landscape of everything antagonizing you. Lila tries to explain this experience to her childhood companion, Lenu, by warning her:

> "If she [Lila] became distracted, real things, which, with their violent, painful contortions, terrified her, would gain the upper hand over the unreal ones... she would be plunged into a sticky, jumbled reality and would never again be able to give sensations clear outlines" (Ferrante, 2015, p. 176).

Viewing everything as a threat, as a "sticky jumbled reality" ultimately diminishes both mental and physical strength through the exertion of pressure on certain limits that cannot be overcome.

When Lila faces these extreme moments of blurred reality, she always seeks refuge in Lenu, who calms her by providing a grounding sense of stability, akin to a mother nurturing an ill child. Why does Lila choose Lenu to trust in these moments of great fragility and mental chaos, even when the two characters grow apart and have not spoken in years? Along with the type of intimate trust only achieved from childhood bonds of friendship, I believe this is because Lenu can break up the fear of the uncontrollable into digestible doses. Maybe she has no choice. Lenu has to succumb to the pain as it comes, because she understands that she is limited and cannot control everything simply because she wants to. Lenu admits at a certain point in her life, "I was getting used to being happy and unhappy at the same time, as if that were the new, inevitable law of my life" (Ferrante, 2015, p. 76). Here lies an example in which she understands that certain unfortunate paradoxes are inevitable. So, is it Lila's strength that forces her to the breaking point, the blurring of boundaries? Are those who struggle to maintain their grip on reality, and resist the longest, the strongest? Is strength only based on the length of an unbroken line? Or are the small, broken lines added together stronger because they are greater than the length of the long, unending line?

In the medicalized culture of the Western present, mental illness is rarely, if ever, equated with strength because it is characterized as an illness, something taking strength away from the body and mind. Perhaps the sociomedical framework of "mental illness" implies so much weakness because these classifications regularly place weakness as the origin rather than the aftereffect of incredible perseverance. Why are we, the people who others think are Crazy, considered the weak ones, when it feels like we actually fight so much harder and longer than everyone else? Perhaps this is because we put all our resources and strength, like Lila, into one long battle, so that by the end of it, we have exhausted every single part of ourselves. At times, we do not even have the energy to recognize the lines and boundaries of reality. We are stuck in this rotating system of courageous feats and debilitating failures, only to be defined and identified by the failures.

In response to my earlier speculation of whether strength can be surmised from one unbroken line or many unbroken lines, it perhaps seems logical to see Lila as weaker because quantity seems to hold more value than length in our capitalist world obsessed with production. But personal strength cannot be determined by math. Even psychology, which sometimes claims to do so, does not hold the scientific capacity to determine the personal strength and weakness of an individual. Weakness cannot be weakness exclusively because it exists in a dichotomy with strength. For example, Lila's fear of the uncontrollable translates into her bold passion for pushing hard against forces holding her back, or vice versa; her intense desire to triumph over boundaries leads her to fear her inability to do so. Lila's power derives from the strength of pushing boundaries, while Lenu's power lies in enabling structures of limitation. Although they derive their strength from seemingly opposing sources, they both have indeterminable powers that lead to impressive personal victories. If we were to put these dynamics of strength and weakness into the context of our current world order, I believe that Lila represents the people in the pre – COVID-19 world defined as crazy, weak, and mentally unstable, while Lenu represents the people in our post COVID-19 world who are feeling craziness, weakness, and mental instability for the first time, but who are not defined by these experiences, or at least, not yet.

Though the difficulties in transitioning to the reality of a global health pandemic are numerous for those from both orientations, it seems as though the mixing up of temporal frameworks has an especially problematic impact on the "Lenus" of the world: those that derive strength from established boundaries.This is not to say that people diagnosed

with mental illness are immune to disturbances in the dominant temporal matrix. Rather, dealing with emotional suffering disturbs time in and of itself, so we are used to being throttled by inconsistencies in our greater reality. The normalized capitalist structure of time is one of those boundaries that can be important to utilize and may have served many of us well in a hyper-capitalist and production obsessed neoliberal state. With the many demands placed on us for acceptance as normative socio-political subjects, the capitalist structure of time provides an organized framework through which we can discipline our bodies and minds to achieve both capitalist and personal goals. While this structure has the very real capacity to wreck our bodies and minds in the process, some, even those diagnosed with neurodivergent minds, benefit from having a tool through which to organize the tasks demanded of us from various socio-political pressures. Lenu, whether she is conscious of this or not, utilizes these strategies of practicality, while still maintaining strength and perseverance where and when she can.

The more nefarious side of structuring time according to capitalist demands, however, can lead to feelings of unworthiness founded on futuristic notions of productivity. Useless or not, the actions we carried out in our pre – COVID-19 lives, and continue to carry out today, are programmed with socially determined meanings of productivity and time. According to this model, there is always a beginning, middle, and end. If the middle does not give way to an end that produces, we are told to start over, give up, or continue until success is reached. Lenu struggles with these feelings of inadequacy when the labours of motherhood halt her writing career, during which time she cannot write or produce. These strict temporal guidelines do not afford us fluidity, as there is no regard paid to the well-being of the self when production trumps everything. Because self-worth and identity are founded upon what we do and what we can achieve under this framework, it's as if we stop existing once we stop producing.

With the onset of a pandemic that forces our worlds into stillness, many of us panic in our idleness. We do not know who we are without our achievements to make us feel valuable. As someone who has struggled with these thoughts since childhood, I related and continue to relate to the pure frustration of feeling inadequate from a lack of production long before the world of COVID-19 forced us into a state of stillness. Many periods of my life have thus been centered on trying to escape the obsession with being productive, which necessitated accepting my own ordering of time outside of the capitalist time paradigm of work and value.

Rather than the capitalist formula of time defined by a beginning, middle, and end, attaining acceptance is a process that does not follow a strictly linear path. In trying to work with and accept a perceived weakness or failure successfully, it might be more useful to conceptualize time as spherical, not linear. Navigating the sphere depends on the constant movement of striving towards balance, whether the balance is between two points, two dimensions, two planes, or even six planes. Rather than believing balance is achieved once and for all, we need to understand that balance is something that will always need consistent movement, though not always of a physical or literal nature. The Lenus of the world might be frightened when confronting structures that don't have a definable end or reward. But because these structures reek of the rigidity and necessity of capitalist production, and we currently face a time of pause outside of said production, these structures compromise our present concepts of reality. I believe that those who have experienced the many shades of mental duress before the pandemic have already grappled with existential meanings of personal worth and therefore carry somewhat of an advantage stemming from past experiences.

In particular, the timelines imposed on those diagnosed with mental illness reach a point of incoherence while attempting to mediate the prognoses and identities of the illness. These identities automatically challenge our simplistically accepted realities of normative capitalist time and their intimately linked projections of productivity. In considering temporality through disability theory, Alison Kafer (2013) argues:

> During that period [of diagnosis], past/present/future become jumbled, inchoate. 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" (p. 37).

Because our mental illnesses are seen as something inherently bad that will limit productivity, capitalist structures of time exacerbate our worries of "wasted time" and (not) being productive. Through this process of diagnosis, we have to rearrange and challenge normative notions of time in order to accept and live through our new identities of mental illness; of being Crazy.

I have firmly centered my belief around mental illness from my experiences in the rabbit hole of psychiatric diagnoses, not on the concept of weakness or insanity, but the complexities in adapting to shifting or challenging systems of living. I believe that many mental illness cases become medicalized when a behavioral pattern that served someone in extreme or traumatic circumstances is no longer advantageous, or the reverse: when a behavioral pattern that served someone in non-extreme or non-traumatic circumstances is no longer advantageous. The old behavioral patterns then present roadblocks in living according to the new paradigmatic circumstances. Therefore, these cases of "mental illness" cannot be fully addressed through the discourse of all-encapsulating solutions, especially not through bio-medicine. Like Lila's ability to dissolve boundaries, immense strength can result in weakness and vice versa, so how can we justifiably define Lila as "mentally ill"? Relapse, or rather, vacillating between two ways of coping, is almost a guarantee, not an exception. Unfortunately, when we do relapse, we are instructed to believe this is a failure. But it is only a failure if we continue to use the dominant time structure of capitalist temporality: the linear process of a beginning, middle, and end.

It is imperative to recognize experimentation as foundational in our pursuits towards balance. Solutions and failures are never found outside of contextual reasoning, just as the problems urging us to change are never acontextual. We must consider our positionings as gendered, racialized, sexualized, classed, and geographically organized beings within constantly changing socio-political contexts and mental spaces; an incredibly arduous task that always seems to evade appreciation. This means we are constantly experimenting with lines, figures, logics, emotions, and ontologies that change shape through failure and success, perhaps at the same time. Failure is never failure by itself if we continue to challenge the rigid orthodoxy of oppressive structures that limit our capacities to flow and shift into different modes of being.

Suicidal ideation forces people to go through the apocalypse every time they truly want to die, because, like the apocalypse, their world is coming to an end. Everyone who faces suicide has faced the kind of fear arising from persecution and imminent mortality from within. We experience the pain of isolation without a mandated order to isolate. We experience rejection without others openly rejecting us. We know the feeling that the world is soon coming to an end. Not every suicidal person recognizes the need for balance, but rather, we have all faced the end of what was once our being and therefore know from experience what this reckoning entails, and sometimes, how to cope and withstand the blows. Now the rest of the world is becoming aware of what we have long experienced.

Much like the converging differences between Lila and Lenu, the lives of the mentally ill and the lives of the mentally well are built from different materials but are shaped by similar hands of trauma. I believe that the converging of mental realities in the current context of COVID-19 proves that the mentally ill are not in fact ill but have developed different strategies in confronting certain challenges and reality disruptions. We all must experience not being okay, and to live within the terror of the unstable unknown, but we also must find a way to fight back against that which is destroying our individual and communal well-being. We are all now living in an extreme world, and everyone in it, whether mentally unwell or medically sane, is experiencing the blurring of boundaries.

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Author biography

Celia is a white settler living in Sacramento, California on the unceded lands of the Nisenan people. She is an MA candidate in Anthropology at York University (Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies) interested in intersectional social justice movements organized against white settler colonialism, and how girlhood is constructed, negotiated, and contested through these movements. She is specifically interested in understanding the experiences and practices of sumud, or steadfastness, articulated in the political imaginaries of Palestinian refugee girls who, as both Indigenous and racialized, continue to be under- or mis-represented through neo-Orientalist and Zionist humanitarian projects. Celia received a BA in Anthropology and Psychology at the University of California, Santa Cruz, where she organized in and led the Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) chapter, as well as several other social justice-oriented networks and organizations within the greater Santa Cruz community. She is currently working as an editor for *Contingent Horizons: The York University Student Journal of Anthropology*.

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In Defence of #blackAF's Celebration of Mediocrity

Aharon Joseph

Abstract

This article explores how television and film writer-producer Kenya Barris' Netflix series #blackAF disturbs and seemingly upends Black millennial woke cultural assumptions about the good life. This, I contend - not discounting the valid classist and colourist critiques of the show - is the animus for Black millennial discontent with #blackAF. Specifically, I reveal the hashtags #blackexcellence and #supporteverythingblack to be ideological blankets covering the unfortunate reality of everyday Black life. These hashtags, which do the ideological work of covering over reality, are made unstable and incoherent by #blackAF's apotheosizing of mediocrity as a grand cultural accomplishment. In one fell swoop #blackAF manages to give the death knell to Cosbyian respectability politics, which have hitherto been operating in the guise of the hashtag #blackexcellence.

Keywords

Black studies, cultural studies, philosophy, semiotics, sociology

Whenever we stand on principle...in this generation, it becomes hashtag, and it doesn't stick to the reality.

- *Craig Hodges*[1]

I made myself the poet of the world. The white man had found a poetry in which there was nothing poetic. The soul of the white man was corrupted, and, as I was told by a friend who was a teacher in the United States, "The presence of the Negro beside the whites is in a way an insurance policy on humanness. When the whites feel that they have become too mechanized, they turn to the men of color and ask them for a little human sustenance." At last, I had been recognized, I was no longer a zero.

- *Frantz Fanon,*
Black Skin White Masks[2]

Kenya Barris, the creator of the acclaimed ABC sitcom, *Black-ish* (and its spin-offs, *Grown-ish* and *Mixed-ish*) released a Netflix series in the spring of 2020 entitled *#blackAF*. The show is about a successful Black father and husband trying to navigate sharp arrows thrown at him by his white contemporaries in the film industry. The show is a semi-autobiographical portrayal of Barris' life. It does a fantastic job at blurring the lines between what parts of the show are dramatized and which parts are real. This metonymic rhetorical approach creates a kaleidoscopic effect within the show's discourse that, to the viewer's dismay, tends to keep the audience out of kilter.

Much of the show is about Kenya dealing with the existential crisis of his self-worth and questions of Black authenticity after engaging in psychologically dangerous encounters with his white peers. His self-loathing, insatiable neediness, creative genius, and flawed counterfactual reasoning are showcased through interviews conducted by his second eldest daughter, Drea, who is filming a documentary for her N.Y.U. film school application. Parts of the series are shown through Drea's lens, adopting a mockumentary approach to storytelling. The entire series features his six children and biracial wife Joya, played by Rashida Jones - who is also a writer and producer on the show. #blackAF has received visceral reactions from the Black Twitterati, which regularly highlight the classist and colourist undertones of the show.[3] Yet, despite these, admittedly valid, criticisms, I deeply enjoyed *#blackAF* for purposes that are not easily apparent. Allow me to explain.

Theorizing with Kenya

#blackAF seems to upend woke culture in ways that leave many aspirant Black millennials uncomfortable. The signifying hashtags #blackexcellence and #supporteverythingblack are revealed to be veils covering the unfortunate social, economic, and political reality of everyday Black life (Petski, 2019, para. 1).[4] The ideological power of hashtags (which often get misidentified as mere hashtags) is summarily unravelled by the cool embrace of Black mediocrity by the ensemble

[1] (Hodges, 2021, 8:44-8:51)
[2] (Fanon, 2008, p. 98)
[3] For instance, Essence magazine covered Barris' social media response to early critiques of his casting decisions as being colourist. Barris responds: "Regarding the casting of his Black Excellence actors, these kids look like my kids. My very Black REAL kids & they face discrimination every day from others outside our culture and I don't want them to also see it from US" (Essence, 2019, para. 8).
[4] After I had completed the second draft of this article it was pointed out to me by my colleague Firrisaa Abdulkarim that the original name of #blackAF was #blackexcellence. Further substantiating my argument that #blackAF is a pointed critique of the black excellence ethos (Petski, 2019, para. 1).

cast. The lacunas that are displayed thereafter require one to be a skilled leaper, which Kenya himself is not. Kenya comfortably embraces the mania that comes from being freshly set loose from the straitjacket tightly wrapped around practitioners of Cosbyian respectability politics. Early in the show Barris admits to being everything he is and is not, fully embracing corporate mediocrity, cupidity, un-charitableness, and the rancid dislike of his children. This is a refreshing take. He is everything his childhood hero Heathcliffe Huxtable was not. After Cosby's shameful downfall, this is the American dad we are left with, and he has a message for all of us looking for Black redemption in the messianic father figure: look elsewhere or be doomed to repeat the last 40 years of hell again. In this way, he laughs in the face of a young Bill Cosby in the guise of a Dwayne Wayne (one of the lead characters in *The Cosby Show* spin-off - *A Different World*). This relational dynamic is exemplified when the latter self-righteously says: "it's not enough for you to be equal, you have to be better, we have to be better" (see Miller, 1991, 18:53-18:58). If only Dwayne Wayne knew that Black mediocrity would suffice to get us over the mountain cliff.

Cosby is always the ghosted dad in the room (Nelson & Poitier, 1990). Displaying a penchant for waxing poetic and ranting on the virtues of uplifting others, personal responsibility, and bootstrapping to the Black-underclasses (which, for him, consisted of deadbeat fathers, single mothers, and delinquent children), Cosby spoke with a scathing paternalism that even the newly-minted and firmly established lumpen Black-bourgeoisie would find detestable - although, in private, they would applaud his audacity and apply his vision of Black excellence to their lives. Nevertheless, and relatedly, the not-quite conscious need to break with the singularizing ideology of #blackexcellence embodied in the never not-not-there father figure of Cosby is challenged in #blackAF.

This is brought to the fore in Episode 6 when a series of Kenya's problematic tweets whizz by the screen with dizzying effect. Freezeframing the show with the pause button, I am greeted with a deeply parodic tweet (from when the first allegations of rape were levied against Cosby in the media) that reads: "I Stand with Cosby!!! #BlackExcellence #YouWillAlwaysBeMyDad #LeonardPart6" (see Barris, 2020, 13:34). Truth is entirely relative in the show and self-abnegation is rampant. Indeed, the truth is subjective to a fault - and pleasing untruths pass for reality. The family (especially the children) have come to learn what Thrasymachus, in Plato's Republic, learned so long ago while debating Socrates: that truth and justice is whatever the strong and wealthy say it is (Plato, 2005, p. 16).

The mediocrity that the show celebrates is one steeped in the understanding, like its predecessor *Modern Family* - whose creator, Steven Levitan, appears as Kenya's antagonist in Episode 1 - that their George Jeffersonian arrival is merely the mimicking of the unfettered rapaciousness and concerted dim-wittedness of which white privilege can afford. This is where Kenya hits the bottom of the proverbial lacuna. His need for recognition and acceptance by his white contemporaries (whereby the Emmy Award which alludes him drives him up the lacuna's wall) culminates into a self-incinerating 'ressentiment'. Every action thereafter is a reaction. The entire show is essentially based around the audience voyeuristically watching him tragically attempt to climb out of a hole he has not dug - and he knows this. Hence, why *damn* near every episode is entitled, "...because of slavery...".

Way Beyond Belief

#blackAF seems to exemplify Friedrich Nietzsche's ressentiment in toto. The show employs the idea that "assigning blame...is all the have-nots seem willing and able to do...even under conditions of the most ancient and total form of domination: slavery" (Sexton, 2019, p. 7). Thus, we are caught in the theatre of expression that pegs moralizing as its main act. We stand still, solemn, and wax poetic on soapboxes that do not make possible the ability to see outside the lacuna we have fallen into. We lack the will to venture out and create new ideological formulations that are able to will us into action against political antagonists that have lulled us to sleep with the "cool language of bipartisanship, technocratic crisis management, evidence-based practices, and, above all, viability" (p. 4).

This unwillingness to create space to think of and for oneself and formulate a stratagem or clear-eyed analysis of the situation that puts a premium on the "ethics of truth over the morality of values" (Sexton, 2019, p. 14), makes Kenya, and we who identify with this all-too-human failure of the courage to-be, slimy in the most Sartrean sense imaginable (Gordon, 1995, p. 38).[5] To put it in Jean Paul Sartre's (1993) words, the slimy individual "is a sly solidity and complicity of all its leech-like parts, a vage, soft effort made by each to individualize itself, followed by a falling back and flattening out that is emptied of the individual, sucked in on all sides by the substance" (p. 778).[6]

In Althusserian fashion, Kenya is hyper-aware of how the mechanisms that produce his subjectivity - society's reproductive forces, which he detests - creates an irremediable interpellation in him from without - an interpellation that alienates its subject from its alienation. Simply put, he cannot be comfortable in his discomfort. Nothing will suffice to give him a healthy dose of external-inculcated repression to null his neurosis and self-lacerating memories to rest for a while. Such an ability, which he lacks, could have enabled him to experience a noble type of forgetting, an almost extinct and aristocratic type of forgetting, that would enable Kenya to move towards more original and creative ways of thinking and acting in the world. This, in turn, would have reduced his psychological need to have to authenticate himself in front of the Steve Levitan's of the world by way of mimesis/imitation of those who do not suffer the anxieties brought on by imposter syndrome.

The scopic maze Kenya and his family navigate through Drea's documentary film project creates a show within a show. This makeshift hall of mirrors flashes memories and not images. This is the case because, as mentioned before, Kenya cannot healthily repress the moments of interpellation that haunt him. The feverish remembrance of the past projects onto the future, making the future a 'Pastime Paradise' (Wonder, 1976, 0:37-0:47).[7] This interpellation is not the denial of presence by the white to the Black but rather a hyper-visualization that freezes the Black. It freezes us in the way Dante Alighieri's hell freezes its occupants from the lower circles in the early Renaissance book *Inferno*. This is ironic because hyper-visualization is a process that affixes one to the gaze of the other, as if to scorch the viewed upon with a flame. Such an isolating experience pushes the subject into a figurative and literal isolation - a purgatory-like state of being that the subject is thrusted into and, oddly enough, granted a freedom they would otherwise not experience in the company, or face, of the sadistic other (Grieco & Manders, 1999; Dean, 2021).[8-9]

The decidedly ironic and parodic features of the show, which are symptomatic of the liberal

[5] Jean Paul Sartre is read through the prism of Lewis R. Gordon's Black existential-phenomenological text *Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism*. When lacking the moral fortitude to stand for one's beliefs, as Gordon remarks, "Even the body at rest can be in bad faith. Such a body sinks into its facticity; it drowns itself in a "slimy" form of existence" (Gordon, 1995, p. 38).

[6] One may infer from the symbolic death of the messianic Black patriarch (Barris giving us the coup de grace), a remnant of the reconstruction era, that a space in time is now being made for the Black maternal figure to return, but her return is not immanent. This fact peeve's Black millennials to no end. Hence why the barrage of colourist critiques levied at the show's choice of multiracial cast members, namely Rashida Jones, rang so loudly at the outset of the show's release (Essence, 2019, para. 8). When will the Black maternal return as the not-mammy figure? When will she be present on the screen in the fullness of her being and in the full display of the innumerable complexities of her psychic life? Where she no longer is typified by one-dimensional tropes and stereotypes. Barris clears the land for this type of inventing and self-creation to occur. Yet, he is more tiller than planter. Hence, his genius for making space is not redoubled in the ability to generate new ideas. #blackAF is a pastiche. Its knack for self-deprecating humour is more Larry David than Keenan Ivory Wayans.

[7] Stevie Wonder's classic *Pastime Paradise* accurately expresses this dastardly sentimentality. He sings: "They've been wasting most their time, Glorifying days long gone behind, They've been wasting most their days, In remembrance of ignorance oldest praise" (Wonder, 1976).

[8] Michael Jordan's biographer Bob Greene states in the *ESPN SportsCentury: Michael Jordan* documentary, aired in 2003, that Jordan would describe this moment of being hyper-visualized as one when the eyes staring back would burn his skin with almost acidic acuity. It is for this reason that Jordan would only feel free in the icy isolation of his opulent hotel suite (Grieco & Manders, 1999).

[9] In an Instagram tribute to his friend, the rap superstar DMX, music producer and businessman, Swizz Beats, says a similar, yet even more tragic, truth: "He was in so much pain, that he would go to jail to have his freedom. He would go to jail to escape his pain" (Dean, 2021),

progressivism of our age, forecloses any real calls to action from taking place. The show's cynicism, like its liberal-comedic contemporaries, *The Daily Show* with Trevor Noah, or *SNL*, is as politically debilitating as it is informative. These shows are driven to poke holes in the logics and positions of conservatives and alt-right bigots, pointing and laughing at the scientifically unfounded and delirious beliefs of middle-aged American racists and, occasionally, colourblind-woke liberals of supposed good intent (read ecclesiastes). Hence, in the fashion of the Sartrean slime, these shows will never tell you what they believe in or what they stand for.

This reluctance to avow any belief may stem from the fact that such shows or comedic musings do not believe in anything outside of what analytical guidance, forecasts, and polls tell them to believe. This deep dive into the steely underworld of unabating enlightenment rationality is a deeply unreasonable deepfake that the Black cannot depend on. In other words, this progressivist-liberal ethos is not what it purports itself to be, nor does it do what one thinks it will, namely, to organize and meaningfully strategize. This is so, because, as Simon Critchley puts forward, belief (albeit distorted truth) stirs the animus of a people of similar affliction (but not completely equivalential afflictions) to take political action (Fanon, 2008, p. 120; also see Critchley, 2009)[10]

Yet still, Kenya ascribes to a sort of genealogical materialist analysis that Cornel West would be proud of. Such analysis treats Black history with the nuance and cultural sophistication it deserves, not merely couching it in economistic or politicized terms. However, the conclusions derived from Kenya's analysis are doused in cynicism and bereft of the engaging spirit of hoping against hope, thereby lacking in the passion of the Black prophetic tradition, the kind that Cornel West carries (West, 2008, p. 236).[11] It could be argued that West's hermeneutic baggage produces the conditions for an edifying political consciousness that extends beyond the empty identitarian based politics of our age. Such pessimism of the will and optimism of the intellect - to invert the famous Gramscian notion - leads to what Frank Wilderson would call the "politics of culture" rather than a desired "culture of politics" (Wilderson, 2010 p. 26).[12]

A culture of politics transforms the matrix of violence that positions the white, the Black, the racialized, and the Indigenous subject into an edified relational politics not keyed to the aforementioned paradigm of violence foundational to Euro-American modernity. On the contrary, a politics of culture works towards social progress within the confines of Euro-American modernity's matrices of power. This maddening arrangement is oxymoronic, to say the least. It is Sisyphean, in that one progresses, to only have to push the rock up the proverbial lacuna's walls within a generation's time. Media outlets such as *Buzzfeed* and radio shows like *The Breakfast Club* are perfect examples of the politics of culture. Their modus operandi is to

[10] Yet belief brings about meaningful action, not merely unthought reaction, with, of course, the first order of patience. Frantz Fanon describes the Black psycho-existential situation thusly: "If I were asked for a definition of myself, I would say that I am one who waits." We are, in essence, the patient ones. Lastly, the ability to meaningfully organize and strategize happens when one ardently believes in the emancipatory potential of a political project. And it is patience that enables one to see that political project through. This feat cannot be accomplished through the milquetoast and narcissitically self-reflexive disposition of liberal-progressivist politics (Fanon, 2008, p. 120).

[11] Cornel West elaborates on this new philosophical methodology in his 1993 book 'Keeping Faith', stating: "My perspective can be characterized as a genealogical materialist analysis, that is, an analysis that replaces Marxist conceptions of history with Nietzschean notions of genealogy, yet preserves the materiality of multifaceted structured social practices. My understanding of genealogy derives neither from mere deconstructions of duplicitous and deceptive character of rhetorical strategies of logocentric discourses, nor from simple investigations into the operations of power of such discourses. Unlike Derrida and de Man, genealogical materialism does not rest content with a horizon of language. In contrast to Foucault and Said, I take the challenge of historical materialism with great seriousness" (West, 2008, p. 236).

[12] Wilderson (2010) states: "Rather than privilege a politics of culture(s)—that is, rather than examine and accept the cultural gestures and declarations which the three groups [,(the white, Black and Native),] under examination make about themselves—I privilege a culture of politics: in other words, what I am concerned with is how white film, Black film, and Red film articulate and disavow the matrix of violence which constructs the three essential positions [,(the Settler, Slave and Native),] which in turn structure U.S. antagonisms" (p. 26).

offer empty criticisms from within Empire's accepted hegemonic cultural codes; this invariably buttresses the very hegemonic structures they seek to critique and, presumably, transcend. This may well be the case because 'wokeness' has become so profitable and formulaic for entrenched systems of cultural production, and because cultural production today is more about inane content creation than edified storytelling. In contrast, the 'culture of politics' would be best exemplified in movements like Rhodes Must Fall in South Africa and the Movement for Black Lives in Ferguson, Missouri in the late 2010s.

Nevertheless, Barris takes to heart the misrecognition he receives from contemporaries like Steve Levitan and cultural establishments like the Emmy Awards. In these instances, #blackAF is clearly operating within the hegemonic cultural codes of Euro-American modernity. Hence, the show, without equivocation, embraces a politics of culture as its frame of socio-ontological reference. Tyler Perry seems an odd figure to point this out to Barris. Barris approaches Perry for counsel. He admits that he "really cares about what white people think...I care what everybody thinks" (see Barris, 2020, 30:07-30:12). Perry is the picture of self-assuredness. The confident and self-starting side of the Janus-faced coin. When coaching Barris, Perry dismisses the legitimacy of mainstream cultural hegemons and tastemakers like the Oscars and Rotten Tomatoes. He tells Kenya: "I super-serve my niche. We speak a language, we're talking, we know each other, we get it. There's a lot of times I see shit that wins Oscars and I be like, 'what is this shit?'...I'm talking to us. That's why millions of people are watching my shows every week" (see Barris, 2020, 32:07-32:56).

One Last Dance with my Father

In Barris' *Black-ish* we see a 'new Black' familial "struggle with racial identity in the post-integration era" (Weheliye, 2014, para. 5). In the show we see an "upper middle-class black couple that is struggling to keep cultural influences for children" (Ibid.). *Black-ish* was veritably *The Cosby Show* 2.0 (with its equivalent spin off to *The Cosby Show*'s *A Different World*, *Grown-ish*), not so much in substance and content, but in form. Yet in #blackAF, the identity crisis is not completely a family affair. Kenya and Joya are out of touch but not out of step. They still have a working notion of what it is to be Black within the facticity of the Euro-American horizon. It is their four youngest children, excluding their two eldest daughters, who are 'the new Blacks' on the scene a la Raven Simone and Pharrell Williams (Hunt, 2014, para. 8-9).[13]

Joya witnesses this out of steppedness when she observes her two sons dancing horribly off beat. She takes this to signify that they are out of touch with their Blackness. When Joya interrogates Izzy, the third eldest daughter, we come to learn that, yes, indeed, Izzy as well as her two younger brothers see, rather dispassionately, themselves as existing beyond the identifiers of Black and African-American. This is the classic 'new Black' situation where one attempts to overcome the factical points of their existence - namely their body - by transcending their embodied Blackness. Joya subsequently convinces Kenya to organize a family BBQ with his 'Black' Inglewood family. Of course, this is a reactionary impulse that is as comedic as it is tragic.

Overworn stereotypes and tropes are employed in the BBQ episode, Episode 5 of the series. It gives the viewer the sense that the Barris family is knowingly mimicking and mocking what the

[13] In 2014, Black Twitterati was in uproar over former Cosby Show star Raven Symone's infamous refusal to claim signifiers such as African-American or Gay in her interview with Oprah Winfrey. Around the same time the Raven interview with Oprah was aired, Pharrell Williams (who coined 'new black' as a term of identification) did an interview with Ebony magazine that had his Cosbyian fatherly ethos on full display. He remarks on the fatal killing of Michael Brown, saying, "it looked very bully-ish; that in itself I had a problem with. Not with the kid, but with whatever happened in his life for him to arrive at a place where that behaviour is OK. Why aren't we talking about that?" with the Ebony interviewer noting, "You can almost hear the gnashing of Bill Cosby's teeth"; with Pharrell responding back, "And I agree with him. When Cosby said it back then, I understood; I got it. Listen, we have to look at ourselves and take action for ourselves [..] he portrayed a doctor on The Cosby Show and had us all wearing Coogi sweaters" (Hunt, 2014, para. 8-9).

white does when they feel they "have become too mechanized" by Western modernity's mechanistic rigidities; *'slumming it up'* for a short while with the Black, or the native, in order to get that good 'ol' feelin' back (Fanon, 2008, p. 98); to get back in touch with the inner child from their primordial past. The white cunningly uses these liminal spaces on the Black side of town for the purposes of escape. Contrastingly, the Black uses these spaces for self-re-creation and inspiration. The noted difference here is that the Barris family has brought the party to their quarters and not to the *'hood'*, a faux pas in the Manichaean black and white world they live in. Another misstep for the nouveau riche Black family on the block.

Lastly, although #blackAF incinerates the Cosbyian Black fatherly logos in one fell swoop, Kenya unknowingly falls into the father-brother socio-cultural archetypal role (Marriott, 2000).[14] In a way, he is vying for the same attention and recognition his children are via competition amongst each other. He and his wife Joya even attend the same parties and take the same drugs as their college freshmen daughter. The couple, as Nas would rap about in his classic *Stillmatic* album, are stuck in their second childhoods, in arrested development. Nevertheless, he is the father-brother that so eagerly wants to give an inheritance (not just financially - but also, for example, his love for film and writing) to his children, but cannot because the psycho-social Oedipal arrangements of Euro-American society will not give said right to a father-brother who himself is yearning for recognition and acceptance; an inheritance - approval - from a civilization that lords over him like the father-tyrant of our mythic and historical past (Marriott, 2000, p. 113). Still, Kenya's constant failures endear him to us. For we too are destined to fail an innumerable amount of times before we succeed. But what is failure to those who have yet to enlist or to enrol in the game of life and its many tests?

Regardless, the show upends woke culture with its satirical takes. The direct consequence of the show's biting cynicism and slacker ethos is the apotheosizing of mediocrity as a grand cultural accomplishment and as a marker of achieving the American dream and its concomitant material acquisitions. In this way, the show shares more in common with sitcoms such as *Modern Family* and *Arrested Development* than with the *Cosby Show* or Barris' own *Black-ish*. #blackAF is in effect the wholesale dismissal of the Cosbian motto of having to be better than equal to attain success. Here, Cosby's left-behind children, the 'wayward' and all-to-fragile millennials, are left to feel dismayed and disillusioned (Markowitz, 2019, p. xv).[15] The signifying hashtags #blackexcellence and #supporteverythingblack are nothing but intramural Du Boisian veils covering over the miserable social, economic, and political reality of Black everyday life. Their ideological power (which gets misidentified as mere hashtags) is summarily unravelled by Barris' all-encompassing embrace of Black mediocrity.

[14] This idea of father-brother comes from a chapter entitled *Father Stories* in David Marriott's text *On Black Men* (Marriott, 2000).

[15] Here I am generalizing Daniel Markovitz's specified explanation for the fragile nature of the elite millennial's psychological constitution to apply to all millennials, and in particular, aspirational monied Black millennials. He states in his book *The Meritocracy Trap*: "Elite millennials can be precious and fragile, but not in the manner of special snowflakes that derisive polemics describe. They do not melt or wilt at every challenge to their privilege, so much as shatter under the intense competitive pressures to achieve that dominate their lives. They are neither dissolute nor decadent, but rather tense and exhausted" (Markovitz, 2019, p xv).

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Aharon Joseph is a writer/independent researcher, artist-musician and founder of 2-D mobile game making and multimedia start-up TrethWest. The different endeavours that make up the sum of my professional passions all lend to one another in very eclectic and economic ways. Moreover, writing, for me, is an artform that in its most radical dispensation reveals aspects of reality that are hidden from plain sight. It enables us to understand the contingent nature of the world we inhabit with much more clarity, precision and humility. Supplying us with a historical consciousness that is not an action stopping weight but is rather a staircase to otherwise ways of being.

Dear Academia

NS?

A Collective Grievance, A Collective Acquiescence: Rememberings and Hauntings in our Pandemic of Racialized Violence

Amber-Lee Varadi

Abstract
Can grieving death be the presence of a haunting? In this brief think piece, I draw on memory studies to contemplate the ongoing pandemic of racialized violence against Black and Indigenous people specifically and people of colour more generally. Life and death, surviving and suffering, and tenebrous apparitions are discussed as I synthesize the work of Sharpe (2016), Dean (2015), and Gordon (2008) to consider how we, particularly white scholars like myself, are implicated in a present that is haunted by an insidiously active past. Vision and the nuances of sight are also discussed in relation to whiteness, accountability, and allyship with/in our seemingly over-and-done-with pandemic of anti-Black and settler-colonial violence.

Keywords
Memory studies, haunting, Blackness, Indigeneity, whiteness, allyship

The climate of our insidious pandemic

Saying the names of the Black people who have been murdered by police officers, Black Lives Matter (BLM) activists are one of the many racialized and colonialized activist groups across the globe who participate in the memory work of reclaiming and refusing death. Other groups include the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, who silently gather to remember their children and others who make up *los desaparecido* of Argentina, exposing their government's routine of terror through their presence and by sharing photographs of those who have been tortured, killed, or disappeared (Dean, 2015; Gordon, 2008). There are also numerous consciousness-raising art installations, such as Black's *REDress Project* (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019) and Cole's *Remember Their Names* exhibit (Dean, 2015), which preserve, honour, and memorialize the Indigenous women and girls who have gone (and continue to go) missing or have been murdered. Whether a silent accusal or collective cry, these memory practices are just some of the many acts of radical memorialization occurring across the globe today.

The practice of using memory work to protest injustice is not new but a consequence and remembrance of history itself. Once silenced histories spill out of these memorialization sites and challenge the stories of Western history that are often enunciated through repetition across high school curriculums, popular media, and (national) anthems. Indeed, the stories that have been amplified across time and space have induced "various forms of blindness and sanctioned denial" (Gordon, 2008, p. 5), thereby maintaining historic structures of anti-Black, racist, and settler-colonial violence through the omission of the harms committed by renowned historical figures. Moreover, by preserving, (re)articulating, and legitimizing particular (read: patriotic and white) histories, these "representations not only describe reality but transform it" (Fassin & Rechtman, 2009, p. 277), consequently producing a national amnesia that is complicit in maintaining social arrangements that kill and let die Black and Indigenous people (Orr, 2006; Puar, 2007; Sharpe, 2016).

Within this sociohistorical milieu, the long-lasting police brutality and health disparities experienced by Black and Indigenous populations are rendered into seemingly new phenomenon that are reducible to individual behaviours as opposed to the rampant pandemic of state-sanctioned violence that they are. Accordingly, the memory work of BLM, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, memorial artists, and others like them, operate as a disruptive tool that resists and dismantles the legitimized interpretations of history that many white people have come to accept as a comprehensive and conclusive version of the past (Gaudry, 2011; Johnston et al., 2018). By ensuring that loved ones are not forgotten, or remembered as mere victims of a bad choice, these groups draw unfaltering attention to the past that holds people and institutions in power accountable for their previous and persisting violence (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019). These inextricable connections between the past and present make clear that violent histories of racism, anti-Blackness, and colonialism are not "settled" in a past that is behind us. Instead, we find ourselves "in a past that is not past, a past that is with us still; a past that cannot and should not be pacified in its presentation" (Sharpe, 2016, p. 62).

With attention to a past that is not past, Sharpe (2016) states that anti-Blackness can be thought of as an inescapable climate that is ubiquitous and "the totality of our environments" (p. 104), which has pervaded and haunted all life following the transatlantic slave trade. By giving saliency to historical events and practices, Sharpe produces a recount that reveals how racism is not a random anomaly but, rather, a belief firmly entrenched in prevailing structures that insidiously harm, oppress, and exclude Black people. Without this connection to and recollection of history, the reality and ordinariness of racism would be further obscured as an outcome of individual or familial problems rather than an expression of ongoing oppression, exclusion, and social fragmentation (Jamal, 2005; Loyd & Bonds, 2018; Sharpe, 2016).

The need to confront our (read: the West's) history of white supremacy can be equally applied to the ongoing symptoms and structures of settler-colonialism. Just as the legacy of racial slavery has left in its wake a society conditioned by anti-

Blackness, so too has settler-colonialism secured a climate that demands the constant disappearing of Indigenous people (Dean, 2015). Here, Indigenous peoples are made to disappear so that they are unable to "make claim to the stolen land upon which Western society is built" (Da Costa, 2020, p. 440). The ongoing violence of this is witnessed in the institutional silencing of Indigenous voices and knowledge across all educational and state levels (Fellner, 2018; Watts, 2016), the premature death and high mortality felt by Indigenous populations writ large (Hunt, 2018; L. T. Smith, 2012), and through the thousands of missing Indigenous women and girls across Canada (Big Canoe, 2015; Sayers, 2016).

It is necessary to note that, despite the Western narratives and white imaginaries that separate anti-Blackness (Black slavery) and settler-colonialism, these acts of violence are by no means mutually exclusive historical entities. This is not to suggest that the oppressions across history should be thought of through a recent white settler logic that smooths the "quotidian spectacle" of Black and Indigenous death as similarly unfortunate and unfair but, rather, acknowledged as distinctly harmful yet motivated by interrelated logics of white supremacy (King, 2019). Indeed, the interconnections of white supremacy result in a logic that places Black and Indigenous lives at the "horizon of death" (da Silva, 2007, as cited in King, 2019) – in greater proximity to slavery and genocide, and becoming property, disappeared, or a threat (Dean, 2015; Gordon, 2008). As mutually informing histories, whereby Black slavery was used to reterritorialize Indigenous lands to the benefit of the white settler (Da Costa, 2020), anti-Black racism and settler-colonialism constitute and maintain "an unresolved and incomplete project" (King, 2019, p. 77), one of intertwining violence, conquest, and death that is hardly a "history" at all.

Manifestations of these anti-Black and colonial violences have morphed across time. In the context of anti-Blackness, we saw slave law transform into Jim Crow and then into the chokehold of the police officer (Sharpe, 2016). The incessant loss of Black life and the dominant narratives used to discuss Black life and death have created forms of (white) desensitization towards Black death (Chaney & Robertson, 2013). For instance, the media coverage that positions Black death as "practically… excusable" exists parallel to (and as a consequence of) the overrepresentation of Black lives as violent and criminal (Chaney & Robertson, 2013). Anti-Blackness can be found in the health inequities between Black and white populations today and linked to the reduction of Black life to historical relics (read: slaves) (Da Costa, 2020). This inability to recognize Black life in the contemporary has resulted in a (white) public consciousness that assumes, "relative to whites… [Black people] feel less pain because they have faced more hardship" (Sharpe, 2016, p. 10), and impacts the time, concern, and treatment offered to them in healthcare and medical institutions (Jackson, 2020; Sharpe, 2016).

Regarding settler-colonialism, such violence shifted from apprehending Indigenous children and imprisoning them with/in residential schools to settlers' "fascination with Indigeneity as one of simultaneous desire and repulsion" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 8). This gawking intrigue and exotification, rooted in a lack of value and care for Indigenous peoples, inherently leads to the thousands of cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Turtle Island (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019). At the same time, settlers simultaneously exotify and invisibilize Indigenous life and knowledge today through their romanticization of the "vanishing Native" and claim to have a "distant" or "long-lost" Indian grandmother – what Deloria Jr. calls the Indian-grandmother complex (Mojica, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Further, the role of social work and apprehension of Indigenous children today can be recognized as an ongoing enactment of Indigenous imprisonment and erasure.

Within our anti-Black and settler-colonial climate, these racialized harms are not random but explicit indications that our violent history has shaped our current context. Indeed, when we give saliency to these "historical" events, forces, and practices of anti-Black racism and settler-colonialism, we can move towards a more comprehensive understanding that reveals how we, as white people, are implicated in white supremacy and related systems of racial inequality that are also not random, an anomaly, nor always noticeable, but, rather, firmly entrenched,

sustained, and institutionalized across all spheres of contemporary Western society.

Acquiescence and implicatedness

The disappearance and death of Black and Indigenous people today is symptomatic of a "past" that is assumed, by white people, to be over-and-done-with, especially within a society that is constructed as postracist and postcolonial. The ongoing presence and enactment of racism and settler-colonialism is not news to Black and Indigenous people, nor is it news to many people of colour. My use of the "convenient invention" of these post-problem terms and their following assumptions – a practice I am by no means alone in perpetrating – further reveals how white settlers are still (and have always been) in a position of "power to define the world" (L. T. Smith, 2012, p. 14). As a white scholar within a privileged institution of "the Canadian intelligentsia" (D. Smith, 1987), my words about long-lived racial traumas hold a weight of legitimacy, value, and credibility. This speaks to how academia adopts and replicates the racial-colonial logics of larger society. Here, as in most other facets of the Western world, whiteness functions as neutral, undisturbed, and unintelligible (Carbado, 2013), allowing white speakers to intervene in racial matters with authority and declared insight.

Naming the power dynamics present in my writing is an essential part of tackling the colonial worldings I am examining. To simply report on them is to reproduce them, as my words are more likely to be read as "objective" and closer to "truth," despite the reality that I am writing about experiences that are not my own and imperial systems that hurt neither me nor my family (and, in fact, benefit us). There is violence in this. Contra to my supposed legitimacy, Black and Indigenous scholars regularly have their research projects deemed "contaminated" with deeply personal understandings and dismissed as merely motivated by a self-serving political agenda (Collins, 2000; L. T. Smith, 2012; Todd, 2016). Thus, I (and potentially you, the reader) am necessarily implicated in what Métis scholar, Todd (2016), refers to as the "academy's *continued, collective* reticence to address its own racist and colonial roots" (p. 10). When white scholars write about settler-colonialism and anti-Blackness, we need to question our oversights and motives. Whiteness leaves me blind to certain realities, creating boundaries to my vision, recognition, and understanding of racial violence that cannot be crossed with isolated research and conversation alone – let alone performances of empathy. Relatedly, this invites questions about my motives – and the motives of many white scholars studying race – given my warped insight, what is propelling me to engage the question of racial haunting? What should be named and examined in my approach?

When considering the question of Black and Indigenous life and death in a (neo)liberal public consciousness, white people's empathy is too often a short-sighted step "forward" and thus an ineffective mode of change (Anane-Bediakoh & Ali, 2020). Anti-Blackness and settler-colonialism permeate our past, present, and future, creating a climate of death to which we are all implicated. This implicatedness, as highlighted by Dean (2015), prompts one to move beyond mere reactions of empathy, as empathy alone can result in feelings of guilt and, consequently, the desire for an immediate reprieve to reconcile our white settler guilt "without having to change much at all" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 10). Such liberalized empathy (that often manifests as sympathy or pity) does not consider the violent historical conditions that have shaped our social order today, and its resulting privileges and inequities, thereby negating any real potential for accountability. This results in genuine empathy being distorted into performances of empathy that are then practiced as a means to ending racism. The consequence of this is that white people's feelings are protected instead of integrated: contra to performances of empathy, the process of accountability should feel uncomfortable, if not painful, and located inward as it ruptures the core of white consciousness and ego in the West – supremacy (Anane-Bediakoh & Ali, 2020; Da Costa, 2020; Jackson, 2020; Tuck & Yang, 2012). It is when this unsettling self-reflective accountability takes place that white people can meaningfully direct that accountability outward. Immediate examples include donating to already established BIPOC activist and mutual aid groups, while long-term examples involve doing the work of fostering deep and genuine

connections with these movements to support BIPOC leadership.

The more common reactions of guilt, versus the desired reactions of accountability, as Tuck and Yang (2012) suggest, can lead white settlers to deny our culpability and complicity through hollow, settler moves to innocence: ahistorical, asocial, and apolitical strategies that make it possible for settlers to alleviate their guilt while the specific objectives and requirements of decolonization are neglected and rendered invisible. For example, recalling what Deloria Jr. refers to as the Indian-grandmother complex, a white settler may claim to have "Indian blood" as a descendant of an Indigenous grandmother to absolve themselves of responsibility for the harm Indigenous populations have and continue to face (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Without a historical context that links our past to today's racial pandemic, well-meaning acts of consciousness-raising may be more frivolous and flippantly sanguine than anti-racist and thus work to reproduce a white acquiescence that tolerates ongoing violence against Black and Indigenous people. While discussing the disappearance of Indigenous women from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside and Canada more broadly, Dean (2015) argues that the prolonged inaction by the state and police can work as an acquiescence that maintains and fosters the structures, culture, and values that tolerate this violence and, ultimately, death. Thus, Dean proposes that these harms are state-*supported*, which further implicates us – white populations benefitting, reinforcing, influenced by, or blind to these unequal systems – in this pandemic of racialized violence. As phrased by Dean, "the broader social fabric of Canadian society… is inextricable from its state formations in its tolerance for this inaction" (p. 27).

Attention to Black death and suffering at the hands of police officers also come to a halt after one has chanted or hashtagged "Black Lives Matter." Although a well-meaning display of allyship, this ahistorical (and often fleeting) approach to anti-Blackness will not take Black well-being and justice far, if anywhere (Anane-Bediakoh & Ali, 2020). As observed by Sanders (2020), such liberal sentimentalities do not assuage the "resting hum" of imminent death that he feels as a Black man: "It doesn't feel like the hollow rejection of an ugly breakup. It's not the stinging disappointment of missing out on a promotion. What I feel is the lingering fear of death. Heart emojis and positive vibes won't help" (para. 15). Indeed, a wider acknowledgement and conversation surrounding anti-Blackness will not "talk away" anti-Black racism, as anti-Blackness is fundamental to whiteness and Western society.

When I merely say or hashtag "Black Lives Matter" as a white person and scholar, or express hope that things will change surrounding Vancouver's missing Indigenous women, I neither recall nor challenge Canada's long history and violent role in the transatlantic slave trade and settler-colonialism (Turner, 2019). On the contrary, I cover up these histories through my engagement in a performative allyship that permits me the ability to (mis)represent myself as resisting white supremacy while still allowing me to benefit from its abuse, thereby maintaining the national amnesia towards the ongoing disappearance and death of Black and Indigenous people. I, therefore, cannot offer my feelings of remorse or guilt with ease and *hope* that systems of anti-Black racism and colonialism will change. I also cannot report their violence as if they are new. However, what I *can* do, along with other white scholars and colleagues, is name my position in the pandemic of racialized violence and take meaningful steps from there. This acknowledgement of our (read: white people's) implicatedness is a step away from a continued white acquiescence.

More specifically, I am attempting to simultaneously intervene into so-called "Canada's" history of racial haunting to the pedagogical growth of white people while also refusing to present this intervention as novel. In doing this, my goal is to not just use my unearned legitimacy to show other white people, particularly academics, how settler-colonialism and racial slavery are woven into the very fabric of our current society, but to do this in a way that disrupts, rather than invokes, the colonial impulse of speaking over and for BIPOC. I use this intervention to lean into institutional violence (publishing and "producing novelty") and turn a mirror to and interrogate my own reflection. Indeed, a "hope" that things will change will hardly trouble white supremacy, a violence deeply rooted in "the dreadful past… animating

our current conditions of racial inequality – a past that produced these conditions in the first place" (Walcott, 2019, p. 394), without such reflection.

This piece has simultaneously prompted me to contemplate allyship and how "being" an ally, as a white person, is hardly an immediate positioning, but, rather, one that is in an ongoing state of *becoming*. As a white person who is immediately implicated in white supremacy, my actions, words, and decisions can become a movement towards a complicit acceptance of this continued white acquiescence or an active, embodied effort and desire to produce change. White allyship must be revisited, as white performativity has only taken transformative justice so far (e.g., Canadian multiculturalism). White allyship is something we – me and white people, writ large – must be deeply invested in and ongoingly work towards. We must turn to the BIPOC activists surrounding us and follow their lead – an act that involves giving non-white life the same vitality that we have inherited through racial violence. Local and international BIPOC activists remind us that we are not starting from nowhere, although, as white people, it may feel like nowhere we have been before – in a space we do not dominate, get primacy, and get to conquer as our own. In this space, we are not white escorts for anti-racism.

As a white scholar and *aspiring* ally (as my allyship is never a given or something I can claim for myself), I have an obligation to the past, to learn from the harms of colonial violence, and know whose land I am on and my treaty obligations on that land. Moreover, I commit to recognize where the "past" manifests today – through the institutions I am embedded within, the people around and beside me, and in my behaviours. In academia, who do I cite? Whom do I recognize as an "expert" and a "revolutionary"? Outside academia, who do I make the space to listen to? Whose perspectives are informing and guiding me, from the quotidian to the "unprecedented"? How am I supporting social movements, and what beliefs and logic inform my actions of support?

Moreover, I have an obligation to the future. This obligation should not position me in yet another place of power as a "woke" white saviour wielding my privilege to amplify the voices of Black, Indigenous, and other colonized populations. At the same time, this white allyship is not me stepping down, washing my hands clean from responsibility while claiming an absence of experience with oppression (e.g., "'I don't experience the problems you do, so I don't think about it,' and 'tell me what to do, you're the experts here'" (Mawhinney, 1998, p. 103, as cited in Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 10)). It is not racialized populations' responsibility to "tell me what to do." Lastly, it is not productive to attempt to reverse existing power relations, which would be institutionally performative, at best, much like Canada's multiculturalism, which simply disguises "conditions of racism that have been relatively unchanged since post-World War II and might be said to have intensified from the 1990s to the present" (Walcott, 2019, p. 396; see Walcott, 2019 for more on "the multicultural lie"). As white scholars, people, and aspiring allies, we need to put in the work to learn, to face discomfort and shame, to recognize white supremacy in our very reflection, as conquest "is not an event, not even a structure, but a milieu or active set of relations that we can push on, move around in, and redo from moment to moment" (King, 2019, p. 40). We need to step aside and listen and keep listening. I am still learning how to practice anti-Black racism and decolonization in my everyday life, and this learning would not be possible without listening to and following the expertise of BIPOC. Our support for anti-racist change will not stem from new forms of colonialism.

We are haunted by a present past

The above reveals that anti-Black and settler-colonial violence is something many, if not all, of us continue to produce and benefit from. This acquiescence continuously makes itself visible: when media reports on violence against Black and Indigenous lives are limited to "physical and extraordinary violence," consequently overlooking the structural violence and systemic violations that hinder Black and Indigenous peoples' quality of (and ability to hold onto) life (Nako, 2016); when decolonization becomes metaphorical (Tuck & Yang, 2012) rather than a process that works "to recover histories, lands, languages and basic human dignity" (L. T. Smith, 2012, p. 23); and when truth and reconciliation commissions across the globe do not prompt

structural redress, but, rather, promote *symbolic* redress by amplifying (some) once-silenced voices, composing a "real" and singular history, and acknowledging mistakes of the "past" (Milton, 2014; Nako, 2016). These acts restore nothing but the violence they rebuke.

I, therefore, conclude my piece by drawing on Gordon's (2008) theoretical field of haunting to reinforce the fact that white people – regardless of our support and understanding of BLM and Indigenous well-being – are implicated in today's current pandemic of racialized violence. Gordon recognizes haunting as an altering state, where once-clear distinctions between past and present, presence and absence, fact and fiction, and knowing and unknowing, are obscured (2008). Here, binary distinctions are intentionally obfuscated, and the logic that constrain people to believe that there is one thing *or* another and that they themselves are *this* or *that*, are mystified.

Applied to the contemporary Western world and the many discourses it generates, we see that it is haunted by continuities from the "past" (de Leeuw et al., 2010). These continuities are often difficult for white and monied people to notice, as they are eclipsed by permitted narratives that reinforce the West as exceptionally liberal, accepting, and progressive (L. T. Smith, 2012; Walcott, 2019). By depoliticizing and individualizing structural inequities across the West, these narratives fuel the flows of power that maintain colonial and racial violence (Anane-Bediakoh & Ali, 2020; Bannerji, 2005; Chávez, 2013; Puar, 2017). Despite these diffused "white lies" (Walcott, 2019), haunting brings rise to ghosts that "appear when the trouble they represent and symptomize is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view" (Gordon, 2008, p. xvi). Thus, at this point, it is not relevant to ask: Can grieving death be the presence of a haunting? Instead, we must acknowledge this: We have always been haunted.

What haunts us is made legible, visible, and heard through the names that are amplified across the BLM movement and the thousands of missing Indigenous women called upon by their communities. These are the same names that are only ever whispered by news outlets seeking ethical accreditation (Dean, 2015; National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019). We are haunted by a history that is unresolved. We, including white beneficiaries, are haunted by a "past" violence that continues to puncture racialized and Indigenous lives today. Consequently, we – white people, scholars, and aspiring allies – must continue to confront and learn from our past to recognize where its harms linger, not just in the cries of the "other," but in the scent of our breath. In this haunting, we are both colonizer and ally, and it is our responsibility to recognize and navigate this overlap. When we take seriously that the past is not yet past, we begin to dismantle imperial repetitions through informed interventions (Dean, 2015; Sharpe, 2016). This "remembering" has the potential to give rise to new understandings, critiques, and projects in which we are all responsible and implicated: "In this necessarily collective undertaking, the end, which is not an ending at all, belongs to everyone" (Gordon, 2008, p. 208).

This claim is not new.
This claim is not revolutionary.
This claim is not mine.
But it is I who bears the responsibility
of feeling it.

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NS?

so Angry, so Black

Kwene Onotseke Appah

Abstract
The constant fear that exists within me, in both academic and non academic environments, to avoid being the 'angry black woman' has left me paralyzed and feeling invisible. Academia, even academia that is centered on human betterment, is whitewashed. It is disheartening learning about the oppression of the marginalized from a perspective that can only empathize. It is from this place that I anchor the following poem. What the poem lacks in length it makes up for in raw emotion. The burden of being Black and femme for the entirety of one's life is a heavy cross to bear. Black women are continuously failed inside and outside of the Black community. Black women are the foot soldiers, the healers, the tacticians, the martyrs, and yet, their compensation is abuse. In this year of 2020, a devastating decade that has still not given us any peace, I fully accept being the angry Black woman. Unequivocally, unapologetically.

Keywords
black women, black existence, black lives matter, black poetry

i'll be an "angry black woman" until my voice goes,
until my legs go,until my brain goes.
i'll be*so**angry**and so black*until there's change.
because we beg, plead, cry, scream,
and you don't hear us.
we say no, we say stop,
you don't hear us.
so get ready for our outside voices.
you'll hear us now.

//onotseke

Author Biography

Kwene Onotseke Appah is a Nigerian-Canadian immigrant, currently residing on the Treaty 1 lands known as Winnipeg, Manitoba. Appah is a 2nd year graduate student of the Master of Arts program in Sociology at the University of Manitoba. Appah seeks to highlight the multi-layered impact of immigration in both their creative work and scholarship by presenting work from a lens that speaks to the intimate, intersectional experiences individuals face. She holds a deep passion for community work that seeks to empower and uplift systemically marginalized groups and is a persistent advocate for initiatives which assist migrants in their respective integration and migration journeys. Appah's masters research addresses identity struggles and conceptions of belonging in the field of immigration and migration; exposing a critical space for inquiry into colonization, immigration policy, nationalism, race, and globalization. In her poetry, she embarks on journeys of understanding, healing, trauma, racism, and the roiling anger they birth.

NS?

Reflections on Conducting Community-Engaged Research During COVID-19

Peter Duker

Abstract

As an emerging scholar committed to social justice and anti-oppressive praxis, I entered my master's program in Geography at York University, Toronto, with the goal of contributing to new theoretical insights and meaningful outcomes for research participants in Thailand. While initially the concept of community-engaged research appeared to alleviate the tensions between these two goals, the realities of the university's constraints on graduate student research coupled with those of the COVID-19 pandemic have made it clear that this endeavor would not be straightforward. The inherent messiness of balancing academic matters (e.g., contributing to new theory and demonstrating an adequate level of rigor) with social justice concerns (e.g., eliminating epistemological violence and contributing meaningful outcomes for research participants) in community-engaged research has only intensified as COVID-19 has reconfigured our social relations, exacerbating existing inequities and restricting our social mobility, particularly across international borders. In this reflection, I consider how remotely collaborating with local research assistants in my own graduate research project typifies these tensions. More specifically, I posit that the COVID-19 pandemic has further underscored the importance of researchers, particularly white men researchers such as myself, to be willing to consistently re-evaluate our projects, and embrace flexibility, accountability, and the removal of ego from our work.

Keywords

collaborative methods, positionality, research assistants, COVID-19

Introduction

Since entering graduate school with the goal of writing a master's thesis based on original research, I have needed to adapt my expectations to the realities and constraints of academia. After spending years abroad living and working alongside marginalized groups in West Africa and Southeast Asia, I began York University's graduate program in Geography perhaps a bit naively, albeit well-intentioned. My goal was, and continues to be, to conduct research that has meaningful outcomes for research participants. Familiar with the concept of 'community-engaged research', I saw the process of collaboratively working with research participants as a sort of 'silver bullet' to alleviate any potential ethical issues pertaining to the role of 'outsiders'. However, my original plans to achieve a mutually beneficial and collaborative process were upended by the COVID-19 pandemic. While COVID-19 is certainly unique, many of its challenges are ubiquitous in academic research, and underscore the existing tensions within community-engaged research. Accordingly, in this reflection, I invite the reader to consider the story of my research project as a testimony to the tensions inherent in well-meaning graduate student research projects. Drawing on my lived experiences with community engaged research and COVID-19, I make a case for privileged researchers, including myself, to embrace flexibility, accountability, and the removal of ego from their work.

My master's research project explores the emergence of community-based conservation areas on rivers in Northern Thailand, giving substantive focus to the economic and political potentialities of these actions for neighbouring Karen communities.[1] This project arose from my experiences living and working in Thailand for five years, where I spent much of my time in rural areas working with the Karen and other ethnic minority groups. During my final year in Thailand, I was introduced to the people who later participated in my study while working as a research assistant for a colleague. We created surveys, and trained volunteers on how to record their daily fishing activities in order to better understand the impacts of the riverine conservation areas created by these communities. From here, I saw the potential to further amplify the voices of the research participants as they resisted the threat of displacement posed by the incursion of a national park on their homelands. This is how I arrived at my master's research.

My time in these communities, and Thailand more broadly, muddles the insider-outsider dichotomy often present in transnational research. I have a level of understanding and familiarity with the culture, and a few locals with whom I am close, which allows me to somewhat bridge that gap. However, rather than dissolving the researcher-research participant power dynamic typical to such work, I simply have a better view of the tensions that define and constrain it. I elaborate further on the value of such a perspective below.

Flexibility

When I began working on the methodology for my master's research proposal back in December of 2019, I was already struggling to balance the demand to produce 'rigorous' academic research with the ethical responsibility to remain adaptable to the preferences of research participants. Remaining cognizant of my past experiences in which I often noticed that these Karen community members would defer to my opinions (likely due to power imbalances), even though I wanted to hear from them, I was prepared to find ways to make sure the research was actually enriching their lives. Accordingly, I remained open to adapting my research methods as much as possible during my fieldwork.

Conducting fieldwork *in situ* (situated in the place, as opposed to remotely, for example) would have greatly facilitated my ability to notice and navigate cultural subtleties (e.g., non-verbal cues that indicate an underlying feeling or informal check-ins during mealtimes). This process of noticing and navigating is critical to understanding which aspects of the research or research process should be altered to meet the wants and needs of research participants. However, I cannot access my

[1] The Karen people are an ethnic minority group in Thailand, often derogatorily referred to as a 'hill tribe', who have historically experienced significant marginalization, which continues to this day. See Delang (2004) or Laungaramsri (2003) for more information on the Karen people in Thailand.

field sites due to the current health pandemic. National travel restrictions aside, the research participants refuse, and rightfully so, to let outsiders potentially infectious with COVID-19 into their communities. Due to many factors, including their remoteness and historic marginalization by the Thai state, these Karen communities lack access to the high-quality medical care needed to treat those who fall sick with the virus. Therefore, they have taken control of their situation by limiting the potential for exposure to the virus and denying outsiders access to their lands. The subsequent inability to conduct my research in-person has required me to completely adapt my research to remote methods. I am left trying to find ways to produce 'rigorous' research in order to satisfy my degree requirements, while also navigating how to engage remotely with communities on the other side of the world. Additionally, this all must occur within the strictly limited timeframe of a master's program; a challenge which is further exacerbated as I am an international student with limited funding opportunities to extend my studies. Yet, despite these challenges, I am still committed to conducting research that has meaningful outcomes for the research participants.

Adapting my research to remote methods has not been straightforward. While many academics have recently been encouraging the acceptance of remote methods for scholars looking for new ways to conduct research during COVID-19 (for a comprehensive compilation of materials, see Samuels, 2020), the majority of these strategies do not apply to my research, as they rely on a stable and consistent internet or cell network connection. The participants in my study reside in the mountain valleys of Northern Thailand where cell and internet connectivity are minimal, at best. Cellular networks (e.g., 3G or 5G) are only available in a few specific locations (e.g., on a mountain top) and are unreliable even in those locations due to factors such as weather conditions. There are some places with WIFI connection (e.g., some schools in the area), but the connection can also be unreliable. This means that participants would have to drive far distances to access signal or WIFI and the connection itself may not be strong enough for conducting research activities once they arrive. This is too heavy of a burden to place on them and it would also be very difficult to coordinate with more than a few participants.

However, I was extremely fortunate to have attended a conference in 2019 whereby a peer from my program, a doctoral candidate who has completed her fieldwork, presented on working with local research assistants to access areas otherwise inaccessible, such as how my sites have become.[2] I reached out to her, and she has since become a vital source of support. She taught me how to work with local research assistants, which provided access that I would otherwise not have had. At the same time, this access comes with new power dynamics, which I further elaborate on below. Additionally, it must be noted that this fortunate encounter was itself a function of privilege. Not everyone interested in community-engaged research can attend conferences, either because they cannot afford to or because they do not have the time, or both. Furthermore, conferences can be exclusionary along racial and class lines, so even if marginalized students and researchers are able to attend, they may feel uncomfortable about doing so.

The inaccessibility of conferences and other academic resources has only gotten worse during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the increase of unemployment, food insecurity, police brutality, Sinophobia, anti-Black racism, and healthcare inaccessibility. COVID-19 has thus exacerbated the need for researchers to have preexisting social and cultural capital to mobilize. For me, this fact became most clear when I started searching for a local research assistant to work with. While it took a while, I connected with a potential candidate through the family that hosted me whenever I stayed in the village. Not only did they identify this candidate for me, but they also advocated for my integrity so that this person felt comfortable working with me. It took a great deal of trust for him to sign on to work with me—a foreigner whom he has neither met nor would be able to meet in person due to the pandemic (at least for now)—as a research assistant. Therefore, while flexibility

[2] See Roberts (2019) for a recent publication from this fieldwork.

was critical to make my research project viable despite the aforementioned hurdles, it also must be simultaneously acknowledged that my pre-existing relationships with and experience in the communities were crucial to making remote research possible in this context.

Accountability

Before I continue narrating the story of the evolution of my research project, a brief academic interjection is required. In academic work, one must always 'justify' their methodology to their peers, regardless of any potentially meaningful material or symbolic benefit it may bring to the research participants. This step is essential to the completion of my thesis, and therefore degree; and without it, my research would not be considered 'valid'. Rather than withhold from the readers the same opportunity to hold me accountable, I present an abridged version over the next two paragraphs.

Over the past few decades, an increasing number of scholars have been interested in collaborative research methods, particularly feminist scholars (Sharp, 2005). Among such methods is the recruitment of and collaboration with local research assistants. While the definition of 'local' might vary from scholar to scholar, in the context of transnational research, 'local' implies someone from the country, if not the community of research participants itself.

From a postpositivist, or more traditional, academic perspective, the practice of sending 'untrained' (read as lacking a 'Western' education) research assistants to conduct research activities without the researcher physically present would be questioned.[3] Such a practice invalidates the perception of 'objectivity' in research conduct and interpretation. However, I follow in the footsteps of many postmodern, critical race, and feminist scholars, in that I do not recognize the researcher as an 'objective' outside observer. Instead, the researcher, research assistant(s), and participant(s) all contribute to the research from their own 'partial perspective', in which embodied subjectivities (where one body can hold multiple subjectivities) offer particular insights into the world contingent on their positioning (Collins, 2000). Coming from an understanding of 'partial perspectives', local research assistants enable new and deeper research insights, rather than barriers to mythic 'objectivity'. At this point, I will spare the reader from further theorizing, and leave them with this takeaway: academics willing to decenter themselves in the research process and uplift others, including local research assistants, as insight-generating researchers in and of themselves, will enhance their research outcomes compared to those who do not. Accordingly, this is the approach I take in my work.

Academic rationalization aside, working with local research assistants helps my research contribute to social justice projects more meaningfully. By engaging local community members and other 'insiders' in the research process, we create opportunities "from the conception through the outcomes of the research" for local knowledges and priorities to be emphasized (Sharp, 2005, p. 307). In turn, collaborating with local research assistants has the potential to disrupt the typical hegemonic paradigm of extractive and exploitative research and to keep the research accountable to the communities we are studying. Thus, engaging with local research assistants facilitates a more mutually beneficial and reciprocal type of research with greater potential for growth and transformation.

These claims can be grounded in some examples from my own project. All of my engagements with community partners are mediated by the aforementioned local research assistant. This means that input by the local research assistant is provided at every stage of the project, and he dramatically shapes the project. With this comes the opportunity to include Karen cosmologies and to enable these cosmologies to shape my work. The local research assistant is from the community, and, from his discussions with other community members, is able to tell me what kinds of research outputs will directly assist them in their self-identified challenges, specifically the challenge of insecure land rights due to the looming incursion of a national park.

Further, the local research assistant is also developing many new research skills that may help

[3] The pervasiveness of this mindset is evident in the difficulties that I have faced in trying to get my research funders to accept research assistants as a legitimate fieldwork cost.

him and his community in the future. For instance, he has expressed the joy and excitement that he and the participants feel when they discuss the importance of the river in their lives for project activities. Here, the 'typical' power dynamic of traditional in-person research is upheaved as I am no longer present for the interviews and other participatory research activities. The hopeful part of me imagines that this new dynamic may provide a compelling model to level power relations between the researcher and research participants in a transnational community-engaged research context. However, I must also acknowledge that, despite the fact I am not physically located there with the research participants, I remain a "non-present and yet highly powerful actor."[4] Unfortunately, the implications of this new power dynamic are very difficult, if not impossible, to gauge and fully understand. Therefore, I may never fully comprehend the impacts of this methodology, and whether it truly disrupts the typical researcher-research participant power dynamic. Nonetheless, I still have hope, and place value in that feeling.

Removal of Ego

Importantly, the potential for mutually beneficial and reciprocal research is not guaranteed by undergoing collaborative research. The specificities of research design are contingent upon each project, and the researcher must be prepared to continually negotiate the tensions that remain, no matter the research design. These tensions are highlighted by Nagar (2002), who stresses that the need for the development of new theoretical insights, so that the researcher can advance their own career, must also be balanced with the need for knowledge production that disrupts hierarchies and hegemonies for the research subjects. The external validation needed for career advancement inevitably engages the ego as well, adding a personal dimension to these tensions, as our identity is often intertwined with our careers. I certainly feel the push and pull of these forces in regard to the theoretical, timing, and funding constraints I encounter as a white man master's student—a person of privilege in a subordinated location—in addition to my ethical commitment to contribute to symbolic and material benefits for the research participants.

When researchers remove ego from their work, they will be more able to assess the various impacts of, and the degree to which they can reduce, academic harm. In my own research, the tensions between ego and ethics first emerged in the creation of my research proposal, but they perpetually exist as I continue to work on my thesis. While I would be happy to support any research that communities wish to undergo, the requirement to conduct research that develops new theoretical insights limits the extent of possible topics. For example, while land use and forest access issues are the most frequently cited concerns for Karen communities, scholars have been looking at these issues for decades now, and they are well understood, at least academically speaking. Therefore, a compromise was reached to instead look at their *river* management. Academics, and especially Southeast Asia-focused researchers, have historically examined community-based management of rivers much less prolifically, which indicates an opportunity for new research insights. My own research project is thus able to reconcile these juxtaposed interests between local communities and academics by examining the communities' management of their neighboring river, and to consider how this may help them in their struggle for land rights and self-determination. The well-meaning researcher must let go of the egotistical desire to control every aspect of the research process, and instead, compromise and allow for participants and circumstances to guide the decisions and outcomes along the way.

I have also faced issues with the internal ethics review process at my university, which can be at odds with local realities. While the research participants' communities, and Thailand writ large, have done an effective job of mitigating the spread of COVID-19,[5] York University's ethics office

[4] For these insightful words I give credit to Dr. Sarah Rotz at York University and extend my deep gratitude for her guidance in helping me to navigate the tensions in community-engaged academic work.

[5] See the following links for WHO reports, press releases, and a video that have been released highlighting the advantages (and limitations) of Thailand's COVID-19 response: https://www.who.int/thailand/news/detail/14-10-2020-Thailand-IAR-COVID19; https://www.who.int/thailand/news/feature-stories/detail/thailands-1-million-village-health-

required a Canadian-based standard of COVID-19 precautions for all on-going research activities, regardless of the jurisdiction and local context. I am sure that the intentions were well-placed, and likely based on a concern for the health and safety of participants; however, the effect of this requirement is inherently neocolonial, as it inserts Canadian-based assumptions and practices about COVID-19 onto my research project, and that can undermine the efforts and agency of research participants. Fortunately, I was able to satisfy the office's requirements with a suitable alternative that recognizes the local context appropriately and works alongside existing community protocols, and my research was approved to continue. This instance illustrates how the inherent epistemological violence of research may be reduced by well-intentioned researchers, while also being thwarted, or at least exhausted, by the institutions in which they reside.[6] Thus, while the question remains as to whether this violence is constitutive of research and therefore inevitable, removal of ego will assuredly help researchers to address this issue more purposively.

On a personal level, I have found it challenging to adjust to the slowness of the community-engaged research process. This has been especially exacerbated by my research context, and then again by the need to collaborate remotely. In the Global North, our neoliberal capitalist society places particular value on 'productivity', which has essentially been reduced to the quantity of tangible outputs produced over time. In this context, many of us may find ourselves in a 'rat race', focusing on our rate of 'production' (whatever that may be in our own specific cases) at the expense of our relationships (whether to our self or others). Despite my awareness of this situation, I (and I assume many of us) find it virtually impossible to escape from the societal pressure to conform to this modality. However, the Karen communities in which my research is based are rooted in other ways of knowing and being, whereby cultivating relationships is often of higher priority than producing tangible outputs or optimizing time.

Adapting to a diametrical living and working style that prioritizes relationship building would be much more straightforward during *in situ* research, where the immersive experience is bound to force even the most stubborn of researchers to adapt. When working remotely, however, this is not the case. Let us think of this in terms of a hypothetical. For example, if the Karen communities were about to plant rice, I would not get *any* interviews done for the next two weeks. If I were in Thailand, that would be okay, as I would be able to engage with the community in other ways and still be physically present in their worlding. This hypothetical research-halting rice planting scenario did in fact happen while I was in Toronto, and I was stuck in the disconnect between physically existing in my immediate atmosphere of 'productivity' and the relatively slow-paced world of the villages in Thailand, thereby decelerating my research outputs. Although this was a blow to my productivity-oriented ego, the sheer pertinacity of the dilemma eventually forced me to adjust. A primary way I did this was by 'getting over myself', so to speak, and focusing on how I could comprise and renegotiate my circumstances to benefit research participants, as opposed to mourning my ingrained need to be productive. This suggests that removal of ego is key for the well-meaning researcher to better address the tensions between the personal aspects of conducting research and the epistemological violence often present in academia.

Re-evaluation

All the tensions and constraints covered in this reflection have led and continue to lead to difficult decisions for my research design. How can I fully engage with and appreciate the wants and needs of local communities, while still fulfilling the requirements for my degree? Community-engaged research is (and should be) a time-consuming process, and community interests may be antithetical to typical academic requirements (e.g., 'new' theory, 'rigorous' methods, and so on). Administrative blueprints, such as acceptable research methods and ethics protocols, fail to account for local realities, and undermine other

volunteers-unsung-heroes-are-helping-guard-communities-nationwide-from-covid-19

[6] It also seems prudent to point out that, as a white man with access to social and cultural capital, I am in a better position to (successfully) challenge my university than others.

ways of being and knowing. While all of this was certainly apparent prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, these tensions have only been exacerbated since the crisis hit. Well-intentioned researchers may have to rely on preexisting sources of social, cultural, and economic capital to facilitate the research process, and they cannot count on their university or other funding institutions to support them adequately. Perhaps COVID-19 will force the academic world to reflect on how to contribute to anti-oppressive praxis more meaningfully. At minimum, researchers, and particularly white men researchers such as myself, clearly need to embrace flexibility, accountability, and removal of ego from our work in order for us to continue to create meaningful research during the pandemic. That being said, the real need is for this change to occur beyond this moment, and for researchers to have the general willingness to consistently pause their work and reconsider if its impacts are just—we need to commit to confronting the latent epistemological violence within the community-engaged research we hold dear. If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it should be the importance of re-evaluating our roles in perpetuating 'business as usual'.

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Peter Duker is an MA student in the Geography program at York University's Faculty of Environmental and Urban Change. His research utilizes a political ecology approach to study the intersections of livelihoods, conservation, and development. Peter's current work includes his MA thesis on the establishment of riverine conservation areas by ethnic Karen communities in Northwestern Thailand. He also contributes to the Work at Sea project at York University, investigating the working conditions and labour relations among migrant workers in industrial fisheries and the seafood sector in Asia, particularly Thailand. Peter has been an educator for many years working as a teaching assistant at York University, a study abroad instructor at the International Sustainable Development Studies Institute in Thailand, and a secondary-level physics teacher in Sierra Leone. He received his BA in Environmental Science and Physics in 2013 from Colorado College. He can be contacted at pduker@yorku.ca for any inquiries.

NS?

Affections and Afflictions with You

Gloria Park

Abstract
This poem is about the underlying discrimination that East Asian people encounter in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. After the pandemic struck, I started to analyze my thoughts and feelings on subtle and covert racism, especially during quarantine, which manifested into this piece. My poem explores first-hand experiences of the kind of microaggressions that second generation immigrants from Asia are regularly subject to, as well as the realities of xenophobia, cultural confusion, and identity disjuncture we often endure. Through the poetic form, I expose how everyday interactions are laden with histories of anti-Asian racism and, more specifically, how the coronavirus has further revealed these concealed racist beliefs. The piece opens up the deep-rooted feelings of displacement I have long experienced and ponders if the recent rise in hate crimes against Asians are mere infestations of a hatred that has been growing for generations.

Keywords
COVID-19, identity, culture, race, xenophobia, beauty

When I was six, you told me that I was ugly.

I was too young to comprehend what you meant,

from where your words came from –

that place in your heart was like a seed, pitted with superiority.

As we grew older, those thoughts festered and grew roots; they took a hold of you.

Meanwhile I couldn't understand why I didn't look like the girls I saw out of my monolid eyes.

They were curvaceous with double eyelids and ultimately, beautiful.

Beautiful in terms of Eurocentric standards, no,

universal standards.

My whole life, from birth to death,

an unintentional beauty contest that I did not ask for—

and judged nonetheless on standards I do not qualify for.

When I was ten, you told me that I was Chinese when I said I was not, but you were adamant.

You told me to go back to where I came from, to the country I was born in.

Going back to the country that was torn between north and south,

a place that experienced war and political turmoil,

to the country that I never visited before, it did not make sense.

You did not know that you were asking me to leave to a place I never knew.

It took years for me to realize that I have intrinsic worth;

I do not need to beg people to listen to me,

that love will pour out of people willingly,

and words will heal me just as they have cut me.

Now, at twenty-three, I quietly mind my own business,

I do not tell you to wear a mask out of fear and I make sure I stay away from you in public

but not because I am docile, innocent, and all the things you think all Asian women are,

I stay away because I am afraid.

I am afraid of what will burst out of me when you provoke me now.

While seeds of xenophobia and division grew in your heart, wrath bloomed in mine.

Anger billows slowly within me and I know how to respond now —

but my answers will never be enough

no matter how eloquent, gentle, and polite I am

because these toxic roots have rotted your heart.

COVID-19: a disease with no cure,

harboring death,

revealing another infestation that we knew about for generations.

From my great-grandparents to my future children, will this prejudicial infection persist?

Author Biography

Gloria (she/her) is a writer, researcher, and digital and media marketer who is interested in creating content that is innovative and meaningful. Her research interests are in Indigenous rights in Canadian prisons, gender and feminism, and structural violence. Gloria has received a BA in Criminology and a Digital Marketing certificate at York University and is currently a Master of Public Policy in Digital Society candidate at McMaster University. She is passionate about creating content that combines research and policy together. Outside of her academic and professional endeavors, she enjoys cooking, reading, and writing poetry. As a second-generation Korean woman residing in the Greater Toronto Area, she often writes about her lived experiences with identity, racialization, mental health, and femininity, and hopes that her written work will resonate with others.

Book Review.

NS?

Dealing in Desire

Patara McKeen

Abstract

This is a review of Kimberly Kay Hoang's (2015) *Dealing in Desire*. Her ethnographic study observes four different bars in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam: 1) Kong Sao Bar, 2) Naught Girls, 3) Secrets, and 4) Lavender. Hoang traces different representations of the global financial sector after the 2008 financial crisis and explores the relationship between Asian ascendancy and Western decline. From the local to the international, interactions with clients and hostesses in the bars of Ho Chi Minh City demonstrate a new global trend: the rise in transactions occurring among a global financial sector undefined by traditional social structures (e.g., commercial or national banks). By moving from observer to participant, Hoang develops a deeper understanding of the capital and labour practices that these men and women engage in, highlighting how their everyday experiences demonstrate that nightlife in the city is a way for locals to move up the socio-economic ladder.

Keywords

Asian ascendency, Western decline, global financial sector, Ho Chi Minh City

Dealing in Desire: Asian Ascendancy, Western Decline, and the Hidden Currencies of Global Sex Work
by Kimberly Kay Hoang, 2015,
ix+229 pp., $29.95 (paperback) ISBN: 9780520275577

Flying into Vietnam and into the bars of Ho Chi Minh City, Kimberly Kay Hoang discovers shifting realities in the global financial sector by observing bar patrons and hostesses. Her book, *Dealing in Desire*, challenges the idea of Western hegemony in international transactions in Vietnam following the 2008 financial crisis. Beginning her journey, Hoang lets intuition be her guide as she explores Ho Chi Minh City on motorbike and winds up drawn to its nightlife. Here, she unearths the 'hearts and minds' of the global financial sector.

While the United States, Canada, and Europe are feeling the downturn of the 2008 crisis, nightlife in Ho Chi Minh City is booming. In fact, Vietnam is one of the fastest developing economies in the world at the time. This means lucrative business for the city, and upon further exploration, Hoang finds that many big deals are being struck in the sex industry. In the bars she visits, Kong Sao Bar, Naughty Girls, Secrets, and Lavender, Hoang discovers different representations of Asian ascendancy and Western decline, whereby she finds that the hostesses' work provides a small glance into the newly monied high-flying lives of Asian men and the subsequent desire of their white peers for a world before the recession.

Hoang does not just observe, she also participates, working as a hostess to uncover how these financial and cultural shifts are taking place. In one bar, Secrets, Western businessmen in Vietnam try to project Western dominance through their interactions with hostesses. These men reminisce for a world before the crisis and Western decline. While in another bar, Naughty Girls, Western backpackers and tourists go to experience Vietnam as a "Third World." The third bar, Kong Sao Bar, is a hotbed of local activity and Asian businessmen, and the last bar, Lavender, is frequented by overseas Vietnamese men (referred to as "Viet Kieus"). Thousands to hundreds of thousands of dollars are negotiated and exchanged between these last two bars. In all four locations, however, Hoang discovers Vietnam is actually a place where Asian men, either elites, locals, or foreign-born, are shifting the global financial landscape.

Hoang navigates very real experiences amidst her fieldwork. Observing and interviewing locals that she encounters along the way, her book moves between data and theory in a seamless, uninterrupted fashion. One interesting aspect is the role of body work the hostesses perform, as they try to meet the desires of their clients and achieve body capital. Here, the women's bodies act as the centre for economic transaction (body capital), while also allowing them to ascend to higher socio-economic positions (body work). This exemplifies the concept of "technologies of embodiment;" i.e., the ways in which women transform their bodies to meet the demands of Vietnamese society and engage in new labour opportunities.

Another interesting aspect is her narrative of the sex industry as being a place of economic ascension for Asian men and women alike. She discovers different roles, for example, that men (clients), acting as businessmen, locals, or travellers, use the Asian glamour of Ho Chi Minh City's nightlife to make deals or live out their dreams. In the desires of men and the labour of women, Hoang explores the different representations of a changing global financial sector. The bars in Vietnam become a place to observe, not sex, but capital. The movement of huge financial transactions and cross-national dealings, as well as the body capital of women to meet the desires of their men clients, illustrates the complexities of Asian ascendency. As well, this engages with another narrative, that of a declining West. Here, some (Western) men desire for a West before the recession and to live out the false belief of a still "Third World" Vietnam. For the men clients, their desires, either to negotiate trade or to please their business partners, mirror the desires of the women hostesses, as they gain access to higher economic opportunity. These transactions involve more than money, but emotion too. Clients use their wealth to help support and uplift the hostesses, and, in doing so, enable their transition from hostess to independent businesswoman.

Overall, this book provides a strong analysis of the shifting realities of the global financial sector after the 2008 financial crisis, presenting it through a

fascinating account of Vietnam's nightlife. Through happenstance and word-of-mouth, Hoang chases the glitz and glamour of Ho Chi Minh City's nightlife to map out different areas of the city's sex industry. In the desires of men and the labour of women, Hoang explores the different representations of a changing global financial sector. The bars in Vietnam become a place to observe, not sex, but capital. The movement of huge financial transactions and cross-national dealings, as well as the body capital of women to meet the desires of their men clients, illustrates the complexities of Asian ascendency. Further, all of this engages with another narrative, that of a declining West. Here, some (Western) men desire for a West before the crisis and to fulfil a fantasy for a still "Third World" Vietnam. Of course, this is an impossible desire, a yearning of mythical proportions, as Vietnam represents an Asia on the rise.

Author biography

Patara McKeen is a MA student in Sociology at the University of British Columbia. His research is on the far-reaching impacts of the 1907 anti-Asian riots in Vancouver, Canada. Previously, he did a Master's in Sociology of Law at the University of the Basque Country and a BA in Law at Carleton University. He is a recipient of the Canada Graduate Scholarships-Master's (CGSM).