# New Sociology

Journal of Critical Praxis

Issue 3

## Reverting the Gaze

Resisting Humanism and Hegemony in the West

Cover art by Patricia Ki

New Sociology: Journal of Critical Praxis

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## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Our third issue, *Reverting the Gaze: Resisting Humanism and Hegemony in the West*, combines art and academic critique to resist, revert, and refuse western humanism, covering issues from disability justice and state violence to neoliberalism and healthcare. At its core, western humanism is the mythical norm that many of us must live and die by – it is the systematic abjection, erasure, and exploitation of some forms of life in service of others; it is the pervasive idea that who "counts" are those in closest proximity to, and for the rare few, occupation of, all the imperial traits that states like Canada have rendered into conditions for life: whiteness, wealth, Christianness, ability, western-ness, masculinity, coloniality, cisness, heterosexuality, sanity, thinness; power.

As our largest, and perhaps richest, issue to date, these introductory comments will be brief, as such words pale in comparison to the raw talent, vibrant art, and visceral insights of the pieces that follow. Thus, to begin, I will simply write that this is a magnificent collection, containing poems and prose; photography and visual art; local, international, and transnational geographies; humour and joy; mundaneness and grief; violence and dreams. This issue is a burst of both light and rage; a pulse felt in the bones and held in the soul. Truthfully, the best way I can think to capture the collection in its entirety is to scoff at academics who regard graduate journals, and authors, as *less than.* Our academic articles are more insightful, profound, and masterful than much of what you'll find in "high-ranking" journals. Our creators offer knowledge(s) and insight that moves beyond statistics, jargonistic analyses, and dry textbook rhetoric. These pages, and the wonderous souls who constitute them, are unrivaled; this issue is movement, possibly, life.

This issue is divided into six sections: *Temporalities*, *Imperialisms*, *Decolonization*, *Neoliberalism*, *PostCOVID*, and *Posthumanism*. The first section, *Temporalities*, plays with the whimsies and power of time, while simultaneously navigating and resisting the west's colonialization and capitalization of temporal norms. Western hegemony has long linearized our worlding to the beat of western progress, yet, that said, time is also ours; it is ours to know, reclaim, refuse, embrace and grieve. Here, you'll find an adaption of a minifilm, a collection of poems, a short poem, and a piece of creative non-fiction. The next section, *Imperialisms*, brings together pieces that reveal, endure, and explore the insidious abuses of western hegemony and the white gaze from varied perspectives, including an academic analysis grounded in lived experience, a poem, and a cultural studies essay. Afterwards is *Decolonization*, which broadly embodies decolonized approaches to research and art, relocating knowledge mobilization within a realm beyond and in refusal of colonial legacies. These pages contain a visual essay (in which the cover art was drawn), a reflection piece with a striking glossary, and a drawing.

Next is *Neoliberalism*, which houses two academic articles that explicitly critique the neoliberalization of community, considering matters of geography and health, respectively, and a captioned photo that embodies an anti-neoliberal approach to life and living. Then, in *PostCOVID*, there are two academic articles and two poems, interspersed, all of which explore either how COVID-19 continues to directly plague the lives of the oppressed, or how it indirectly haunts Black life with the subsequent uptake (and cooptation) of Black Lives Matter. The last section is

*Posthumanism*, and it features two academic articles on posthumanism, futurity, and technology, and how these realities contradict western human codes. Then, we conclude the issue with a book review of Valerie Francisco-Menchavez's *The Labor of Care.*

> Like all issues of *New Sociology*, this is an issue of radical love, of community, of those who live and speak truth to power in all they do to exist, dream, love, and grieve through the world.

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. Thank you to all the people who make this journal a possibility and believe in the power of critical praxis; in the power of Disabled, Femme, Queer, and Trans/Black, Indigenous and People of colour students, organizers, and creatives.

Jade Crimson Rose Da Costa, NS Founder and Editor-In-Chief, with Beatrice Anane-Bediakoh, NS Chief-Deputy-Editor, and Ritika Tanotra. NS Chief-Deputy-Editor.

# Temporalities

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# Non-Linear Healing

## Shams Seif

### Abstract

*Non-Linear Healing* is a minifilm that makes tangible and visible the reality of healing as a continual process, rather than a target that must be reached. The film features visuals from a dozen personal journals spanning the years 2014 to 2020. In the background, audio recordings of different entries overlap with varying degrees of intensity, urgency, and volume. Those varying degrees allow for the non-linearity of healing to be felt through the sense of movement created when the recordings lull to softer volumes, to make some readings more audible than others. Below, is an adaptation of this minifilm, which has been reproduced for print form. The adaption includes a short media curation text and video stills placed strategically to convey the spirit of the film. Additionally, multiple listening and speed typing sessions were used to create a transcript that could adequately capture the auditory experience. This transcript is included in sync with the video stills.

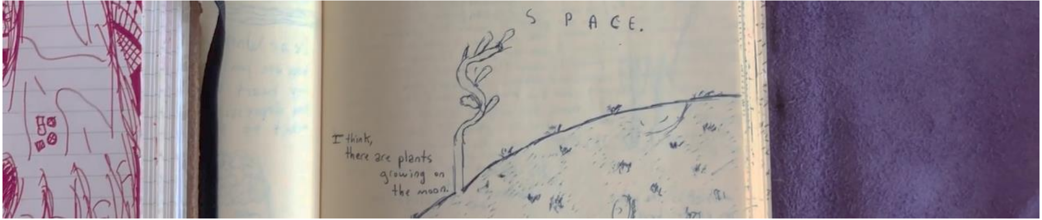
### Keywords

research creation, trauma healing, affect theory, art-based research

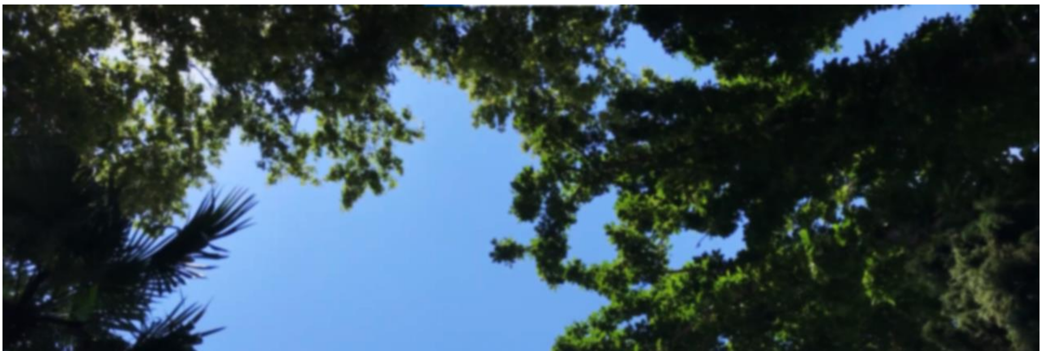
Healing is nonlinear. Tenderness towards oneself is necessary. This mini film features dated journal entries from over 10 journals spanning the years 2014 to 2020. There are several entries overlapping, in various volumes for the majority of the clip. Those entries vary in style from prose and poetry to documentations of emotional outbursts and self-revelations. The final 30 seconds of the minifilm are a creation of cut clips from various entries, creating an auditory black-out poem, to remind the audience of the importance of tenderness towards oneself.

The central objective of the mini film is to make tangible the experience of healing as nonlinear. Through inviting the viewer into my personal archive of unsent letters and private thoughts, I make visible the behind-the-scenes aspects of trauma and healing. Both states, trauma and healing, evoke a sense of intensity and finality that often leaves the person experiencing them with an overwhelming conviction that this state is static and unchanging. This mini film shows the temporally circular motion of healing, reminding the viewer that neither state is final.

Healing being non-linear creates avenues to experience the euphoria of healing, even while some pain is still present. It means that one need not postpone joy, experiences, or goals while stuck in a state of waiting to grasp the unrealistic illusion of final and complete healing.




This minifilm invites the viewer to reconsider their relationship to themselves and to the small kid in each of us who requires extra tenderness and patience. What if healing were a practice, not a destination? What if you did not need to wait for all the hurt to be completely gone, to begin to move on? What if you can be tender with yourself despite the fact you are often depressed? What if you let go of an unattainable state of "healed" and embraced yourself for where you are at this exact moment? Corny? Maybe. But it's also true.



October 2014

I want to blow out my heart carving it out like a

darling no I don't smoke to piss you off

that's how the song goes

my heart can't handle strong weather conditions

street sellers and cigarette butts

moving the rush of water

some days I think it does it on purpose

I am sorry

I am so damn sorry

my heart is a loud child and I am the mother who

is always apologizing

I am a writer its what I do don't flatter yourself

I just want to be happy for them

but I am ashamed of my jealousy?

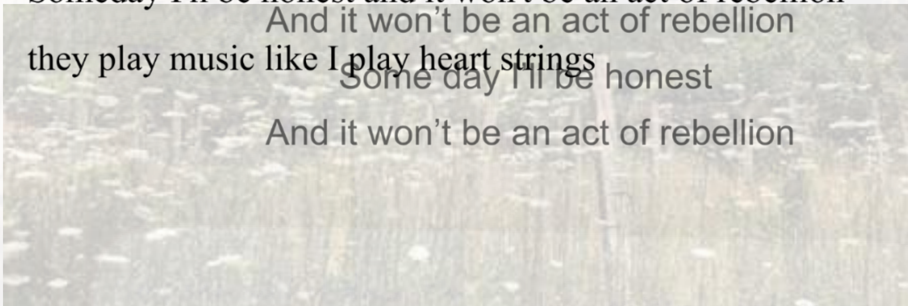
Someday I'll be honest and it won't be an act of rebellion

they play music like I play heart strings

Maybe drowning and drowning in the
Presence of someone else are
Two different things
I feel the weight of too many could have beens
And I just want to be happy for them
My family is what it is
Someday I'll be honest and it won't be an act of rebellion
I don't smoke to piss you off
I do it because it heals
Throat closes up on itself
An eight-year-old girl selling gum on a dirty road
The sound of cigarette butts hitting the ground and finding home
until the rain fingers them homeless again

The scolding hot water
the bodies of the forgotten people
the weight in because of the things my chest doesn't burn he has
that's how the song goes
It cripples on the sight of an 8-year-old girl up to the
Throat closes up on itself, a beat from a heart that
cannot handle extreme weather conditions
The sound of beggars praying
And cars honking
And the rush of water and sewage into the street drains
Sometimes I think it does it on purpose
The weight is stitched to me

I hate how much my sadness is stitched to me
The lines are blurring
I don't know what is my anxiety and what is the pills
And what is me
I feel the weight of too many could have beens
I vanish
My parents are who they are
Some day I will accept that and resist it less
Some day I'll be honest
And it won't be an act of rebellion
Some day I'll be honest
And it won't be an act of rebellion



November 11, 2020
Shamousa

December 2015
There are good things

September 6, 2017
They play music like they’re playing heartstrings
Sing in a language that does not call them home

November 11, 2020
I love you.
Sincerely,
Shams

## Author Biography

Shams Seif is an artist, academic, writer, and part time nanny. They are a PhD student in Gender, Feminist, and Women's Studies and are currently preparing for their comprehensive exams. Shams enjoys self-reflection, growth, and open communication. They are passionate about creating a neurodiverse inclusive learning environment and world. They believe that wearing masks, socially distancing, and getting vaccinated are necessary social and civic responsibilities.

NS?

# For Dana and Her Ancestors: A Poetic Emergence from Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred*

Elaine Cagulada

## Abstract

In this collection of poems, I narratively engage each chapter in Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred* to examine disability and Black life anew. My engagement with the tale of longing, time-travel, and slavery that Butler weaves together in the novel is moved by an interpretive, or a phenomenological, disability studies approach, where "the experience of disability, our own or that of others, becomes the scene where we can frame how we experience embodied existence and, thus, disability becomes a place where culture can be examined anew, again and again" (Titchkosky & Michalko, 2012/2017, p. 77). Interpretive disability studies surfaces necessary questions around how we make sense of boundaries that distance 'normal' from 'non-normal.' Haitian author, Edwidge Danticat's (2018) desire to make sense of separation is what brought her, in part, "…to the internal geography of words and how they can bridge sentences" (para. 10). Following in Danticat's footsteps, while remaining indebted to the wisdom of Black women storytellers' writ large, I hope to understand the separations among the characters of *Kindred*, namely among Kevin, Rufus, Alice, Alice's mother, Hagar, Dana and her ancestors, and Tom Weylin, and, in so doing, emerge, through poetry, from a geography of words charted by Butler and again encountered. The below poetic emergence reveals all boundaries as bridged, showing how disability can become a place where culture can be examined anew. For Dana and her ancestors, perhaps we might wonder about what it means to be in kindred with notions of normal and non-normal, and to live in kindred with one another.

## Keywords

interpretive disability studies, phenomenological disability studies, Black studies, creative resistance, poetry

I. *The River*

along the
edge of wood
along wide
blue life

a child thrashed in its centre

the river was harsh
and hungry
the wood was wise
but withdrawn

called into the past
into the edge
time-travel tremors

our Black heroine

breathes him
back into a world
where he will
later greet Alice
a similar exchange
by taking her
not to save her
but to enslave her
to wrap themselves
together
in his wretched way
as carnivores know
only meat
as Man slices into
steak while cattle
eat only to die
for now
the river and wood
dance on

II. *The Fire*

"whips
are used to
kill our souls"
the beautiful, Black
goddess mother queen

told her doe-eyed
daughter of the green

after
*it* found little Hagar

common-sense warned,
run back
ancestor-sense whispered,
*jump*
*rope*

decision disguised
as choice

smiling
she skipped whip
happily in silence

III. *The Fall*

lying with him
is being embraced
by a warm blanket
after wading through
wet weather
drenched by the downpour
of this damning day-job

where is
the sun
haunt me
with heat
while pens
help me
imagine
worlds without work

lying with him
is fine too
together in loneliness
I'll be your zombie
anytime, K

IV. *The Fight*

Tom Weylin
frowned down
at a mat of red hair
evidence of tears
filed away
in the rim
of his son's collar

insensible Rufus

hurt them until
they get it
else I'll play you like a drum
beat you until you get it
rhythmic violence
your teacher

fly boomerang
fly

V. *The Storm*

in dreary
darkness
a so-called
master
fell into a genre
of human
impatient from
waiting
for ages

time witnessed
him bind
his kindness
strike slave
until her child
was revealed
from hiding
in mum's
warmth
in mum's
self
in territory mum
could never travel

a version of Kevin
was with mum too
moving through uncharted territory,
mapping sorrow,
trauma,
and dreams of Dana

“five years”
cannot capture
how death, birth
and their middle
are released in minute
moments

“five years”
assumes nothing
and everything

feel time, don’t tell it

VI. *The Rope*

I am
exploring
what I might be
or who I might be
or what I am not
which is dead
like Rufus
the red-haired boy
he once was
the red-haired brute
he always will be
even this is unclear

science
and regimes of truth
might claim
that my existence is
fact

it is fact,
the claims begin,
that I am
a broken arm
once part of a whole
now living in a hole

in Dana's wall

it is fact,<br>
the claims continue,<br>
that I am human<br>
as Dana is<br>
and I am hers,<br>
an extension of a<br>
dislodged<br>
disappearing<br>
disability<br>
into white<br>
plaster

but I have<br>
my facts,<br>
a regime of<br>
topsy-turvy truth<br>
my science of contradiction<br>
holding answers too

follow me<br>
as I contradict<br>
this self<br>
that I do not          know<br>
which I must          know<br>
in order to claim      self - science

I am an arm, yes<br>
just as much<br>
as I am the wall<br>
in which I am<br>
implanted<br>
I am Dana's, yes<br>
but held in the past,<br>
by Rufus too,<br>
both Dana's<br>
and not,<br>
lingering in<br>
the liminal,<br>
laden in<br>
a lack,<br>
lagging last<br>
in Octavia's<br>
long, looping<br>
line of lies

meet me
in this mess
I have not arrived
at myself yet,
Rufus
can sleep
Dana
can rest

they will not know me
have me
get to me
any sooner than I will

certainly uncertain
regimes of
tumbling     turvy
topsy        truths

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## Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Tanya Titchkosky for turning me towards this profound piece by Octavia E. Butler, and setting me on the path to creating these poems.

## Author Biography

Elaine Cagulada is a teacher, poet, and PhD Candidate in the Department of Social Justice Education at OISE, University of Toronto. She is interested in the single stories of deafness, disability, race, and policing produced and reproduced by the ruling relations, with her focus primarily being on police institutions. Through poetry and counterstory, Elaine develops a narrative approach to making disability matter differently, engaging carceral practices as sites of dependence and resistance. Influenced by teachings abound in disability studies and Black Studies, she wonders what different stories of deafness, disability, and race, what radical possibilities for Being, might be let loose with and through interpretation.

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# Goodnight, Dad

Lorena Paxcci Jonard-Snyder

## Abstract

The following piece captures the experiences of an Indigenous youth in care who has been historically parentified. He writes of his parental allegiances, his love and devotion to his dad, and his relationship to a foster home. At the heart of the piece, is an exploration of the inherent powerlessness that children endure when their lives are predetermined for them and how, despite this, they continue to hope, to love, and to idealize. The piece is positioned from the imaginative yet honest eye of the child, and models much of the fantastical thinking held by so many of our Indigenous youth who sleep away from home.

## Keywords

foster care, Indigenous, youth, intergenerational trauma, parentification

## Goodnight, Dad

I tuck you in our video chat, I see you have passed out on the couch now almost drooling, unresponsive when mom shakes you, I guess you are a hard sleeper like me. A minute ago, you were talking with me but then you dropped into the couch, the exhaustion of it all hit you at once. I know you are trying dad; know you are working in the mornings now, so you get up early. I am safe dad, and the people here are nice folks, a bit fancy but nice. I'll be ok dad, while you rest. I hope you're not still taking all that stuff that made you sick dad you know, those bad things. I knew you were lying then, but I wanted to believe you so bad. Like when the ambulance came, and you turned blue. You keep trying and I'm trying to. I miss you; I love you, dad. I've kept your secrets dad, at least I've tried. I want to be like you. So now I sing you gently to sleep as you used to when I was small sometimes. Good night moon, goodnight room, goodnight dad.

## Author Biography

Lorena Paxcci Jonard-Snyder is a Diaguita Indigenous mother and graduate student in the Ph.D. program of Socio-political thoughts at York University. Her interests are in the decolonization of motherhood and the decolonization of mental health. She is focused on the legitimization of traditional knowledge and the epistemic violence of settler ideological hegemony within the domestic sphere. Lorena works as a therapist in the field of children's mental health and has informed her research interests and focus from her front-line work.

NS?

# Aging Flower: Giving Back to Those Who Raised Us

Muskaan Khurana

## Abstract

Drawing on my lived experiences with caregiving for my aging grandma, the following short story explores what day-to-day life looks and feels like for youth in caregiving roles. Evoking bitter-sweet emotions, my words familiarize readers with the reality many young caregivers face. Stereotypical ideologies regarding caregiving for elders primarily focus on the physical aspects of providing care, and while I engage these aspects, such as managing my grandma's medication, I also emphasize the emotional burden that both aging elders and young caregivers face, highlighting the importance of establishing a healthy routine in which both parties have their needs met. Further, I not only examine the hardships of being a young caregiver, but the positivity and joy I try to find from my responsibilities. I subtly bring attention to small details when describing the relationship between my grandmother and me. The simplicity and sweetness in our bond, fills my life with wholeness in a way that makes caregiving meaningful. Even though caregiving as a young adult brings with it many challenges, especially when managing the twists and turns of life, I have found there is always light within the darkness, beauty within the aging flower.

## Keywords

intergenerational, family, resilience, caregiving, youth, aging

“What did I eat for dinner again?” Nanima asks for the second time. “You did not eat anything, remember? Your stomach was off”, I reply. Conversations like this echo through our house daily. I try my best to stay calm, but I feel guilty to admit that, sometimes, I get really frustrated having to repeat myself over and over again. I know it’s not my grandmother’s fault, it is her dementia that is slowly taking her away from me. I insist she eat something, it’s almost time to take her evening medication. After much convincing, she finally agrees. Mom goes to heat up some leftover lentil and rice soup for her, while I begin tracking down her weekly-filled medicine container. Nanima always hides her container, so the house doesn’t look ‘messy’. Although this may seem like a smart idea, every night I am on the hunt for it because she can never remember where she put it. After a good five minutes of searching, I finally find the container, but to my disbelief, it is almost empty. I then realize it is Monday, or as I call it, “Medicine Monday”. I give Nanima her meds and I log onto my laptop to update the medical chart that I have created for her. I have made one for my mother as well, so it is easier for me to keep track of their meds.

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Later in the night, Nanima, and mom are on the couch, enjoying an episode of the Indian show “Kaun Banega Crorepati", while I try to finish an assignment. Since I’m usually at school or work during the day, I like to spend time with them in the evenings. Even if we're doing different things, it is nice to be in their company. I make some progress until Nanima asks, “What did I have for dinner?” This brings up a whole conversation about what she did throughout the day and what we are doing tomorrow. Upset that she can’t remember, Nanima begins to cry. I settle down beside her, laying my head on her lap until she’s ready to go upstairs and get ready for bed.

*To be completely honest, it does get chaotic doing my homework while sitting with them. Not only does Nanima have dementia, but she is also experiencing a significant loss of hearing. So, she not only consistently forgets that I am doing homework, but when she talks to me, I have to speak in her ear or write down what I want to say. Adding on, due to my mother’s mild cerebral palsy, I constantly have to repeat myself as they both have memory difficulties.*

After Nanima goes to sleep, I take another break from school to refill both her and mom’s weekly medication containers. Nanima has one for morning and night; and another for breakfast and dinner, while mom has one for morning and dinner. I fill the three containers for the week, double-checking to make sure everything is correct. My final task is to make note of the medication that needs to be refilled so I can order them in the morning.

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The next morning, I have a 9:30am class and I plan to leave the house at 7:30am so I can reach the campus on time. I get ready, packing Nanima and mom’s empty medication bottles in my bag to remind myself to call the pharmacy in-between classes. I head downstairs, Mom is awake and making breakfast for herself and Nanima, who is still asleep. I am usually quite lazy in the mornings, so I do not really eat anything. I make my way to her room to let her know I’m heading out. I hate waking her up, but she gets upset if I don’t say goodbye before I leave. “Don’t forget to message me when you reach” she says. Nanima always wants me to inform her when I arrive on campus, as she constantly worries about me. I leave the house with very mixed feelings. I am happy I got to see Nanima this morning, but I fear the worst when the two of them are home alone. We’ve had some hospital scares, so I can’t help the anxiety that forms when I think about every possible thing that could go wrong. It’s hard to keep my

mind off of it, so whenever I can, I message, call, or Facetime Nanima. Even though she is not able to hear me when I call or Facetime, just knowing they are okay gives me peace of mind.

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I arrive home around 5:30pm. Seeing Nanima and mom always makes my day, no matter how stressed out I am about school. I open my bag to see that I've completely forgotten to order their medications. I set an alarm to remind myself to order them tomorrow, as I will probably forget again. Nanima and mom get dinner ready while I try to catch up on some exam prep. We eat dinner together as usual and I give Nanima her meds. They were both home all day, so after dinner, I decide to take them on a walk so that they can get out of the house for a bit. Nanima's arthritis means she can't walk much or very far, so we decide to take a break, settling down on a table at the local school park.

The sun is strong outside. I fold my arms on the metal table, feeling the sun's warmth touch my skin. It is a quiet evening, with not many people out. I gaze around and spot a beautiful garden; it looks like it has been painted by an artist. Each plant is placed ever so nicely. I stand up and walk towards the tulips, attracted by the radiant colours, when I notice a patch of aging flowers, petals made dry by the sun's rays. I caress a petal only to feel a crisp surface. Turning slowly on my heel, I see Nanima and mom, still resting peacefully on the bench. Then I look back at the flower; it's beautiful. Things can get difficult while taking care of them, but when I look at them, all I can see is my wonderful childhood, the warmth of the sun on my face. They made me who I am, and I am lucky to have them in my life, and I see the beauty behind the aging flower.

## Dedication

I dedicate this story to my grandmother, my Nanima. She changed my world in ways I can't describe and was a purely selfless gem. She raised me as a daughter from the day I was born, and was my second mother. I am so lucky I had her as my mom for the past twenty years. *May you rest in peace Nanima. Say hi to Nanaji for us*.

## Acknowledgments

I want to first say, sharing a part of my story to the world has not been an easy decision and I am extremely grateful to all who have supported me through my journey. This story was inspired by conversations with my closest friends, as they have always encouraged me to tell my story. I also want to express my gratitude towards my entire family - my aunts and uncles have always encouraged me to be who I am and have celebrated all my achievements. Additionally, this piece would not have been possible without my TA, Jade Crimson Rose DA Costa, who gave me the opportunity to publish my story with New Sociology after I submitted it for a course assignment. I thank them for this and for the constant support they provided throughout our course, SOCI 3660. Lastly, I want to thank my grandmother and mother for making me who I am. You both are so special, and I am so grateful to have you in my life.

## Author Biography

Muskaan Khurana (she/her) is an undergraduate student of Sociology and Concurrent Education at York University. She chose to write this piece because of her experiences with being a caregiver from a young age. After she lost her grandfather at the age of 16, she took on the responsibility of providing care to her grandmother and disabled mother. Her goal with this piece is to allow others to understand the different aspects that go into caring for elders. Society may understand the difficulties of caregiving in general, but they lack insight into how it really affects youth. Muskaan believes that there are many youths who face similar situation as her, and she wants to use this platform to bring light to their realities. Due to her passion for caregiving, after Muskaan finishes her teacher's degree, she aspires to get her Masters in Social Work and give back to society as much as possible. Muskaan's personal experiences allow her to see and engage the world in a unique way and it plays a big role in how she perceives society.

# Imperialisms

NS?

# Building canada[1] on Our Barbarized Backs

## Sabine A. Fernandes

### Abstract

In this article, I identify and analyze the intersections of propaganda circulated throughout two textual objects connected to my experiences of alienation with the care agency organization *L'Arche Canada*, and my subsequent assimilation into settler colonial belonging via canadian citizenship eligibility. The first textual object *is L'Arche Canada's* anti-racism statement (2020). The second is the *Discover Canada* citizenship knowledge test study guide (2021). In my analysis, I reveal a common policy of barbarizing racialized migrants in the interest of criphomonationalism. Specifically, I indict *L'Arche Canada* as an auxiliary of the criphomonationalist canadian settler state, which valorizes desirable (read white) disabled and queer Others, on the backs of Third World care workers who are circulated as nondisabled, cishet, hateful, and disposable.

### Keywords

barbarization, criphomonationalism, debility, disablement, migrant care work

[1] I lowercase the word "canada" to express my dissent towards the canadian settler state.

## Introduction

In the summer of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic was in its first wave within the canadian settler state,[2] and I experienced constructive dismissal from my role as a care worker at a *L'Arche Canada* care agency in Ontario. During this time of unemployment and income precarity, I also became eligible to apply for canadian citizenship,[3] and was therefore granted an opportunity to gain security in my immigration status. I found myself grappling with the agendas of two settler colonial processes that, while seemingly disparate, were deeply imbricated. The first was exile from a Christian-rooted care corporation that I had been proselytized, via white saviourism,[4] to consider my "community" for over half a decade. The second was the preparation I had to undergo for formal rights-based inclusion within canada's neoliberal settler state project.

As a Mad Queer of Colour Third World[5] care worker, I have had the privilege of taking up space in the academy as a Critical Disability Studies student, a position that differs from those of my comrades, accomplices, and kin who are denied access to ivory towers. My positionality as a care worker-scholar affords me access to works of critical theorists of colour that allow me to make sense of the strategic oppressions I have survived, continue to endure, and am complicit in. During one of my elective courses in Fall 2020, I was assigned Jasbir Puar's (2017) monograph, *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability*. Puar's text, in concert with many other offerings from transnational Feminists of Colour, radically theorized the structural violence I was experiencing in synchronized white supremacist exclusion and incorporation. The following reflection is my attempt to affirm my analysis of my experiences to myself, and to redistribute an expression of the collective critical inquiries that I have been able to piece together for other migrant care workers in settler colonial states who may feel heard, seen, and/or felt in my articulations.

By engaging an autoethnographic approach and drawing on Feminist of Colour disability studies (Schalk & Kim, 2020), this article identifies and analyzes the intersections of propaganda that were circulated throughout two textual objects connected to my simultaneous experiences of alienation in *L'Arche Canada* and assimilation into settler colonial belonging. The first textual object *is L'Arche Canada*'s anti-racism statement (2020). The second is the *Discover Canada* citizenship knowledge test study guide (2021).[6] In my analysis of both texts, I reveal a common policy of barbarizing racialized migrants in the interest of criphomonationalism. Barbarization is the white supremacist rendering of racialized people, communities, and cultures as savage, primitive, and hateful. Criphomonationalism is a portmanteau of cripnationalism and homonationalism as theorized by Puar (2007, 2017). I understand criphomonationalism to be a form of barbarization. In simple terms, it is a strategy of the white supremacist state for restoring white privilege to previously

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[2] I use the term settler state as informed by King: "With regard to language, we moved fluidly between the terms colonial, settler colonial, and white settler state to explain social relations in what we now know as Canada and the US" (2013, p. 201). Please see King (2013) or Snelgrove, Dhamoon & Corntassel (2014).

[3] According to the government of canada's Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada webpage, the eligibility criteria to become a citizen are as follows: be a permanent resident; have lived in canada for 3 out of the most recent 5 years; have filed taxes, if necessary; pass a citizenship knowledge test; and prove French or English language proficiency.

[4] I credit the work of the No White Saviors Instagram account and their analysis of the White Saviour Complex in my political articulation of white saviourism in this article (No White Saviors, n.d.).

[5] I use the term Third World as informed by Mohanty, Russo, and Torres: "colonized, neocolonized, and decolonized countries (of Asia, Africa, and Latin America) whose economic and political structures have been deformed within the colonial process, [as well as] to black, Asian, Latino, and indigenous peoples in North America, Europe and Australia" (1991, p.ix, as cited in Erevelles, 2011, p. 122).

[6] The citizenship knowledge test is based on the study guide *Discover Canada: The Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship*.

undesirable white Others[7] (white disabled people, white queers, and so forth), at the expense of further barbarizing racialized and/or multiply marginalized Others (multiply marginalized sick, disabled, queer, trans, racialized people), to maintain the operationalization of white supremacy.

## *L'Arche Canada* and Saviourism

As information about the canadian settler state is publicly available through the various webpages of the government of canada, I turn my focus to *L'Arche Canada* and begin by providing a brief overview of the organization and the events that led to my severance from it. *L'Arche* is an international federation of non-profit agencies for people labelled with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. *L'Arche* was founded in 1964 by white French-canadian Catholic theologian and Templeton Prize Laureate Jean Vanier[8]. In canada, there are currently 31 *L'Arche* agencies that self-advertise as "communities," operating group homes with live-in models for care workers. Many live-in care workers in *L'Arche Canada* are temporary foreign workers from the Third World. *L'Arche Canada* is Labour Market Impact Assessment exempt, as part of the International Mobility Program.[9] According to this exception, live-in care workers are expected to work on a 24-hour basis (Temporary Foreign Worker Guidelines, 2014).

Third World migrants with closed temporary work permits[10] constitute the cheap and exploitable *disposable objects* necessary to make live-in care models functional in the neoliberal settler state. I use the term "disposable objects" as informed by Puar's (2017) assertion that "certain bodies are employed in production processes precisely because they are deemed available for injury – they are in other words, objects of disposability, bodies whose debilitation is required in order to sustain capitalist narratives of progress" (p. 81). In *L'Arche Canada*, Third World care workers know we are expendable because there are always more Third World migrants who are willing to become care workers and replace us if, or when, we get expelled by the corporation. The awareness of our throwaway status is what mediates our reticence about, and resiliency against our mistreatment by *L'Arche Canada*.

In February 2020, posthumous news of Jean Vanier's serial sexual assaults made headlines around the world, including within *L'Arche International*'s 156 communities in 38 countries, spanning five continents (L'Arche International, 2020). Many of us in *L'Arche Canada* had been waiting to seize this event as an opportunity to speak out about oppression within the organization. We had been alerted to the possibility of Vanier as a white Catholic sexual predator as early as 2014, when news of Vanier's mentor Fr. Thomas'[11] history of sexualized violence was disclosed to us. We had also been waiting for this revelation because we had long recoiled at Vanier's uncontested white saviourism, demonstrated in his deployment of Catholic beatitudes such as *Blessed Are the Poor* (Vanier, 1981). This white religious stratagem has historically been leveraged to justify abuse against migrant care workers in settler colonial canada and to legitimize white saviourism-based "human and financial supports to L'Arche in the developing world" (L'Arche Solidarity, n.d., para. 2).

Those holding power and privilege in *L'Arche Canada*, by virtue of their whiteness, refused to

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[7] I capitalize Other(s), Otherness, and Othering to reclaim being an Other as an identity in opposition to identities included in whiteness.

[8] Jean Vanier was the son of Governor General of canada George Vanier.

[9] The International Mobility Program allows an employer in canada to hire a temporary foreign worker without a Labour Market Impact Assessment (see Government of Canada website).

[10] Closed work permits are employer-specific work permits. These permits allow temporary foreign workers to work in canada according to specific restrictions. For example, my temporary foreign work permit restricted me from working for another employer, attending an academic institution, and living out of a group home.

[11] Known to most in the federation as Pere Thomas, the Dominican priest mentored Jean Vanier and co-founded L'Arche with him in Trosly, France; it was obvious to many of us that Vanier's purported ignorance of his counsellor's serial violence was suspicious.

trouble Vanier's saintlike status during his lifetime. His post-obit outing as a rapist presented a crucial and finite moment that highlighted connections between white patriarchal violence and nationalistic saviourism. Relieved that the smoke and mirrors of the founder's "sanctity" had been exposed, and believing that the idyllic illusion of the "Ark for the Poor"[12] had finally been fissured irreparably, little fires of complaint started to combust across *L'Arche Canada* agencies as stories of oppression began to drip and trickle through covenants of silence. During this time, the grapevine connecting current and former Third World care workers and accomplices across *L'Arche Canada* agencies urgently raised questions about the absence of accountability for unchecked white supremacy in the corporation.

With COVID-19 then highlighting the essentiality of care workers, as well as the concerted momentum gained by the Black Lives Matter movement, our fires were further stoked, and our leaks began to spurt – we were all convinced that this was going to be a time of profound transformation. However, by the end of the summer, the grapevine revealed that fires were extinguished: seepage was plugged with the intimidation of nondisclosure agreements, and care workers were issued warnings, suspensions, and subjected to surveillance to the point that the only option for many complainers, like me, was constructive dismissal. The icing on the cake was the anti-racism statement the organization released amidst our resistance. Its coherence with the citizenship study guide is both disturbing and enlightening in its confirmation of *L'Arche Canada* as an affiliate of the canadian settler state corpocracy.

*L'Arche Canada*'s anti-racism statement makes the following declaration: "For 56 years, we have dedicated our hearts, our hands and…our entire lives to ensuring that people with disabilities can enjoy their natural rights…At the heart of L'Arche is the conviction that diversity should enrich, not divide" (L'Arche Canada, 2020, para. 5). This rhetoric is a clear gesture to the canadian citizenship study guide, which makes a comparable proclamation: "For 400 years, settlers and immigrants have contributed to the diversity and richness of our country. Canadian citizens enjoy many rights, but Canadians also have responsibilities, they must obey Canada's laws and respect the rights and freedoms of others" (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2021, p. 3). Although those of us critical of white supremacy, and how, in canada, it masquerades as multiculturalism, understand the term "diversity" to be a red flagged buzzword, I would actually like to draw attention to another tactical manoeuvre at play in the above. Invoking Puar (2017), the incited dichotomy of desirable Otherness versus undesirable Otherness merits close attention; the sexual/gendered/disabled other is white, whereas the racialized Other is heterosexual/cis/nondisabled. Therefore, the racialized Other is constructed as backward, bigoted, and barbaric.

Championed progressive white supremacist rights-based regimes cannot exist without the invention and subordination of undesirable Others. The constructions, for example, of what it means to be a member of *L'Arche Canada* and a canadian citizen produce these Others. In the words of Haritaworn (2013), this form of Othering "serves as the latest descriptor of disposable populations marked as 'monocultural, irrational, regressive, patriarchal, or criminal'" (p. 185). In the context of settler colonialism, these Others personify diversity to cause discord and disunity, as they do not submit to canada's laws, and therefore fail to defer to the rights and freedoms of desirable Others. The white supremacist contradictions of Otherness are produced by barbarization.

Barbarization is a twofold approach that involves the obscuring of historical barbarization to facilitate ongoing barbarization. Take, for example, the parts of history both *L'Arche Canada* and the canadian settler state edit out of

[12] Reference to Jean Vanier's book *An Ark for the Poor: The Story of L'Arche*, published in 1995 by Novalis

their individual statements. *L'Arche Canada*'s anti-racism statement opens with a lament regarding the events of 2020, which detrimentally "turned everything upside down" for the organization (L'Arche Canada, 2020, para. 2). These events included Vanier's sexualized violence, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the economic recession. The statement absolves *L'Arche Canada* from any culpability in the *upside-down-ness* and positions the organization as a victim. This is most evident in how Vanier's sexualized violence is constructed as an ahistorical and apolitical "organizational trauma" that triggered distress within the corporation (L'Arche Canada, 2020, para. 1). There is no acknowledgement of the organizational complicity, which sustained decades-long serial sexualized violence by a white man who held power in an international federation that he founded. The white saviourism that Vanier enacted with the collusion of white L'Arche members is a form of barbarizing Others. The power he was accorded because of his whiteness and consequent ascription to saintliness, immaculateness, and innocence is precisely what enabled the sexualized violence he committed against those he spiritually supervised and understood to be subservient to his holiness.

This skirting of accountability around barbarization is consistent with the canadian settler state's refusal to concede genocide and land theft in its short blurb about violence against Indigenous people, communities, and Nations of Turtle Island. The canadian citizenship study guide merely recognizes that Indigenous children were placed in residential schools from the 1800's to the 1900's to be instructed and integrated into "mainstream Canadian culture" (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2021, p. 10). It admits that the schools were underfunded, "inflicted hardship", and that some students were "physically abused" (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2021, p. 10). In this text, the settler state exonerates itself with Ottawa's apology to "former students" in 2008 (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2021, p. 10). Like *L'Arche Canada*, the canadian settler state befogs its ongoing history of conceiving Indigenous people as uncivilized as the basis for a nation built on and through anti-Indigenous mass murder, abductions, pilferage, and imprisonment (Million 2013).[13] It is against this backdrop of sins barely confessed, and promptly washed away by the very powers who committed them that the fabrication of hateful Others via barbarization persists uninterrupted.

Of particular interest to my analysis is *L'Arche Canada*'s and settler colonial canada's criphomonationalist iteration of barbarization, i.e., the production of undesireable Others as ableist and anti-queer to confer rights and membership upon desirable Others valorized as disabled and queer. The crafting of racialized Others as hateful is quite evident in *L'Arche Canada*'s anti-racism statement. It declares, "Disability has always been our entry point into the struggle for belonging" but the "global outcry against racially motivated violence" has caused the organization to do some soul searching (L'Arche Canada, 2020, para. 6), with the caveat that "diversity should enrich not divide" (L'Arche Canada, 2020, para. 5). Likewise, the citizenship study guide boasts the canadian settler state's defence of progressive equal rights for men and women, and gay and lesbian canadians, with the stipulation that "Canada's openness and generosity do not extend to barbaric cultural practices" (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2021, p. 9). Both proclamations of neoliberal rights-based inclusion paradigms identify those who express and/or embody undesirable Otherness as threats

[13] Million (2013) prolifically examines the ways in which the impacts of colonial violence on Indigenous people are pathologized as trauma by settler states, "creating a policing rationale for their further colonization" (p.150). In this analysis, Million speaks to multiple settler state contexts including Australia, the United States, and Canada. See also Waldron's (2018) work on environmental violence against Indigenous and Black communities in canada. Waldron critically examines the ongoing disproportionate impact of colonialism, white supremacy, and patriarchy on Indigenous and Black women in settler canada.

to disability, gender, and sexual inclusion, and canadian citizenship. To illustrate this further, below I share three episodes of criphomonationalism as a genre of barbarization that I have experienced as a racialized migrant live-in care worker under *L'Arche Canada*'s employ.

## Episode one: Accessibility and Disablement

In one *L'Arche Canada* agency, we had to physically lift and transfer a person and their wheelchair in and out of non-wheelchair accessible vehicles. We did this on a regular basis for years. Maneuvers such as this were avoidably back breaking. In the interest of the collective safety of Third World care workers and the person experiencing risky physical transfers, we would ask for the provision of a wheelchair accessible vehicle to alleviate these safety concerns. However, upon asking, we were met with disapproving stares and told that there was no money available for one for years before an operational wheelchair accessible vehicle was eventually purchased. We also found ourselves framed as careless for complaining about supporting disabled residents[14] with these manual transfers. This discursive framing is a form of barbarization that causes disablement. I use the term disablement, as referenced by Puar (2017) and theorized by Gorman (2016), to identify an "assemblage of political-cultural-economic processes" that disable racialized Others while simultaneously obstructing their access to a disabled identity (p. 258). In these instances, the agency was lauded for making experiences accessible to its wheelchair users through travel, but neither they nor the wider white public paid any attention to who was paying the price for this form of accessibility.

Indeed, the wider white public refused reflexivity about how Third World care workers were barbarized and disabled throughout the process of ensuring accessibility for white residents, a process required to uphold *L'Arche Canada*'s brand of accessibility. The constant emotionally manipulative dismissal of Third World care workers' raising of unmet access needs produced an image of civil beasts of burden who are only considered good, worthy, or caring if they are unquestioning, obedient, and amenable. In comparison to our discredited access needs, we witnessed the multiple ways that white care workers were able to move within, and across the care agency terrain. For example, white care workers would assert their occupational health and safety rights to refuse dangerous manual transfers, and identify back injuries to decline unsafe work without being labeled uncaring. Additionally, pregnant white people were excused from these manual transfers in celebration of the new life they were bringing into the world. This was far from the reality racialized care workers were confronted with, as we found ourselves experiencing an ongoing surveillance of non-compliance and the denial of our disability and access needs.

For instance, racialized pregnant people were not extended the same accommodations as white care workers, particularly if they were Black, because they were bringing "anchor babies"[15] into the settler state. Speculations were made about when, how, and why a Third World care worker became pregnant. Such discourses constructed this form of new life as an undesirable Other even before a first breath was taken. I remember doing solo physical transfers to accommodate both white care workers and my pregnant Third World care worker friend, because it was all I could do at the time to make sense of, and address these differential and discriminatory renditions of accessibility. Our Third World backs were

[14] *L'Arche Canada* uses the term "Core Member" to refer to people labelled with intellectual or developmental disabilities in its agencies. I, however, have opted for the word resident, as it is a word that more accurately describes my relationship with the people labelled with intellectual and developmental disabilities living in group homes in *L'Arche Canada* agencies.

[15] I learned the term "anchor baby" from white people at a *L'Arche Canada* agency. The term describes babies born to non-citizen parent(s) in nation states with birthright citizenship.

literally breaking, with many experiencing temporary and ongoing disablement. In response to this, we were being offered, not safer working conditions, but body-mechanics workshops advising us to "lift with our legs." It can be concluded that white supremacy renders Third World care work a grossly inaccessible system of labour that is deeply embedded in transnational racial capitalism[16] and border imperialism.[17] Contra to the mission statement's advocation for a relational model of interdependency that aims to "create a world where everyone belongs" (L'Arche Canada, 2020, para. 6), Third World care workers are actively mined in the production of belonging, and strategically barbarized into compliance within the cripnationalist agenda of L'Arche agencies and the white settler state.

## Episode Two: Accommodation and Debility

Live-in care workers with and without permanent immigration status would frequently become unwell in the L'Arche agencies that I worked at because of the unsustainable nature of the work. However, the distribution and recognition of unwellness was "differential and uneven" (Puar, 2017, p. 72). Unfailingly rendered as non-disabled, Third World care workers were tasked by white management to do the work of accommodation, evident in the ways that we often had to take on this labour for those white care workers who identified as having mental disabilities or disclosed becoming mentally unwell because of care work. Many times, I had to accommodate and support white care workers to the detriment of my own health. I would be tasked with doing emotional and cognitive labour for white disabled care workers in emotional and mental distress by holding space for their trauma dumping, lightening their workload by adding to mine, and by facilitating more time off for them, while sacrificing my own.

When I raised concerns about not being able to support both residents and white disabled care workers, particularly under constant conditions of austerity and crisis, I was cautioned about discriminating against (white) care workers with disabilities which, in effect, barbarized me as sanist. I was reprimanded by members of the white management for not prioritising self-care which, according to them, compromised my ability to accommodate other (white) care workers. One year, while I was still holding temporary immigration status on a closed work permit, I was given an ultimatum by a white long-term member and a white leadership team member to either seek psychiatric intervention for my "mental health" or relinquish my supervisory role in the group home. As I have shared, white care workers were not subjected to similar contingencies. Rather, they were provided accommodations in the form of Third World care workers, like me, taking on their work for them. Further, the consequences for such stipulations were materially different for care workers holding citizenship in settler and western states, the majority of whom were white, versus us Third World care workers who held closed, temporary work permits.

Finally, no one was acknowledging the maddening conditions of the unsustainable amount of care work I was expected to perform. As a result of the ultimatum I was served, I ended up being medicated with a combination of psyche drugs with compromised agency in the matter. During this time, I was not offered any accommodations, or provided relief from embodying white care workers'

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[16] I use the term "transnational" in connection to racial capitalism, as informed by Erevelles' (2011) emphasis on the transnational dimensions of capitalism. I use the term "racial capitalism" as informed by Melamed's (2011) reading of the work of Cedric Robinson: "because "the development, organization, and expansion of capitalist relations [have] pursued essentially racial directions [in modernity]," racialism is to be considered a "material force" and a "historical agency" of capitalism, with no outside between the two" (p. 8).

[17] I use the term "border imperialism" as theorized by Walia (2013), describing "an analytic framework. [which] disrupts the myth of western benevolence toward migrants. In fact, it wholly flips the script on borders…depicts the processes by which the violences and precarities of displacement and migration are *structurally* created as well as maintained" (p.8).

accommodations. This resulted in my debilitation, as I was driven madder behind a mask of competence. I use the term debilitation as theorized by Puar (2017), to describe "the slow wearing down of populations instead of the event of becoming disabled" – i.e., the suspension of racialized Others in a state of perennial, compounded traumatization (p. xiii-xiv).

To survive in such an environment, and without being identified as mentally unfit, I worked on adapting and finding ways to grind throughout brain fog, panic, and ongoing dysregulation while doing care work for both the residents and my white peers. I was commended for fulfilling my role. The message was clear – I could keep my job if I was an uncomplaining, hyper-able, warm body that supported white disabled people. If I raised any objections to this role, I was simultaneously barbarized as sanist and regarded as too mad to work. By silencing my disquiet through debilitation and obscuring my madness through barbarization, the agency was able to sustain its cripnationalist status quo in which the only people worthy of care were white.

## Episode Three: Queerness and Racialization

I remember a group of East African migrant care workers who would verbalize statements transliterated as anti-queer by white queers and allies in a *L'Arche Canada* agency. White queers and allies were openly wary of these assistants and their "homophobia." As a Queer of Colour who was not working through my anti-Blackness at the time, I too struggled when queerness came up in conversations with these workers. One day, one of the East African care workers had me watch a documentary about US imperialism in an East African state via evangelical Christianity and the anti-queer propaganda it constituted. Before we parted ways, another East African care worker bought me a book authored by Noam Chomsky discussing U.S. imperialism. This unpaid labour[18] by my East African care working comrades caused me to be reflexive about my anti-Blackness, my own complicity in white supremacy, and the ways in which my positionality as a Brown care worker privileged me.

Whatever their views on same sex intimacy and gender identities, these care workers were cognizant of the historical material conditions that resulted in anti-queer politics in their home state, yet were essentialized as anti-queer in the canadian settler state. None of the white queers and allies at the agency, all of whom were racist, were ever identified as racists or held accountable for their racism, including their constructions of the East African care workers as endemically anti-queer, and as having attitude problems. For example, a white queer member of management once described African care workers to me as "culturally lazy". The white queers and allies did not pause to consider the anti-Black and anti-African racism informing their negative labelling of perceived attitudes and behaviours of my co-workers. Rather, white queer members of management continued to understand and render these care workers as anti-queer or indolent. Finally, no one seemed to question the conviction that these care workers were automatically and inherently cishet. Unsurprisingly, many of the same white queers and allies responsible for harmfully stereotyping these East African care workers as anti-queer were also the ones making sweeping and weeping statements of solidarity with Black Lives Matter.

I am also cognizant of the fact that I was coded a "white queer approved" Queer of Colour at the time. This was because of the ways in which I embodied white queerness as a medium-brown skinned, educated, fluent English speaking, genderqueer presenting care worker invested in neoliberal queer rights. Such embodiments were seen in opposition to my "backward" homeland and my "non-progressive" people especially, and Third World care workers more generally. All of this was evident in the preferential white queer

[18] It is important to note that my accessing and benefiting from this unpaid labour from Black women and femmes, in this context and beyond, is, itself, a form of anti-Blackness and extraction. This admission is not a demonstration of accountability, which exceeds the scope of this footnote.

endorsement I was extended in comparison to care workers from India who were darker skinned, less educated, did not speak English as a first language, and were assumed to be cishet. My sexuality was often a topic of gossip among white queers and allies without my consent. While this was disconcerting, it also granted me social capital as a Third World care worker with desirable Otherness. These circulations of Black and Brown care workers as anti-queer, with exceptions afforded to Third World care workers aspiring to white queerness, constitutes the barbarization of racialized Others as anti-queer and queer antagonistic in antithesis to the white sexual Other (Haritaworn, 2013; Kanji, 2017), in the interest of homonationalism (Puar, 2017).

## Concluding Thoughts

In trying to speak up about some of these experiences in *L'Arche Canada*, specifically since February 2020, my comrades and I have been warned by 'good' white L'Arche members – those claiming to be in solidarity with us – to consider what is at stake. The possible loss of funding and security for white disabled residents in the corporation was raised as a potential issue that was often coupled with suggestive, chastising questions such as, "Do you really want people to lose their homes?" The overtone in these cunning questions is clear: by demanding accountability for our criphomonationalist barbarization, and consequent disablement and debility, Third World care workers and our comrades are acting barbaric and hateful towards the care corporation and the desirable Others it represents and serves.

*L'Arche Canada*'s anti-racism statement asserts its mandate of "a vibrant structure that respects diversity across Canada" with a mission to "build a more human Canadian society where everyone belongs" (L'Arche Canada, 2020, para. 9). The canadian citizenship study guide invites newcomers to "build a free, law-abiding, and prosperous society" (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2021, p. 3) in the tradition of "generations of pioneers and builders of British origins" (p. 12). These societies, envisioned by the care corporation and the settler state, are clearly white, colourized with, and sustained by Third World people. Through the works of scholars like Puar (2017), I indict *L'Arche Canada* as an auxiliary of the criphomonationalist canadian settler state, one which valorizes desirable Others as white, disabled, and queer. Such valorization occurs on the barbarized backs of Third World care workers who are marked as undesirable Others, circulated as nondisabled, cishet, hateful, and ultimately rendered disposable. In the words of Puar (2017), we are disposable because we are the "necessary supplements in an economy of injury that claims and promotes disability empowerment at the same time that it maintains the precarity of certain bodies and populations precisely through making them available for maiming" (p. xviii). In cohesion, the canadian citizenship study guide boasts the building of a "prosperous society in a rugged environment" (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2021, p. 18), shamefully erasing the Indigenous and Black life it violently builds on, and the racialized lives it extracts from. In resonance with the master's[19] toolkit, *L'Arche Canada*'s anti-racism statement declares, "2020 has turned everything upside down…And yet, we're still here. And we are standing" (L'Arche Canada, 2020, paras. 3-4), a proclamation which wilfully omits the reality that the standing is happening on the backs of Third World care workers.

[19] I use the word "master" as informed by Audre Lorde's contention that "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" (2007).

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## Author Biography

Sabine (They/Them) is a Mad, Queer of Color settler, care worker, and Critical Disability Studies PhD student at York University. They try to ground their politics, praxis, and research in disability and migrant justice.

NS?

# Please Call Me by My True Name: A Journey for Understanding

Ken Williams


## Abstract

Who are you? Our identities are constantly evolving. They are complex and complicated and beautiful, like the tangled branches of a vine that intertwines. This poem is a critical journey into identity and the historical pieces that produce the whole. It chronicles the uprooting of a people, physically dispossessed and, worst, psychologically traumatized by personas invented by the oppressor to justify their displacement. It tells the tale of uncomfortable truths and personal triumphs, bearing witness to the cognitive dissonance that feeds inhumanity and violence. As painful as it can be, journeying through the darkness to reclaim your truth can be a liberatory step for healing and self-love. With this in mind, below I offer a response to the unrelenting encounters of anti-Black racism, the hypocrisy and hegemony in dominant discourses, the constant self-proving and emotional violence one must navigate as a means of survival, all too familiar with Canada's unique brand of subtle and polite racism. This poem represents an ancestral journey of personal rebirth, wherein I engage in a rediscovery of identity and the vestiges of various forms of oppression that reside within us, offering an ontological and epistemological journey into the self that provides a comprehensive understanding of who I am.



## Keywords

journey, Africa, Caribbean, life, identity

I am the embodied spirit of my ancestors

I am the rich, red, soil of Nigeria, Cameroon, Benin, Togo, Mali –

Africa I am the offspring of West African Kings and Queens

I am the earth, the air, the fire, and the

water I am life

I am the slave master and the occupant of his ship

I am the offspring of abduction, displacement, and human

trafficking I am the ship, the bow, the stern, the rudder, the coal

I am life

I am the sun that dances and kisses the mountainous ridges of the

Caribbean I am the colonizer and the colonized

I am their supremacist thoughts that influenced my
upbringing

I am the product of the volcanic soil deep within my Caribbean

ancestors I am life

I am the plantation owner, the stevedore, the worker, and the field hand picking bananas

and cutting sugar cane

I am the offspring of hard-working resilient strong people

I am my grandmother, my grandfather, my mother, my father, my brother, my

family I am my mother's tenderness and my father's fire and persistence

I am life

I am the pain I feel from living in this racist white supremacist

society I am of sound mind and ability to see it and not be

gaslighted by it

I am the friend to my pain, it guides me and protects me

I am what I am, a survivor, vulnerable, connected healthy thriver, take no bullshit social

justice fighter, disrupter, educator, program developer, researcher, storyteller, friend.

I am what I am, I am, I

am, I am life.

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## Author Biography

Ken Williams has spent over a decade working with young people and adults at various stages of development in preventative interventions. He is a lifelong learner who appreciates studying and listening to people's life stories and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Social Work at York University. He also enjoys the visual and performing arts, music, technology, and travel. Ken is interested in learning more about how Black youth in or out of the justice system have experienced systemic harm and the relationship between healing and justice in this context. He is curious about the intersections of justice, well-being, and art and non-traditional approaches to promoting critical healing in the lives of Black youth.

NS?

# Re-Presenting the Gender-Queer Figure: Western Appropriations of Inappropriate/d Others in *A Third Gender*

Toby Anne Finlay

## Abstract

*A Third Gender: Beautiful Youths in Japanese Prints* was an exhibition curated by Asato Ikeda for the Royal Ontario Museum which included many prints and artifacts depicting the *wakashu* in Edo Japan. The *wakashu*, male youth who were distinguished from both adult men and women to be represented as "a third gender", were depicted by the exhibition in conformity with contemporary queer aesthetics and trans identities. This paper explores the curatorial practices involved in the representation of the *wakashu* as a third gender or gender-queer figure, elucidating the many (re)appropriations involved in the production of a postcolonial queer visual imaginary. I begin by walking through Ikeda's *A Third Gender* exhibition, and recounting the representational practices therein, to examine the construction of the *wakashu* as an essentially gendered figure and exhume the historical and cultural characteristics that are elided by this re-presentation. I then explore the incommensurability of the *wakashu* with contemporary queer and trans representational practices as a fundamentally queer failure, which may precipitate other affective relations with this figure that transcend our spatial and temporal differences. Finally, I question how these inappropriate/d re-presentations might produce an affective rupture within the queer visual imaginary that invites us to interrogate the postcolonial and transnational structuring of sexuality and gender.

## Keywords

transgender, postcolonial, affect, ethics, curation

## Introduction

The image of "Abed, a tailor", which opens Gayatri Gopinath's (2018) *Unruly Visions: The Aesthetic Practices of Queer Diaspora*, presents an almost uncannily familiar gender-queer[1] figure. Gopinath (2018) writes:

> The image stopped me in my tracks. "I know you," I thought as I gazed at the black-and-white photograph from the early 1950s. Identified in the caption simply as "Abed, a tailor," the subject in the photograph looks directly into the camera as he leans on his elbows with his hands folded gracefully under his chin. There was something in Abed's gaze—forthright, uncompromising, fierce—and the precise and delicate gesture of his hands framing his face, that evoked the femme aesthetic of the young queers of colour I remember seeing on the Hudson River piers during my young adulthood in New York City in the early 1990s. With his finely chiseled face, perfectly arched eyebrows and elaborately coiffed hair, Abed was to my contemporary gaze immediately recognizable as a gender-queer figure (p. 1).

Even for those of us who didn't grow up in the New York City of the 1990s, the image described by Gopinath harkens back to the queer and trans people of colour represented in Jennie Livingston's (1990) *Paris is Burning*. Or perhaps the picture is reminiscent of writer and performance artist, Alok Vaid-Menon (2017), whose photo series, *Femme in Public*, is a contemporary symbol of gender-queer representation. The image of Abed awakens an entire constellation of gender-queer aesthetic practices that transcend colonial, geopolitical, and biopolitical specificities. The intimate feelings of familiarity that Abed affects span these spatial and temporal differences to enliven a critical cosmopolitanism grounded in his distinctively queer aesthetic practices.

In contrast, the image "*Wakashu* with a Shoulder Drum" (Figure 1) is far less recognizable to our contemporary queer visual imaginary. The *wakashu* brandishes a drum upon their shoulder, their expression hardened with lips and brows turned down in a discerning gaze, the tight close-up on their head and shoulders affording them an imposing presence. There is little about this image that registers as a decidedly gender-queer figure to our western gaze; the transcendent recognition evoked by "Abed, a tailor" is not similarly mobilized by the *wakashu*. Nevertheless, "*Wakashu* with a Shoulder Drum" was presented as the titular image of an exhibition at the Royal Ontario Museum in Tkaronto,[2] curated by Asato Ikeda (2016), and entitled *A Third Gender: Beautiful Youths in Japanese Prints*. The exhibition featured over 2500 prints and artifacts from the Japanese Edo period (1603-1868), all concentrated on the figure of the *wakashu* who was re-presented as a "third gender" in Edo society. Separated by both the temporal distance of more than 400 years and the artistic medium of the woodblock print, perhaps it should not be surprising that our contemporary recognition of this image is delayed. And yet, the transhistorical representational practices involved in our reception of the image, "*Wakashu* with a shoulder drum", insist we apprehend this figure as a "third gender" and, in so doing, re-constitute the *wakashu* as a gender-queer figure. The multiple representations and recognitions involved in our reception of the image invite us to understand the *wakashu* through the lens of western, queer aesthetic practices.

[1] In this paper, I use the term "gender-queer" to refer to performative or aesthetic practices that transcend the norms of heterosexual discourse (Butler, 1993, p. 228). Although there are many people who do identify as genderqueer, my use of the term should be distinguished from western humanist identity paradigms.

[2] I use the Mohawk word "Tkaronto", meaning "the place in the water where the trees are standing", to refer to the land that is colonially known as Toronto, Ontario (Mills & Roque, 2019).

**Figure 1. *Wakashu* with a Shoulder Drum**

*Note. Woodblock print titled "Wakashu with a Shoulder Drum" by Hosoda Eisui (1790). From A third gender: Beautiful youth in Japanese Edo-period prints (1600-1868) (p. 77), by J. S. Mostow & A. Ikeda, 2016, Royal Ontario Museum.*

The *wakashu* is not the only figure who has been subjected to this kind of queer reclamation. Increasingly, figures such as the Indian *hijra*, the *two-spirit* of Turtle Island, the Igbo *female husbands* of Western Africa, and many others, are being arrogated and deployed to provide legitimacy to the gender expressions of western trans and non-binary people. I remember feeling surprised, for instance, when the facilitator of a trans-101 workshop that I had coordinated at my university, showed a "Map of Gender-Diverse Cultures" (PBS, 2015) that listed 38 transnational and historically specific "third gender" figures, seemingly to confer legitimacy upon non-normative gender expressions in the west. The common refrain "non-binary people have always existed", which can be found on buttons and patches in local queer marketplaces, relies upon a similar appropriative logic: wherein, western queer and trans people seek justification for our own articulations of gender and sexuality in the racialized Other, who is subsequently frozen in time and stripped of specificity. Although it is certainly possible that these queer representational strategies might allow us to reach across spatial and temporal differences to unearth subjugated queer lineages, I worry that the appropriative gesture performed in these re-presentations remains wedded to our western cultural imaginary.

In what follows, I examine the representational practices involved in these appropriations of postcolonial "third gender" or gender-queer figures. Taking Ikeda's *A Third Gender* exhibition as an exemplary case of queer curatorial practices, I explore the array of imbricated inclusions and exclusions, sameness and difference, (re)appropriations and (mis)recognitions, that are at work in the construction of our western, queer visual imaginary. I begin by walking through the exhibition and recounting the representational practices therein to analyze the curatorial decisions involved in presenting the *wakashu* as an essentially gendered figure and, in so doing, exhume the social and historical characteristics that are elided by this re-presentation. How is it, I ask, that the *wakashu* has come to be constituted as "a third gender" figure appropriate to western, queer and trans regimes of intelligibility?

I then go on to suggest that the incommensurability of *wakashu* with western conceptions of queerness and transness need not impede our recognition of this gender-queer figure. On the contrary, I propose that the irreducible differences that cannot be incorporated into the western imaginary, the fundamentally queer failure of the *wakashu* to be appropriated in this way, might precipitate a cosmopolitan vision of our common humanity. How, I ask, might these Inappropriate/d re-presentations elicit an affective relationality and ethical responsibility for the Other, which both upholds and transcends our spatial and temporal differences? Placing the multiple representations

of the *wakashu* in conversation with postcolonial feminist theory, I advance a reading of Ikeda's *A Third Gender* exhibition in which our historically contingent recognition of the *wakashu* can be extrapolated into a postmodern ethics of re-presentation, within and across difference. Attempting to intervene in the gradual conflation of "third gender" figures from the Third World with western queer and trans identities, I propose that the partial or even misplaced recognition we feel for this racialized, gender-queer figure may indeed compel our responsibility to ethically re-present the Other.

## Appropriation of the *Wakashu*

> The transgender native is portrayed not as a normal, fallible human being living within the gender constraints of his or her own society but as an appealing, exalted, transcendent being (often a hero or healer). He or she can be imagined (e.g., as a transgender ancestor), discovered (e.g., on a trip to a foreign land), enacted (e.g., as one's own persona), or simply cited to justify one's argument (Towle & Morgan, 2002, p. 477).

The Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) is an oppressive structure. Overlooking a prominent intersection in downtown Tkaronto, a crystalline formation engulfs the entire face of the museum, spilling out onto the sidewalk. Its reflective aluminum and glass panelling jut-out at unpredictable angles, interconnecting with one another to form the appearance of a large crystal one might find in the minerology collections of the museum. Existing somewhere between an architectural marvel and a mineral miracle, this natural-cultural structure draws our attention inwards and upwards, diffracting our glance throughout the depths of history. In turn, this incredible prism becomes an optic or way of seeing, much the same as the museum itself.

The prism opens onto an expansive atrium where a futalognkosaurus fossil, one of the largest dinosaurs to have ever lived, looms large over the more than one million visitors who travel through the ROM each year. Intertwined staircases branch off the atrium, leading visitors to biodiversity galleries that resurrect the creatures of natural history, or to cultural galleries that animate the artifacts of societies passed. There is a definitive sense, as one leaves the bustling streets of downtown Tkaronto and explores the galleries of the museum, that you are traveling through time, traversing multiple temporalities of natural and cultural life to transcend the tedious present and experience the "authentic" past.[3]

For a brief period in the summer and fall of 2016, tucked away on the third floor of the museum, there appeared a special exhibition about sexual desires and gender positions in Edo Japan, entitled *A Third Gender: Beautiful Youths in Japanese Prints*. Nestled among the many other artifacts of natural-cultural history in the museum, the exhibit affected an ineluctable feeling that this collection represented the "truth" of gendered life in the historical Edo society. The lights were lowered in the exhibition, casted into shadow relative to the bright lights shone upon the other historical figures revitalized in the museum. The words "a third gender" adorned the entrance to the exhibit in large, plain script supplemented by the following explanation in fine print: "throughout history, various cultures have had diverse gender and sexual practices. This exhibition explores one example—the Edo period in Japan".[4]

It was made immediately clear that we, the audience, were meant to apprehend the *wakashu* as an explicitly gendered position—an alternative arrangement of gender and sexuality to the

[3] This paper is influenced by postcolonial critiques of the museum as a western epistemological institution. See Achille Mbembe's (2019) critique of the coloniality of the museum: "since the modern age the museum has been a powerful device of separation. The exhibiting of subjugated or humiliated humanities has always adhered to certain elementary rules of injury and violation" (p. 171).

[4] Ikeda, 2016. In my discussion of the exhibition, I reference the written exposition installed throughout the gallery because this paper is primarily interested in the curatorial strategies used to represent the *wakashu*.

pernicious binaries of heteronormativity and homonormativity so familiar to us in the west. And it appears this framing was effective, as a review of the exhibition in the *Toronto Star* indicates: "with LGBT issues front and centre on the mainstream agenda in recent years, it's past time for our straitlaced western society to consider what amounts to a very simple truth: that, historically, ours is one of the only societies to have such ingrained hang-ups over notions of androgyny, gender identity and sex" (Whyte, 2016, para 3). When I attended the exhibit, I dragged my begrudging father along with me and can confirm that, for someone who represents a typical audience member, he experienced the exhibit as a reflection on contemporary queer and trans issues. My father understood the narrative that was impressed upon visitors to the exhibit to mean that the *wakashu* was "a third gender" whose existence validates contemporary queer and trans people's expressions of gender and sexuality in the west.

Exploring the artwork and exposition in the exhibit, we learned that the "third gender" of the *wakashu* emerged in the social structure of Edo society, wherein gender incorporated the categories of anatomical sex, sexual practice, age, and appearance. Within this matrix, the term *wakashu* referred to anatomically male youth who had reached puberty but had yet to formally come of age—a transitory stage in the life-course inhabited by all members of the male sex. Sexually mature but not yet adults, the *wakashu* were a highly sexualized figure, constructed as "objects of desire for both adult men and women", and depicted as engaging in sexual interactions with "both" adult genders.[5] These sexual practices were structured according to the hierarchical organization of Edo society as opposed to individual desire or sexual preference, with *wakashu* generally occupying a passive role with male partners and an active role with female ones.

The social position of *wakashu* in Edo society was therefore characterized by the intersections of anatomical sex, relative age, and sexual practice, which were bound together in this inherently temporary and desirable figure. To the extent that the *wakashu* was distinguished from both adult men and adult women on the basis of this assemblage of characteristics, the exhibition invited us to understand the figure as "a separate, third, gender of their own".[6] The multiplicity of dimensions along which the gender of the *wakashu* was differentiated in the exhibition, invited our critical reflection on the ingrained definitions and social constructions of gender within the western cultural imaginary.

The gendered dimensions of the *wakashu* were constituted by their visual representations in the woodblock prints. The *wakashu* could be visually discerned according to their characteristic hairstyle, in which the top of their head was shaved, save for their forelocks, which "became both the signature of *wakashu* and an object of sexual fetishism".[7] These forelocks were shaved off upon their coming-of-age, with the fully shaved pate becoming a symbol of adulthood for men. Among the woodblock prints displayed in the exhibition, their hairstyle was often the only discernable way to identify *wakashu*, who were otherwise represented similarly to either adult women or sex workers. In some cases, the forelocks were bent behind their heads to join the remaining locks in elaborately fashioned hairstyles, rendering the *wakashu* even more difficult to discern from other feminine figures. In one particularly illustrative curatorial exercise in the exhibit, Ikeda juxtaposed two images—"Young Woman Reading a Letter" (Figure 2) and "*Wakashu* Going Fishing" (Figure 3)—in which a striking resemblance can be drawn between the expressly feminine bodily comportment of both figures. Between their bowed posture with chins tucked in tightly to their chests, their soft expressions with eyes closed and eyebrows raised attentively, their hair ornately

[5] Ikeda, 2016.
[6] Ikeda, 2016.
[7] Ikdea, 2016.

styled with the bald patch barely visible atop the *wakashu*'s head, it seems clear that the *wakashu* represented a characteristically effeminate figure in the Edo cultural imaginary. Although not immediately reconcilable with our contemporary queer aesthetic practices, when glancing across the visual re-presentations of the exhibit, we could begin to recognize the *wakashu* as a decidedly feminine, supposedly queer, figure.

**Figure 2**. Young Woman Reading a Letter

**Figure 3**. *Wakashu* Going Fishing.

*Note. Woodblock prints titled "Young Woman Reading a Letter" (Figure 2) and "Wakashu Going Fishing" (Figure 3) by Suzuki Harunobu (1770). From A third gender: Beautiful youth in Japanese Edo-period prints (1600-1868) (p. 83-84), by J. S. Mostow & A. Ikeda, 2016, Royal Ontario Museum.*

However, just as I began to sense an affective relationality with the *wakashu* as a genderqueer, or "third gender" figure, I was reminded of the problematics of imposing western conceptions of gender on transhistorical Others. Nigerian feminist, Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí (1997), has elaborated a comprehensive critique of such western feminist engagements with the Third World, in which she argues that feminisms have presupposed gender as a salient analytic category and, subsequently, imposed gendered meanings upon cultures and contexts where they may otherwise be inappropriate. Writing about postcolonial "third gender" positions specifically, she maintains that "the fact that the African 'woman marriage,' the Native American 'berdache,' and the South Asian 'hijra' are presented as gender categories incorporates them into the western bio-logic and gendered framework without explication of their own sociocultural histories and constructions" (p. 11).

Certainly, once we apprehend the *wakashu* as a gendered figure, it becomes impossible to disentangle them from the constellation of symbolic meanings and affective investments that are mobilized by western conceptions of gender. Immediately, our recognition of the *wakashu* becomes inextricable from our contemporary queer visual imaginary, historically situated in western colonialism. The excesses of signification that are affectively imputed to these "third gender" figures—as somehow commensurate with contemporary queer and trans identities—threaten to overflow and spill out beyond the originary representations of the *wakashu*. For as Oyěwùmí reminds us, the flooding sense of recognition affected in these re-presentations may drown out the significant historical and cultural contingencies of this figure in Japanese, Edo society.

Oyěwùmí's critique becomes particularly poignant when we arrive at a large world map splayed across a wall of the exhibition. Marked on the map were postcolonial and transhistorical "third gender" figures including the *two-spirit* peoples of Turtle Island, the *hijra* of South Asia, the *mino* of Benin, and the *wakashu* of Japan, even extending to include the homosexual relations of Ancient Greece. Britain was also re-presented on the map as the originator of dichotomous and heteronormative conceptions of gender, which were then "disseminated as the norm by western imperialism".[8] The narrative being plotted on the map suggests that Victorian England first constructed the contemporary arrangements of sex, gender, and sexuality now familiar to us in the western world, which then suppressed other cultural conceptions of gender

[8] Ikeda, 2016.

as this model was exported transnationally through European conquest. And yet, couched within the global historical vision of this cartographic narrative is a presumption of continuity between the many pre-colonial societies represented on the map, which subsequently overlooks their cultural, spiritual, and historical specificities.

Spanning from Ancient Greek homosexual conduct in the seventh century BCE to the contemporary reclamation of two-spirit identities in the early 1990s[9] and traversing precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial cultures, the spatial and temporal differences lying latent in this map illustrate the problematics of cosmopolitan generalization. The specific colonial history of Japan, for example, which is inherently inappropriate to the traditional organization of the binary opposition between the west and the Third World, is occluded by this visual imagery.[10] Despite the discontinuous spatializations and power relations of colonization that these figures inhabit, the map invites us to comprehend them within a global universalism—a hallmark of the very western thought that the exhibition purports to reject.

The cartography of the map runs into another problem pertaining to the "third gender" concept. The language, "a third gender", which launches our expedition through this collection of Japanese prints and artifacts originates in the anthropological research of the 1970s and 80s, which was becoming increasingly preoccupied with questions about the normative construction of gender in the west (Valentine 2007, p. 156). During this time, ethnographic research turned to "third gender" figures, often finding them in the cultures of the Third World, to supply evidence to refute the presuppositions of gender dimorphism. For instance, gay activist and anthropologist, Gilbert Herdt (1994), in his introduction to the seminal volume, *Third Sex, Third Gender*, positions the "third gender" figures revitalized in his text as "emblematic of other possible combinations that transcend dimorphism" (p. 20).

These "third gender" figures are made to stand in as methodological tools or heuristics for complicating what are, essentially, western articulations of gender. These kinds of analyses rely on a colonial optic that positions the Third World as somehow naturalized or closer to nature—what Towle and Morgan (2002, p. 477) refer to as "the primordial location" of the transgender native—relative to modern western civilization. From this vantage point, the "third gender" figure constitutes a sanctuary of nature, a precolonial refuge that remains static, somewhere prior to the legacy of western colonialism, to which we might return to escape the ubiquity of the heteronormative gender binary. Framing the racialized Other in this way, the western imperialist fiction is reiterated, with these Third World, "third gender" figures being represented as historically backwards or anachronistic, artifacts of precolonial social relations always already surpassed by western progress.

The figure of the *wakashu* is resurrected in the optical apparatuses of the museum, coming to life as "a third gender" through their many visual re-presentations. This re-animation of the *wakashu* rests on their interpellation and incorporation into western cultural frames, hailing them within the anthropological vocabulary as a "third gender". Interpellated as a "third gender" figure who troubles the binary oppositions of male and female, masculine and feminine, heterosexual and homosexual, the *wakashu* becomes "a third gender" commensurate with western queer and trans identities.[11] Such incorporation depends on a series of exclusions, however, in which gender is epistemologically privileged over other social and historical dimensions along which the

[9] The term "two-spirit" has been reclaimed by many Indigenous peoples to name the unique sexual, gendered, and spiritual positions that were stripped away by western colonialism (Wilson, 1996, p. 305).

[10] Japan occupies a complicated position in narratives of colonization and the Third World (Trinh, 1989, p. 98). See Alexis Dudden (2005, p. 5) for an examination of the complexities of imperial power relations in Japan.

[11] The concept of interpellation introduced by Louis Althusser (2008, p. 47) and subsequently developed by Judith Butler (1997, p. 106) speaks to the constitutive effects of naming in gendered discourse.

*wakashu* could otherwise be delineated.

Take the specificities of age, for instance, which are evacuated in the gendered configuration of the exhibit, even when the direct, English translation of *wakashu*—"young companions"—clearly denotes an age-specific figure. Similar inattention must be paid to class, despite admissions throughout the exhibit that *wakashu* could be "sold into prostitution [*sic*]", enlisted as crossdressers in kabuki theatre, or permitted to engage in sexual relationships with higher-class samurai or merchants.[12] We find that, once the *wakashu* is interpellated into the western queer visual imaginary, these other, "non-gendered" differences begin to recede, fading from our perception of this "third gender" figure.

A final wall at the end of the exhibition posed the question, "who are we?", and featured an interactive panel in which we, the audience, were encouraged to add our sexual orientations and gender identities to a collective mosaic (Figure 4). As my own "trans*" tile dropped into the mosaic, intermingling with an overwhelming number of "straight" tiles, my simultaneous difference from and commensurability with the *wakashu* hung heavily in the air. At once irreducible to this figure of Japanese Edo society on account of the intervening geopolitical and transhistorical contingencies, my small offering signified a tacit acknowledgement of the potential reconcilability of *wakashu* with contemporary queer and trans identities. I was left wondering: How would a *wakashu* have participated in this exercise and what word or collection of words would they deploy to represent themselves in the queer lexicon?

**Figure 4**. "Who are we?" Interactive Activity

*Note*. Installation in *A Third Gender: Beautiful Youths in Japanese Prints* exhibition. From *A third gender: Beautiful youths in Japanese prints—a review*, by K. Canales, 2017, (https://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/museum-life/a-third-gender-beautiful-youths-in-japanese-prints-a-review).

In an article about her experience curating *A Third Gender*, published in *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, Ikeda (2018) maintains that the *wakashu* are irreconcilable with current trans identities, characterizing this parallel as an uncontrollable feature of the exhibit's "reception or its audiences' interpretations" (p. 646). And yet, this very exercise, in which we are asked to reflect upon our own identities, re-centres the permutations of sexuality and gender in the west and places them in conversation with the rest of the exhibition, thereby compelling our contemplation of this parallel with the *wakashu*. The exhibition's queer curatorial practices that privilege gender as a representational category and invite our speculative identification with the *wakashu* are what first establish our affective recognition of this figure.

Bound-up in this feeling of recognition is an appropriative vision. When I use the word appropriation to describe these representational practices, I draw upon three distinct meanings intertwined throughout the colonial project. In the first sense, appropriation refers to a relation of ownership—the transformation of some natural phenomenon, whether this is land or the living body, into a property of one's own. To

[12] Ikeda, 2016.

appropriate, in this sense, requires the enclosure of the common,[13] the dispossession of its previous owners, and the re-instatement of the colonizer as its proprietor; a productive relation that has undergirded the colonization of land and the logics of racial slavery throughout western modernity. The objects of appropriation are then subjected to the will of the proprietor, denoting a relation of profound unfreedom.

The second sense of appropriation refers to a relation of representation, the criteria with which to judge whether a given performance is proper or "appropriate." In this second valence, to be appropriate implies both an "authentic" or "truthful" representation of a given condition and its morally correct or virtuous expression. This injunction to be proper has subtended the processes of western colonialism, with the civilizing narratives deployed to rationalize colonization attempting to render Indigenous populations appropriate to western modernity (Stoler & Cooper, 1997, p. 16). In this sense, to be appropriated is to be proper or commensurate with the normative expectations of the western cultural imaginary.

The third meaning of appropriation combines elements of the previous two definitions and is more proximate to the everyday language of "cultural appropriation". Cultural appropriation typically connotes an aesthetic or performative valence, in which cultural artifacts or practices are violently dispossessed from their original owners and are subsequently re-presented as being appropriate to discordant cultural contexts (Hart, 1997, p. 138). The re-presentation of the *wakashu* in the exhibition as a "third gender" figure approximates this appropriative gesture, transforming the *wakashu's* (am)bivalent position in Edo society into a cultural artifact that is then excavated and interpreted from the standpoint of contemporary, western queer discourses.

Often, a dualism is constructed between appropriation and "authenticity", in which appropriative representation strips situated, cultural practices of symbolic meanings and historical specificities. And yet, for figures like the *wakashu*, who were gradually eradicated "with the arrival of American ships in 1853", when "Japan opened itself to western imperial powers", our ability to determine their "authenticity" is noticeably inhibited.[14] The *wakashu* now exists only in their re-presentations, which, while varying in terms of their empirical validity, are nevertheless reconstructions embedded in the peculiar historical contingencies of their curators. Whether it was the original production of the woodblock prints, Ikeda's *A Third Gender* exhibition, or my own narrative re-presentation of this gender-queer figure, the *wakashu* are continually constituted and reconstituted throughout their many re-presentations. The original "truth", which we have since appropriated, has been lost in the many re-figurations of this gender-queer figure across space and time.

## *Wakashu*, The Inappopriate/d Other

> As a *mestiza* I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman's sister or potential lover. (As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is a queer of me in all races) (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 80).

> Those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference—those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older—know that *survival is not an academic skill*. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the

[13] This narrative of the appropriation of the common in the establishment of private property has persisted in political philosophy since John Locke (1980, p. 20) and has been developed in the writing of Hannah Arendt (1958, p. 57) and Sylvia Federici (2004, p. 24), among others. One might also think of the logics of elimination that undergird settler-colonialism (Wolfe, 2006, p. 402).

[14] Ikeda, 2016.

> structures in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish (Lorde, 2007, p. 112).

When it comes to the figure of the *wakashu*, I experience something of a double vision. On the one hand, I recognize the appropriative gesture in their re-presentation as “a third gender”, which constructs them as a cultural artifact of some precolonial elsewhere, a gender-queer ancestor exhumed from the spatial and temporal contingencies of western colonization. Through the exihition, the *wakashu* was resurrected, brought to life in a darkened museum gallery in the middle of downtown Tkaronto. Being hailed in the longing gazes of the assembling queer and trans audience, along with the furtive glances of other voyeuristic spectators, the *wakashu* gradually became appropriate to the contemporary, queer visual imaginary. From this vantage point, perhaps we could deplore the exhibition and our speculative identification with the *wakashu*, altogether.

On the other hand, however, I recognize the ethical necessity of our affective relationality with the *wakashu* in orienting our engagements with the postcolonial Other, the importance of exploring the postcolonial elsewheres this figure animates. Much like the lesbian feminists I quote in the above epigraphs, I wonder if the *wakashu* can bridge the spatial and temporal dualisms erected by colonization, whether we can forge commonalities with this figure through difference rather than succumbing to the relativist inclination to avert our eyes. To sacrifice the possibility of our affective relationality with the *wakashu* for fear of misappropriating this figure, seems to me, too great a cost to bear in our contemporary postcolonial landscape.

Accordingly, I want to explore the possibility of an alternative way of seeing, an ethics of re-presentation, so to speak, that is at once orienting and disorienting of our queer visual imaginary. To this end, I pursue a reading of the *wakashu* in accordance with postcolonial feminist and filmmaker, Trinh T. Minh-ha’s (1986), figure of the “Inappropriate/d Other” (p. 9). Writing about the fundamental inability to represent Third World women within androcentric language, Trinh’s Inappropriate/d Other suspends gendered meanings and articulates other syntactic possibilities—interplays of silence and signification—that overflow the boundaries of the masculine signifying economy. This feminine aesthetics of language is cultivated in the interstices between real and representation, a liminal Third Space that cannot be appropriated into masculine schemes of re-presentation.[15] Existing in this Third Space, Trinh’s Inappropriate/d Other “moves about with always at least two/four gestures: that of affirming ‘I am like you’ while pointing insistently to the difference; and that of reminding ‘I am different’ while unsettling every definition of otherness arrived at” (p. 9).

The *wakashu* similarly performs each of these gestures, with their depiction in the *A Third Gender* exhibition at once signifying “I am like you” in the eyes of the queer or trans onlooker, while diffracting their gaze to the characteristics of age and class that must be overlooked in this recognition. The simultaneous gesture, “I am different”, signifies the incommensurability of the *wakashu* with the western cultural imaginary, once again compelling our affective connection with this figure who is always already improper to the western humanist language of identity, an experience familiar to many queer and trans people today. Occupying the liminal position of the Inappropriate/d Other, the *wakashu* leaves us “disoriented” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 106) and with “crossed-eyes” (Gopinath, 2018, p. 174), gesturing to the necessary fallibility of our visual perception at every turn.

Feminist theorist, Teresa de Lauretis (1990), describes Trinh’s figure of the Inappropriate/d Other as eccentric, “attained through practices of political and personal displacement across boundaries between sociosexual identities and

[15] Homi Bhabha (1994, p. 55) originally formulates the “Third Space” as the inbetween space of enunciation in discourse that allows the production of difference within systems of signification.

communities, between bodies and discourses" (p. 145). The many displacements and dislocations at work in the reconstruction of the *wakashu* as a "third gender" similarly reveal the essential eccentricity of this figure. Never quite appropriate to the anthropological taxonomies and transnational cartographies with which they are interpellated in the exhibition, the *wakashu* is only ever imperfectly apprehended by the notion of representational authenticity. Never fitting properly as the precolonial sanctuary or postcolonial artifact within the historical narrative, always revealing the shortcomings of the visual imageries to which they are fixed, the *wakashu* is always exceeding the representations through which they are constituted.

This inability to be nailed down or circumscribed by representational practices (or rather, the singular capacity to be represented when crossing or transcending these boundaries), is profoundly *queer*.[16] Moving from a conception of queerness rooted in humanist identity paradigms towards Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's (1993, p. xii) understanding of queerness comprised of movements across normative boundaries, we can begin to apprehend the *wakashu* as a gender-queer figure. In so doing, we may draw a distinction between the hierarchical taxonomy presupposed by "a third gender" and the movements across difference connoted by "gender-queer", to foreground the deconstructivist possibilities that are afforded by the latter refiguration of the *wakashu* as an Inappropriate/d Other.

Rather than a straightforward re-presentation, which simply conforms to a historically accurate or authentic image, the visual depiction of the *wakashu* in Ikeda's *A Third Gender* exhibit diffracts into patterns of misrecognition and interference. This diffracted vision, affected by the optical illusion of the gender-queer figure, bends the waves of meaning that pass by the *wakashu* to reveal the significant differences that precipitate our recognition of the image (Barad, 2007, p. 80). Such diffraction is also literalized in the low lighting of the exhibition itself. When the light shines upon the *wakashu*, our gaze is diffracted by the significant absences—those of age, class, and historical contingency—casting our glance about the darkened room, constantly disoriented by the patterns of interference that constitute our perception of the image.

In this way, the gender-queer figure represents what Gopinath (2018) describes as a "queer optic", a way of seeing that "deviates from a forward-looking directionality and instead veers toward multiple objects, spaces, and temporalities simultaneously" (p. 174). The incongruous directionalities of the queer optic erupt in a visual cacophony, "a palimpsestic landscape marked by the promiscuous intimacies of entangled histories", incapable of being separated into their component parts, the intra-acting layers of meaning inextricable (p. 174). Our perception of the *wakashu* is defined by the interference pattern of this queer optic, where interference does not connote an impediment to clear vision, but rather, is the constitutive messiness of vision itself. This diffracted vision, irreducible to the optical lenses supplied by western humanism or Enlightenment rationality, is the queer visual imaginary of the Inappropriate/d Other.

When apprehended through Gopinath's queer optic, the *wakashu*'s representation as an Inappropriate/d Other unsettles our feelings of familiarity with this figure, leaving only partial and uncomfortable commonalities. Always inappropriate to the modern, universalist imperative to reproduce "the same", while simultaneously upending every interpellation of "difference" with which they are hailed, the Inappropriate/d Other is both unrecognizable, yet recognizable; disorienting, yet orienting. As the Inappropriate/d Other, the *wakashu* disorients the feeling of recognition affected by the imposition of western humanist identity paradigms, while, at the same time, orienting an affective recognition through the queer optics of diffracted

[16] Jack Halberstam (2011, p. 97) has analyzed the intimate attachments to feelings of failure, unintelligibility, and loss that ground queer art and cultural production.

interference. Rather than a sense of common humanity motivated by universal sameness, the *wakashu* as the Inappropriate/d Other, re-appropriates the comingled and contingent differences of history as the condition of our re-entry to the common.

The feminist aesthetics of Trinh's (1989) Inappropriate/d Other thus introduce powerful new figurations of our feminist humanity that cannot be reduced to the categories of western humanism. For Trinh, the possibility of a critical cosmopolitanism is not revealed in the binary opposition of sameness and difference, a humanist reduction of differences to identities, but rather, in the feminist re-appropriation of critical differences, always multiple, incommensurable, and overlapping, "grasped both *between* and *within* entities" (p. 94). Our speculative identification with the *wakashu* as a "third gender", the original interpellation of this figure as a long-lost trans ancestor residing within a pure origin that exists somewhere prior to western domination, depends on an articulation of difference as identity. This illusion of continuity, extending along a linear telos from a historicized origin to the monotonous present, ensuring the continuous authenticity of this figure across discrete temporalities, relies on an essentialized difference that upholds the promise of liberal humanism.

Instead, a Trinhian re-articulation would locate our common humanity in pre-ontological differences, the originary and constitutive differences that ensure the boundaries of identity are "not (cannot) always (be) as clear as we would like them to be" (Trinh, 1989, p. 94). Rather than a *difference between* that ensures the internal continuity or self-sameness of a given figure, Trinh describes a prerequisite *difference within* that undercuts the unity of identity, diffracting in every direction to produce a multiplicity of differences. Here, the possibility of an ethical relationality emerges from *between* and *within* differences: "you and I are close, we intertwine; you may stand on the other side of the hill once in a while, but you may also be me, while remaining what you are and what I am not" (p. 90). A postmodern ethics would have to account for each of these relationalities, recognizing our commonalities, acknowledging our differences, honouring these relations either in presence or in absence. According to Trinh, the critical cosmopolitanism that is so often necessary in postcolonial feminist thought and politics is immanent to the pre-ontological differences we share with the Inappropriate/d Other.

This is to say that the representational qualities of the *wakashu* as an Inappropriate/d Other allow us to envision our common humanity differently. In relation to the Inappropriate/d Other, our common cause with one another is not achieved through either the tolerance of difference or the normative reproduction of the same, neither of which are particularly useful in a postcolonial landscape. Rather, our commonality would come before our individuality, with our relational and historical co-implication in the Other preceding and conditioning our subjective identification. Put differently, the figure of the Inappropriate/d Other does not resolve or reconcile our pre-ontological differences but constitutes a queer optic through which the diffracted patterns of interference, the visual effects of our *differences within*, are brought into focus. In their inability to be appropriated into the liberal-humanist taxonomies of sameness and difference, the Inappropriate/d Other exposes the pre-ontological differences suppressed by our representational practices and allows us to tease out our entangled histories of signification. The ethics of re-presentation would then involve attending to our co-constitutive relations with the Other as they are revealed in the interference pattern of our queer optic.

If I return to the interactive mosaic at the end of Ikeda's *A Third Gender* exhibition, I am once again faced with the question, "Who are we?". Maybe this time, I opt not to place a tile in the growing mosaic made-up of the sexual orientations and gender identities of the spectators of the exhibit. Maybe this time, the contemplation of my affective relationality with the *wakashu* is not premised on the reduction of this gender-queer figure to the contemporary

queer lexicon reproduced on the tiles. Maybe this time, I step back from the mosaic, glancing tentatively around the darkened gallery, my gaze bending to reveal the silences and significant absences, diffracting into patterns of interference. It is within the eccentricity of this visual landscape that I can begin to recognize the *wakashu*, not as my ahistorical or atemporal queer twin, but as a figure who cannot be appropriated into the cosmopolitan universalism of the mosaic behind me; as a figure constituted in movements across boundaries; as a figure composed of an array of pre-ontological differences.

Perhaps I find that this disoriented and disorienting vision feels familiar, perhaps I feel a sense of affective recognition for the unrecognizability of this gender-queer figure; perhaps this disorientation is the basis of my deconstructive relationality with the *wakashu*. Disconnected by the spatial and temporal incongruities of our historically contingent locations, in this singular moment of convergence, I find connection in the incongruous, incommensurate, and inappropriate. Perhaps in response to Ikeda's question "Who are we?", the *wakashu*, the Inappropriate/d Other, would answer: "We are not we, are within and without we".[17]

## An Ethics of Curation

*A Third Gender: Beautiful Youths in Japanese Prints* was not simply a collection of prints and artifacts presented in a special exhibition at the Royal Ontario Museum. Existing somewhere between an appropriative reproduction of trans history and a potent nexus of deconstructive relationalities, this visual, postcolonial queer archive re-presents the *wakashu* as a "third gender" or gender-queer figure. In the first half of this paper, I traced the representational practices involved in the resurrection of the *wakashu* as a "third gender" figure, situated in the western gaze, supposedly commensurate with contemporary queer and trans identities. My critique of the exhibit attempted to trace the appropriative visions that are involved in this colonial optic; constituting the *wakashu* as property, rendering this figure appropriate to our queer visual imaginary, re-presenting them as a cultural artifact of our imagined trans ancestry. Underscoring the interrelations of appropriation with western colonialism and its attendant liberal humanist ideologies, I was quick to discard this appropriated figure and the corollary promise of a cosmopolitan universalism.

And yet, in the fundamental failure of the *wakashu* to be appropriated, in their constant escape of the appropriative visions of the west, I explored the possibility of other ways of seeing potentiated by the Inappropriate/d Other. In this queer optic, the pre-ontological differences that resist appropriation into humanist identity paradigms are revealed in diffracted patterns of interference, deconstructing the "continuity" or "authenticity" of our imagined humanity. Thinking alongside the disoriented and disorienting tropes of our postcolonial feminist humanity, I attempted to illustrate how the critical reappropriation of the improper might capacitate our return to the common.

In so doing, I have indicated the possibility of a postmodern ethics of re-presentation innate to queer curatorial practices. Following Gopinath's (2018) etymology of "curation" from the Latin *cura*, meaning "to care" or "to heal", I have tried to advance an understanding of curation as an affective relationality and ethical responsibility for curious re-presentations (p. 174). To care or to heal, in this sense, should not be confused with an imperative for authentic re-presentations, however, but should abound with curiosity for the layers of contingent and constitutive differences involved in our re-presentations. Whether it is the layered curatorial re-presentations of "Abed, a tailor," traveling from El Madani through Zaatari and Gopinath, or the care for the *wakashu* displayed first in the woodblock prints and then reproduced in Ikeda's exhibition and again here; queer curatorial practices erupt in

[17] I am reappropriating Trinh's (1989) articulation of a critical difference from the self in the phrase: "I am not i, am within and without i" (p. 90).

potent visual imaginaries.

Throughout each of these imbricated curations, our affective familiarities and fantasies are re-collected and re-constituted in the archives of history, the feelings of recognition that these figures intimate intermingling in our curatorial practices of "caring for". The many significations of these figures inextricable from this affected and affecting imagery, the contemporary affects and historical artifacts interwoven through these re-presentations, begin to suggest what I might call an "archive of feelings" to misappropriate Ann Cvetkovich's (2003, p. 242) generative term. Situated among this assemblage of public feelings—emotions provoked and preserved in this postcolonial queer archive—perhaps an ethics of queer curation means learning to be responsible to these affective relationalities, holding them in curious regard, holding them in common. "Caring for" these ephemeral and eccentric figures of human history, means learning to be accountable to the affective relations with the Other that undergird our common humanity.

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# Decolonization

NS?

# VOICE

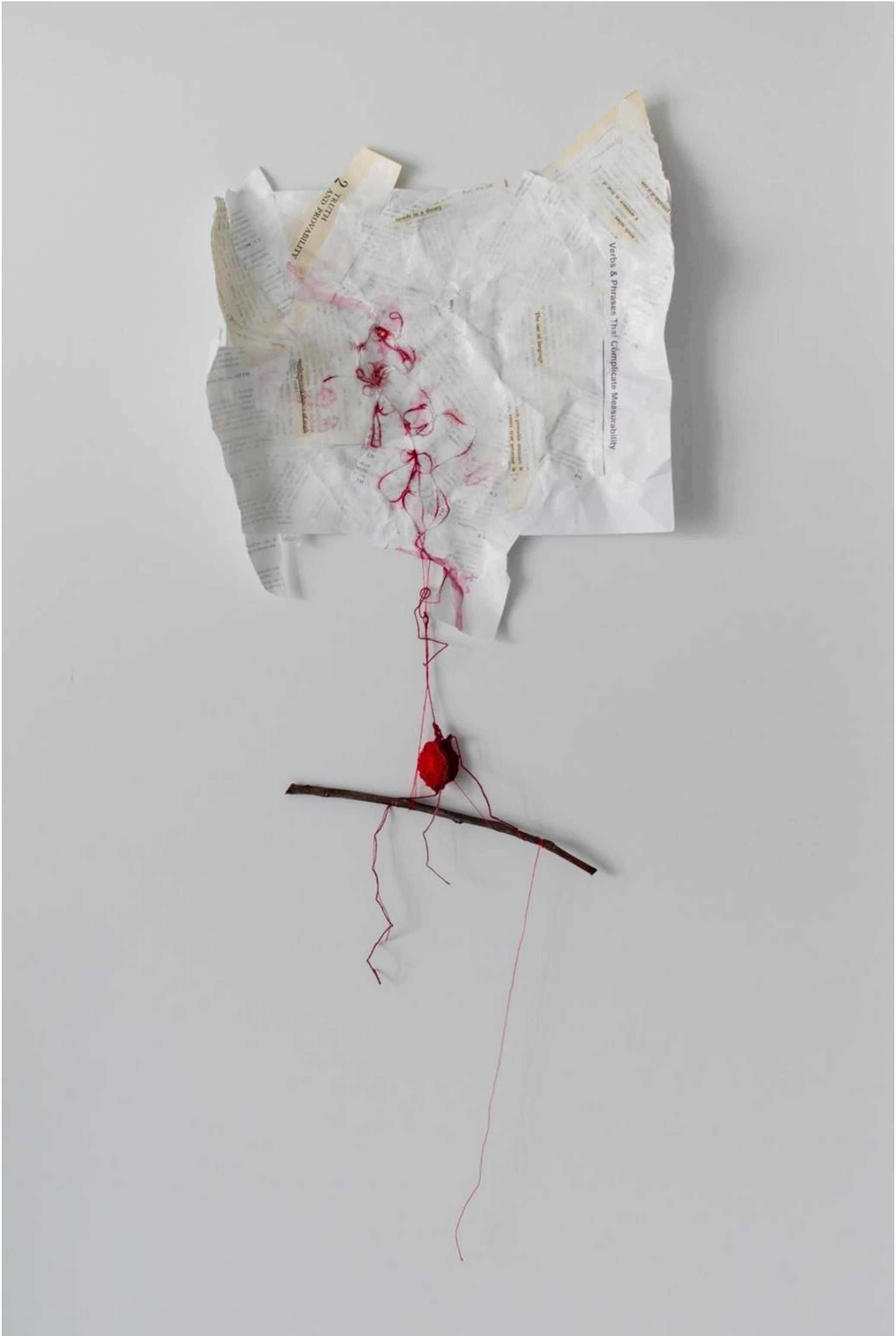
Patricia Hoi Ling Ki

## Abstract

This piece refers to a recurring dream about not being able to speak, not being able to be heard, and therefore, not being able to push back against threats of violence. I created it after having conversations with other Asian women about how we are constantly trying to speak out against systemic violence in organizations that claim to be anti-oppressive, and yet, are almost entirely made up of white folx at the managerial level. Our words momentarily capture attention – perhaps people are shocked at the assertiveness and articulateness of Asian women who are stereotyped as passive and politically apathetic – and we receive acknowledgement, apologies, and offers of help. But over time, we realize that not only has no meaningful change been made, but that we are now no longer invited to the table for discussions. The polite responses always drown out the calls for change, or the offers of help are conditional, requiring us to conform to a white middleclass standard of social respectability that erases our very ways of being and the agency of choice. At the same time, my conversations with friends remind me that we can still draw on each other for strengths, inspirations, and creative strategies to persist in our various spaces; to find small ways of resistance against what bell hook (1995) calls "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (p. 17); to continue to keep alive the dream of a less violent future.

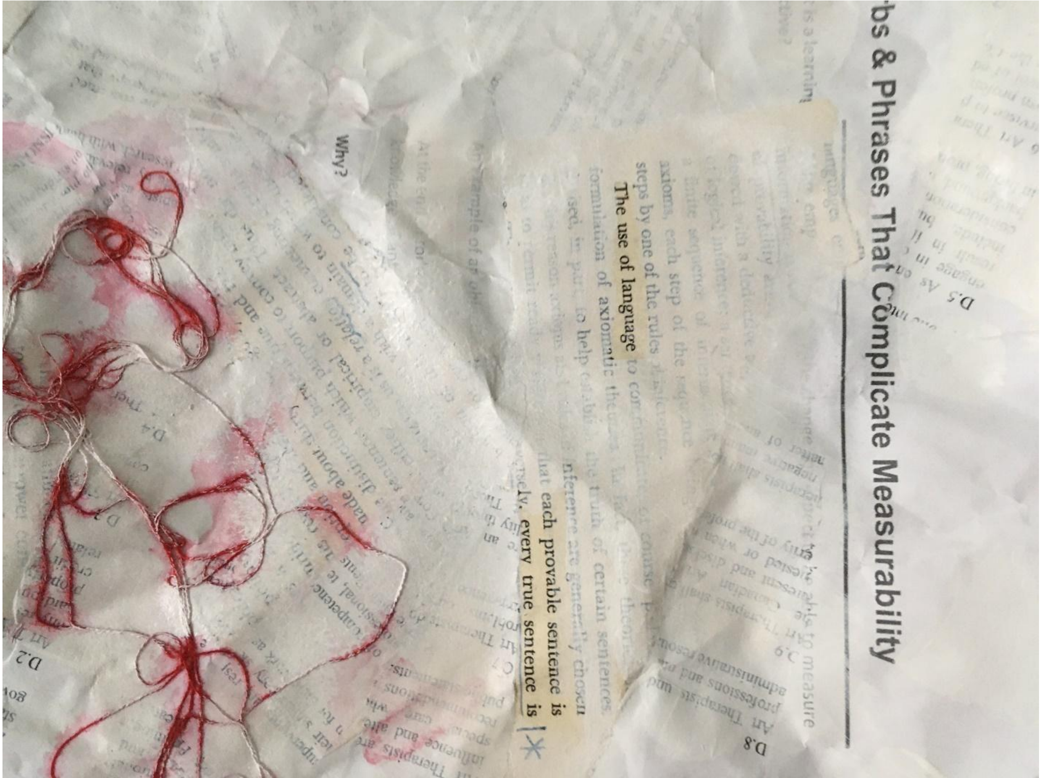
## Keywords

intersectionality, anti-Asian racism, racialized misogyny, white supremacy, performative activism, feminism


2 TRUTH
AND PROVABILITY
Verbs & Phrases That Complicate Measurability

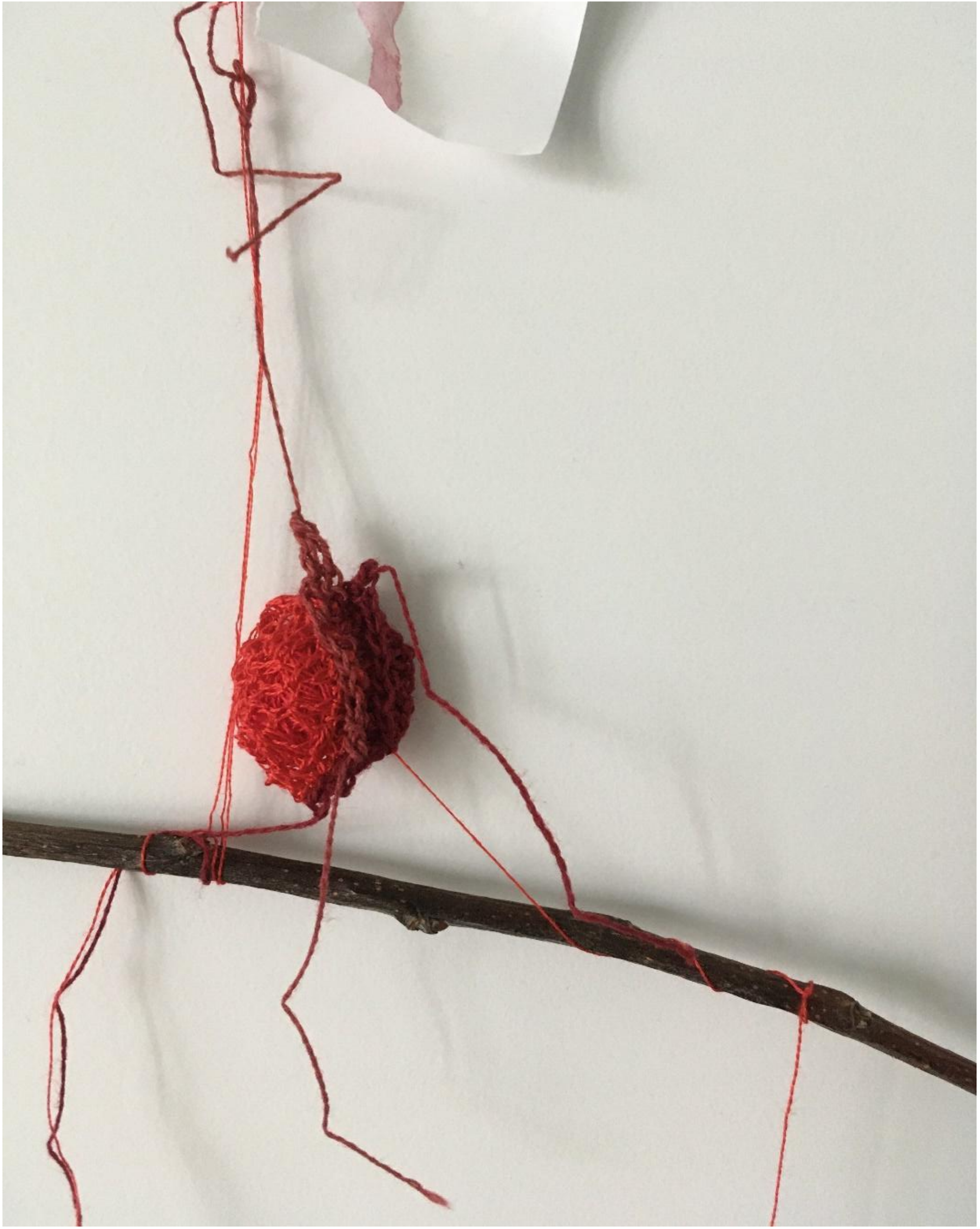
## VOICE

A recurring dream of trying to speak, to yell, but my voice keeps getting smaller, my tongue forgets how to form words, the air feels like a white haze that sound doesn't cut through, and people keep doing what I'm trying to tell them not to.




*You say you're telling the truth? Prove it. Prove that harm was done. Show me measurable evidence, statistics. I can't understand these jargons, explain it with words people understand.*

To insist on having a voice for people not expected to have one is like pouring our lifeblood into the void. But my conversations with my dear friends remind me that we knit together this one heart that persists – the feminist resistance against white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. It may feel precarious and pointless, like perching on a twig attached to nothing, but we find stability in coming together, reaching toward the unknown, the not-yet-tried, not-yet-possible, to build a less violent future.



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NS?

# Hoea Te Waka ki Uta: Critical Kaupapa Māori Research and Mormon Studies Moving Forward

Hemopereki Simon

## Abstract

The following is a reflective commentary on the place of Critical Indigenous Studies, with a focus on Kaupapa Māori Research, within Mormon Studies. Specifically, the piece explores the following questions: What does Kaupapa Māori Research look like when engaging in Mormon Studies? What positionality needs to be taken by Kaupapa Māori researchers and Critical Indigenous scholars when engaging in Mormon Studies? What are the main areas Critical Indigenous scholars and Kaupapa Māori scholars should engage when tackling issues around Mormonism? These questions are important in light of the growing importance of the cultural renaissance in Te Ao Māori and the rise of Kaupapa Māori Research.

## Keywords

global Mormon studies; critical religion studies; Indigenous studies; sociology of religion

## Introduction

In recent years, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS Church) has faced increasing challenges around their exclusionary and inequitable practices. Much of these challenges were popularized by critical think pieces posted on websites, such as Mormon Think,[1] podcast and vlog sites, like Mormon Stories,[2] the numerous YouTube videos that feature Sandra Tanner, and the creation of Mormon Wikileaks (Chandler, 2016), all of which coincided with a falling number of active church members (Levin, 2016; Canham, 2019; Larson, 2019; Mormon Stories, 2021). On top of this is the ever-looming truth found within the CES[3] letter (Runnells, 2013),[4] as well as the advent of publications like *Decolonizing Mormonism: Approaching a Postcolonial Zion*,[5] and *Essays in American Indian & Mormon History* (Colvin & Brooks, 2018; Hafen & Rensink, 2019).

As a result, an increasing awareness of problems in the church, both historical and contemporary, have been made obvious and subsequent calls to acknowledge diversity, a growing interest in fighting patriarchy in the Mormon feminist movement (Finnigan & Ross, 2013, 2014; Johnson-Bell, 2013; Brooks, 2014; Brooks et al., 2015), and more people advocating for change around queer and trans issues, have emerged (Petrey 2011, 2020; Dehlin et al., 2014; Sumerau et al., 2014; Cragun et al., 2015; Cook, 2017; Bridges et al., 2020; Gustav-Wrathall, 2020; Lefevor, 2020; Mohrman, 2020; Swedin, 2020; Young, 2020; Griffin, 2021; Chakravart, et al., 2021)

With this current socio-political climate in mind, below I provide a reflective commentary on the place of Critical Indigenous Studies, with an emphasis on Kaupapa Māori Research, in Mormon Studies. Giving substantive focus to Māori perspectives on Indigenous research, I describe the need for an intervention into Mormon Studies as an academic discipline around Indigenous issues. Specifically, I begin to answer the following questions: What does Kaupapa Māori Research look like when engaging in Mormon Studies? What positionality needs to be taken by Kaupapa Māori researchers and Critical Indigenous scholars when engaging in Mormon Studies? What are the main areas that Critical Indigenous scholars and Kaupapa Māori scholars should be engaging in when tackling issues around Mormonism?

To address these questions, I outline a positionality on researching Mormonism from my own experiences as a Critical Kaupapa Māori scholar from a non-Mormon background. My past projects have explored Indigenous data sovereignty, whakapapa, and Mormonism and the appropriation of haka[6] by Mormon missionaries overseas and on YouTube. Since it is a given that much of the readership may not be from the fourth world and/or familiar with Critical Indigenous Studies and/or familiar with Global Mormon

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[1] Mormon Think, http://www.mormonthink.com/.
[2] Mormon Stories, https://www.mormonstories.org/.
[3] CES stands for "Church Educational System".
[4] For purposes of brevity, full context of the relationship between Te Ao Māori and Mormonism is not provided here. For more on context, please see Peter Lineham, "Tanner Lecture: The Mormon Message in the Context of Maori Culture." *Journal of Mormon History* 17 (1991): 62-93; Marjorie Newton, "Maori and Mormon" (Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2014); Marjorie Newton, "Tiki and Temple: The Mormon Mission in New Zealand, 1854-1958 (Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2012); Kelly Moana Klink, "Breaking the Barrier: Maori religious and spiritual entanglements at Aotea" (Master's Thesis, The University of Waikato, 2019); Ian Barber "Lands of Contrast: Latter-day Saint Societies in New Zealand/Aotearoa and Australia" in *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Mormonism*, eds. R. Gordon Shepherd, A. Gary Shepherd and Ryan T. Cragun (Cham: Palgrave, 2020), 455-474.
[5] It must be noted that, despite being chosen by the author himself, he still thinks that the title of this publication is technically incorrect and may be considered misleading by some. It would have been far more appropriate, but more complicated, to call the commentary something like Postcolonial Mormonism, for the notion of achieving a decolonised religious institution seems antithetical to the concept of decolonisation.
[6] For the purposes of this paper, Te Reo Māori is the Indigenous language of New Zealand. It will not be treated as a foreign language and italicised as is normal practice within academic writing. Translations will be provided in the glossary. Where quotations are used with translations provided, in all cases where it is necessary to convey Māori cultural understandings, Te Reo Māori (Māori language) words will be privileged over English.

Studies, the purpose of this reflection is to synchronise these generally distinct fields into a common understanding of the problem. This will be accompanied with an explanation of the nature and literature outlining Kaupapa Māori Research writ large. To conclude, I will provide a suggested list of areas that Critical Indigenous Studies scholars should focus on when undertaking research on Mormonism.

## A Kaupapa Māori researcher's intervention and positionality

Due to the nature of the material and the research that I write about, it would be easy for Mormons to conclude erroneously that I am what the Church calls 'anti-Mormon'. When I presented a paper at a conference on Religion and Ethics in Tokyo in 2019 as part of my research project on Indigenous data sovereignty, whakapapa, and Mormonism, I told the audience that I was about to present something that was not very 'faith affirming', to which a Mormon professor replied: "If I need to affirm my faith there is church on Sundays; we come to conferences to learn about ideas". The anti-Mormon perception of my research and the like may also be amplified by the lack of Critical Indigenous engagement with subjects relating to Mormonism, and while I am not anti-Mormon per se, I do approach Mormonism as an Indigenist. Indeed, I will always approach Christianity, Mormon Studies, and Mormonism with the idea that my people have a right to cultural integrity. That said, I openly realise that I cannot, and should not, try to dictate to someone what their religious beliefs should be, nor is that my goal. Belief is a very personal thing, as it should be.

However, when your beliefs - religious theology, doctrine, or practice - seeks to alter or comment on my culture without good engagement with my people, including those who are non-Mormon, I have a right and a responsibility to ngā uri whakatupu: to reply and to question you, your teachings, and your practices. My right and need to do so is only further amplified by the fact that I am a critical Kaupapa Māori scholar. That I am such a scholar is important for two reasons, as suggested by Tania Ka'ai and Manuka Henare:

1) Indigenous Researchers are there to be change agents for our communities. We are the key to explaining our point of view to the religious and the scholars of religion.

2) Māori religion is not found in a set of sacred books or dogma; the culture is the religion. History points to Māori people and their religion being constantly open to evaluation and questioning to seek that which is tika, the right way.

(Henare, 1998; Ka'ai, 2008)

Unlike Orthodox Mormonism and Mormon Studies, Te Ao Māori considers it ethical or tika to engage in debate and to question, so that the collective may find an acceptable way forward that has depth and is true or correct to the collective. This path towards being ethical should also include the other ethical standard in Te Ao Māori being pono or truthfulness that has depth. Futhermore, traditionally, in Te Ao Māori, our cultural decision making was done for the overall benefit of the collective. Everything was consensus driven.

It is with these ideas in mind that I approach Christianity and Mormonism as a subject of Critical Indigenous inquiry. A key finding of mine, in examining Mormon scholarly texts and materials from researchers in the field, is that there is a lack of highly critical culturally affirming tuturu work. I can only conclude that their active status as members of the Church and the ever-present threat of excommunication is a hindrance to the production of much needed work that would create more dialogue and understanding among the Mormon community. We, as Critical Indigenous Studies scholars, must put the 'political' and power of our voices back into our research on religious topics (Smith et al., 2012, p. 10). The greater presence of researchers, like myself, in Mormon and/or Religious Studies provides more credibility to the field – particularly in emerging aspects of the field being

Global Mormon Studies (Refer to Inouye, 2014) and Lamanite Studies (Refer to Herdandez, 2021).

## Kaupapa Māori Research

Henry and Pene (2001) state that: "Māori intellectuals, in resistance to the colonial heritage and hegemony of New Zealand's colonial past, are at the forefront of developing the kaupapa Māori paradigm" (p. 234). There are many definitions of Kaupapa Māori Research and the theory that underpins it. One definition states: "Kaupapa Māori, as a concept and philosophy, is the 'conceptualisation of Māori knowledge' that has been developed through oral tradition. Kaupapa Māori is esoteric and tuturu Māori. It is knowledge that validates a Māori world view and is not only Māori owned but also Māori controlled" (Nepe, 1991, p. 15). Webber (2008) describes it as the desire for the research to be by Māori, whereby Māori use Māori cultural perspectives and provide a strategy for the empowerment and the self-determination of the participants involved. The philosophy of Kaupapa Māori is considered, in its most basic form, to be the philosophy and practice of being Māori (Eketone, 2008). Thus, the position of the language, culture, knowledge, and values are accepted in their own right (Bishop, 1996, p. 12; see also Smith, 1992). Hoskins & Jones (2017) comment that with Kuapapa Māori, "…Māori are involved in research and debate. A significant [amount of] literature, mostly in education, has outlined the principles of Kaupapa Māori as methodological and theoretical guides to research and practice" (p. ix). I explore this fundamental research in what follows.

Graham Smith, considered the father of Kaupapa Māori research, states that Kaupapa Māori as a philosophy is four-fold in that it is:

i. Related to 'being Māori'.
ii. Connected to Māori philosophy and principles (see Stewart, 2020).
iii. Something that takes for granted the validity and legitimacy of Māori and the importance of Māori language and culture.
iv. Concerned with the struggles for autonomy over our own cultural well-being.

(as cited in Te Awekotuku, 2009)

Reid (1998) comments that Kaupapa Māori challenges a universal approach that cannot address Māori needs or give full recognition of Māori culture and value systems. This is reflected in a letter to Tā Apirana Ngata, in which Tā Te Rangihiroa Buck states: "…kua mutu te wa mo Te Peehi ma…kua riro ma taua, ma te Maori, taua korero…[sic]".[7] Te Awekotuku (2008) contends that the statement by Buck reflects the philosophy of Kaupapa Māori Research. In a more contemporary context, Rangimarie Mahuika states:

> We live in a time, when many people who traditionally have occupied the role of the 'researched' are in increasing numbers becoming 'researchers'. As their minority voices are beginning to be heard they speak of various similar experiences of marginalisation, cultural inferiority, and immobilising oppression (Mahuika, 2008, p. 1).

Te Awekotuku (1991) reinforces this by affirming that Kaupapa Māori Research is a form of research that moves "to avoid the cultural imperialism of past research and researchers, [that] research itself should be responsive to expressed Māori needs; needs expressed from within the community and not needs perceived by those outside it" (p. 14). Hence, in the sciences, Kaupapa Māori Research seeks to realign power and authority between dominant western science and knowledge and alternative knowledges, such as mātauranga from Te Ao Māori.[8] Scholars of

[7] Ta Te Rangihiroa Buck's letter to Ta Apirana Ngata, Febuary 1931. Ngāhuia Te Awekotuku translates this as: "The time for [Elsdon] Best and co is over, we as Māori must take responsibility for researching our world ourselves…It is up to us to straighten up what has been written by Pākehā pioneers".

[8] For more information on mātauranga (Māori) refer to Hikuroa, Daniel. "Mātauranga Māori—the ūkaipō of

the field recognize that culture, language, and sense of being are scrutinised and validated through the use of 'sound' social science methods in the research process. Therefore, the practice of research within Māori communities is to move against dominant colonial and settler colonial relations of power and authority.

In historical terms, the Māori political economy was antithetical to 19th-century British culture, which was imposed by the systematic introduction of British rule. Māori social, cultural, and spiritual institutions were eroded, alongside the expropriation of land and resources, the diminution of language and cultural artefacts, and the assimilation of Māori into western society (Henry & Pene, 2001, p. 235). Rigney comments that: "The British 'system' resulted in the elimination and extermination of indigenous social systems, knowledge, traditions, and cultural sciences" (as cited in Foley, 2003, p. 44; see also Simon, 2016, 2020).

Kaupapa Māori Research, by its very nature, fosters research that meets the needs of Māori, as there is potential for a shift in the power held within knowledge production from the researcher to the researched. Such shifting takes place with an aspirational goal of tika and pono.[9] Therefore, the ultimate goal of Kaupapa Māori Research is the empowerment of Māori, to "assert our cultural beliefs and practices, our way of knowing and being and our right to both live and maintain them" (Mahuika, 2008, p. 1). Arohia Durie (1998) describes this as 'mana' in that research should make a positive contribution to Māori needs, aims, and aspirations.

Bevan-Brown (1998) writes that there are ten facets to the ideology of Kaupapa Māori that must be adhered to when undertaking Kaupapa Māori Research. They are:

1. Māori research must be conducted within a Māori cultural framework.
2. Māori research must be conducted by people who have the necessary cultural, reo, subject, and research expertise required.
3. Māori research should be focused on areas of importance and concern to Māori people.
4. Māori research should result in some positive outcome for Māori.
5. Māori research should involve the people being researched as active participants at all stages of the research process.
6. Māori research should empower those being researched.
7. Māori research should be controlled by Māori.
8. People involved in conducting Māori research should be accountable to the Māori community.
9. Māori research should be of high quality.
10. The methods, measures, and procedures used in Māori research must take full cognizance of Māori culture and preferences.[10]

(Smith, 2012, p. 16)

Both Pihama (2014) and Chilisa (2012) further this list by adding that there are six key values that

knowledge in New Zealand." *Journal of the Royal Society of New Zealand* 47, no. 1 (2017): 5-10; Te Ahukaramu Charles Royal. "Politics and knowledge: kaupapa Maori and matauranga Maori." *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies* 47, no. 2 (2012): 30-37; Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Te Kahautu Maxwell, Haupai Puke, and Pou Temara. "Indigenous knowledge, methodology and mayhem: What is the role of methodology in producing Indigenous insights? A discussion from mātauranga Māori 4, no.3 (2016): 131-156; Hōne Sadler, "Mātauranga Māori (Māori Epistemology)." *International Journal of the Humanities* 4, no. 10 (2007): 33-46; Debbie Broughton and K. McBreen, "Mātauranga Māori, tino rangatiratanga and the future of New Zealand science." *Journal of the Royal Society of New Zealand* 45, no. 2 (2015): 83-88.

[9] The key ideas of tika and pono are the basis of Māori ethics and ethical standards. I argue that when Mormon Studies scholars write on Māori or Indigenous subject matter, they should take these concepts into account.

[10] Translation: "If it is work that is related to Māori people and if they believe that the research project is a Māori orientated topic, they should write in a Kaupapa Māori framework. There are ten principles for researchers before us (that require consideration) for Māori projects. They are written below in English" (03/01/14, author).

underpin Kaupapa Māori Research. They are:[11]

1. Tino Rangatiratanga (the autonomy principle): Research should be controlled by the indigenous group being studied in that power relations should be addressed.[12]
2. Taonga Tuku Iho[13] (cultural aspirations principle): Research should uplift the development and continuation of indigenous cultures. This should include challenging epistemological racism.
3. Ako (culturally preferred pedagogies): Ensuring you utilise Māori ways and concepts of learning.[14] An obligation to make research relatable to indigenous peoples.
4. Kia piki ake ngā raruraru i te kainga (alleviation of socioeconomic and home difficulties principles): If there is a social problem, research should be utilised to address these problems. Research should have some practical and/or tangible outcome.
5. Whānau (extended family structure principle): Researchers are adopted by a whānau or community [of interest] and a power-sharing model where the community takes greater charge over the research from its conception to its outcomes.[15] All those with interest in the research should be able to participate.
6. Kaupapa (collective vision, philosophical principle):[16] Be clear on your purpose, what are you doing with this research, and why are you doing it.

The most important of these principles regarding the interface between Kaupapa Māori Research and Mormon Studies is that of Tino Rangatiratanga, or the idea that research should empower Indigenous groups to be self-determining and in control of decision making. Whānau in this case uplifts the notion of belonging to a group and the well-being of that collective, here underpinned by whakapapa; it also carries with it the notion of accountability to the collective or whānau. Taonga Tuku Iho and Kaupapa are also interrelated in that whakapapa is considered a taonga tuku iho and that our cultural development moving forward requires mātauranga like this and should be protected and

[11] For examples and full explanations of these within Māori education refer to Smith, G. H. (2003, December). Kaupapa Maori theory: Theorizing indigenous transformation of education and schooling. In *Kaupapa Maori Symposium, Auckland, New Zealand* (8-11).

[12] To explore this concept further refer to Smith, L. T. (2015). *Kaupapa Māori research-some kaupapa Māori principles*, University of Waikato (46-52).

[13] To explore concept further: Jenny Bol Jun Lee-Morgan, "Purakau from the inside-out: regenerating stories for cultural sustainability." in *Decolonizing Research: Indigenous Storywork as Methodology*, ed. Jo-Ann Archibald, Jenny Lee-Morgan 1968, Jason De Santolo, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (London: Zed Books, 2019).

[14] To explore this concept further refer to Shane Edwards, "Ako Wānanga: The art, science and spiritual endeavour of teaching and learning in a wānanga: A localised approach." *International Journal of Pedagogical Innovations* 1, no. 2 (2013): 69-73; Arapera Royal Tangaere, "Collaboration and Te Kohanga Reo." *Childrenz Issues: Journal of the Children's Issues Centre* 10, no. 2 (2006): 35-37; Rose Pere, "Ako." Concepts and learning in the Mäori tradition Hamilton: University of Waikato. (1982); Leonie Pihama, Donna Campbell and Hineitimoana Greensill. (2019). Whānau storytelling as indigenous pedagogy: Tiakina te pā harakeke. *Decolonizing Research: Indigenous Storywork as Methodology*, 137; C. Aguayo and A. D. Sciascia. "He Whare Ako, He Whare Hangarau-A House of Learning, a House of Technologies: Interweaving Kaupapa Māori Values of Ako With Mobile Learning Theory and Practice." In *TERNZ 2015*. Tertiary Education Research in New Zealand (TERNZ), 2015.

[15] To explore this concept further see Linda Tuhiwai Smith, "Kaupapa Māori research-some kaupapa Māori principles." (2015): 46-52.

[16] To explore this concept further see Leonie Pihama, "Kaupapa Māori Theory: Key Theoretical Principles" (Kaupapa Rangahau Workshop Series, Waikato Tainui Research and Development College, Hopuhopu, Ngā Pae o Te Maramatanga, Te Kōtahi Research Institute, 30 July 2014, 2014); Bagele Chilisa, *Indigenous Research Methodologies* (Thousand Oaks, CA.: SAGE Publications, 2012).

learnt. In this case, what is learnt, and how, is key, particularly when engaging in the teachings of the LDS Church.

Throughout the process of reading and compiling my research projects on Mormonism, it has become apparent that Mormon Studies as a discipline fails to be reflective of Indigenous populations and the increasing politicization of Indigeneity worldwide since the 1960s. This failure has provided for the development of Critical Indigenous Studies and, more recently, the creation of Global Mormon Studies. The rise of apologetics, and the continuation of white scholars—particularly apologists—writing on Indigenous topics without accountability, have infused non-Indigenous agendas, which do not consider Indigenous methods or ways of thinking and knowing, into the field, in addition to fostering research procedures that do not recognize Indigenous culture and preferences. In effect, the principles proposed by Bevan-Brown (1998) do not really feature prominently, if at all, in Mormon Studies when engaging Indigenous subject matter.

The problem for the traditional Mormon Studies in the academy is that with the increasing politicization and engagement of Indigenous peoples, there is a need to engage with diverse viewpoints about Mormonism or Mormonisms. Regarding Mormonism in Aotearoa New Zealand, there has not been a strong tradition, like in the Unites States, of studying Mormonism in its host context. Additionally, there is even less research from non-Mormon scholars in Aotearoa New Zealand and there is no real tradition of Kauapapa Māori research in Mormon Studies; this is where the cultural integrity of Te Ao Māori is privileged. Mormon texts on ‘Gospel Culture’ and its issues describe a need to engage in the ‘culture of the world’ (Decoo, 2013, p. 9; see also Pritt, 2015; Colvin, 2017, 2020; Hernandez, 2021). However, with this there is a developing recognition or movement in Mormon Studies towards what is called ‘Global Mormonism’ or ‘Global Mormon Studies’[17] that recognises the diversity that exists among Mormons and an increasing challenge to the Mormon status quo, particularly around questions of Indigeneity, patriarchy, and queer and trans issues.

## Future research

Based on the lack of engagement in Mormon Studies with Critical Indigenous Studies, and, in particular, Critical Kaupapa Māori Research, we as a collective of Indigenous scholars must focus our attention on what I believe are the key or most pressing matters when it comes to Mormonism and Indigeneity, which are:

1) The relationship of Mormonism and other restorative traditions to settler colonialism (see Aikau, 2012; Tenney, 2018; Boxer, 2019; Murphy, 2020).
2) The appropriateness of prescribing a religio-colonial identity upon Indigenous groups or people (i.e., assuming Indigenous people are Lamanites) (see Murphy, 2003; Southerton, 2004; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 2014).
3) Calling patriarchy and all its manifestations into account.
4) Challenging the idea of the supremacy of the nuclear family.
5) Questioning the position of whiteness within Mormon culture, doctrine, actions, and teachings, including racism.
6) Moving to maintain the cultural integrity of our own cultures.
7) Advocating for cultural engagement with the Church, particularly around taonga the Church may hold or exploit.
8) Moving the Church and its members to accept the spiritual nature of the Book of Mormon (i.e., that the Book of Mormon is not actually factual).

[17] Refer to the Global Mormon Studies Association website, https://www.globalmormonstudies.org/

9) Preventing the further destruction of Indigenous cultural heritage sites as a worldwide archaeological project of the Church and its members to validate the Book of Mormon as historically accurate[18] (see Murphy & Baca, 2016).
10) Questioning the applicability of 'Gospel Culture' to diverse people (see Colvin, 2017)
11) Promote healthy sexual attitudes and relationships and decolonising takatāpui, two spirit, and queer and trans issues (see Neilson, 2016; Rangiwai, 2018).
12) Exploring the relevance of the Gospel Topic Essay and/or the CES letter to the indigenous experience.[19]

My hope is that by undertaking such works from a Critical Indigenous Studies viewpoint, the Church and its members with Indigenous ties will start to engage in much overdue dialogue about the place of Indigeneity within and outside of the Church. Hopefully, this will result in understanding and respect and generate questions about the hegemony and the settler colonial nature of the Church. Underpinning this is a whakataukī, "Ko te kai a rangatira he korero". This proverb explains that the food of chiefs is discussion. It is through dialogue, reflection, and critical discussion that I hope we can arrive at new understandings and a place of empowerment and enhanced spirituality for Indigenous peoples.

Tēnā Koutou katoa.

[18] For more context on this validation of the Book of Mormon through, at first, grave robbing and then, afterward, archaeology and Book of Mormon tourism, refer to the story of Zelph: Kenneth W. Godfrey "the Zelph story." *Brigham Young University Studies* 29, no. 2 (1989): 31-56.

[19] For context on these refer to for the CES letter: https://cesletter.org/ and for the Gospel Topics Essays: https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/essays?lang=eng.

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## Glossary

**Ako** To learn, study, instruct, teach.

**Haka** A generic term for a range of performances involving movement and chanting or song within Māori culture, used for a range of ceremonial purposes. Frequently mislabelled a 'war dance'.

**Kaupapa** Topic, policy, matter for discussion, plan, purpose, scheme, proposal, agenda, subject, programme, theme, issue, initiative.

**Kaupapa Māori** Māori approach, Māori topic, Māori customary practice, Māori institution, Māori agenda, Māori principles, Māori ideology. A philosophical doctrine incorporating the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values of Māori society.

**Ngā Uri Whakatupu** A Te Reo Māori expression to mean the coming generations or those to come behind you.

**Mātauranga** Knowledge. Here, this is used to denote traditional knowledge. Also known as Mātauranga Māori.

**Pono** True.

**Takatāpui** Lesbian, gay, homosexual men and women; Close friend (of the same gender), intimate friend (of the same gender).

**Taonga** Precious treasure; in the case of the LDS Church, this also means Indigenous Knowledge and the performative aspects of it.

**Taonga Tuku Iho** Heirloom, something handed down, cultural property, heritage.

**Te Ao Māori** The Māori world.

**Te Reo Māori** The Māori language.

**Tika** Correct.

**Tino Rangatiratanga** Self-Determination

**Tuturu** True or authentic.

**Whakapapa** Generally translated as genealogy; however, the term means more than western understandings of this. It would better be described as the knowledge that defines my place, responsibilities, and being in Te Ao Māori.

**Whakataukī** Proverbial saying.

**Whānau** Extended family, family.

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Hemopereki Simon is currently a Research Justice at the Intersections Scholars Research Fellow at Mills College in the United States and is based on his ancestral land at Wharewaka. His iwi are Tūwharetoa, Te Arawa, Waikato-Tainui, Hauraki, Mataatua Whānui.

NS?

# 饺子 (dumpling)

**Elizabeth Tsui**


## Abstract

Offering a glimpse into the Chinese-diasporic experience, I create mundane artworks that elicit the sensation of reliving small joys from my life. In *饺子,* or *dumpling*, in English, a still life drawing of a home-made Chinese pork dumpling is captioned with the word "dumpies!". The image references a time when my siblings and I were trying to remember what the food is called in Mandarin (none of us are remotely good at the language) and, when that failed, we settled on calling them dumpies instead. The vast negative space of the drawing resonates with the simple design of the subject, gesturing to the sort of echo chamber that can happen when one is comfortable and used to being around folx with similar life experiences and worldviews. The memory of making dumplings in the kitchen with family is rather unremarkable as it was common in my community growing up. But as I embarked on my academic journey, I learned that the experience was alien to many of my peers and mentors – that sitting around a table preparing food with family wasn't a universal practice. It was a small but disorienting realization. From this, it can be observed that language and food play integral roles as methods of retaining and preserving everyday culture among displaced communities.



## Keywords

Mundane, diaspora, food, Chinese culture

dumpies!

## Acknowledgments

Having made this piece, I'd like to thank my parents, John and Minzhi, and my sisters, Cecilia and Stacey Tsui, who are joining me in the nexus of cultures that make up our diasporic reality.

## Author Biography

Elizabeth (Liz) Tsui (she/her) is an emerging artist and curator based in Tkaronto/Toronto who received her BFA in 2021 and is currently continuing her studies toward a MA in Art History at York University. Her artistic practice and research interests are grounded in technology, popular culture, and Asian diaspora. She is interested in the manipulation of humorous content and dissecting it to critique the cultural context that situates it as disposable culture, responding to the fluctuations of social media, and emulating fads. Her artwork is often derivative of memes: currently in the form of 3D print, ultimately casting the object in bronze. Memes are of particular interest as a virtual phenomenon because the content they translate is tailored to the user and their activities online. Using this information as a foundation, Liz seeks to uncover erased histories surrounding migrant and diasporic communities in Canada. As a multidisciplinary artist, Liz is constantly learning how to manipulate new types of media. Her most recent interest is in the integration of 3D printing, painting, and woodworking to create sculptural forms that blur the line of artworks and functional objects. Through this shift in perspective, she hopes to generate dialogue between the mundane ity of her work and spectators to encourage a sense of intimacy with art objects.

# Neoliberalism

NS?

# Re-Imagining Wellness in the Age of Neoliberalism

## Sarah Badr

### Abstract

In this article, I explore the neoliberalization of wellness practices and the negative impact that this has had on the production and consumption of food products otherwise considered 'healthy' and or 'ecofriendly'. Specifically, I argue that capitalist notions of productivity and wellness have become intertwined, resulting in the large-scale destruction of both our environment and of the politically and economically marginalized. First, I examine the capitalist co-option of the concept of self-care and its origins in the 1960s civil rights movement as a response to a discriminatory medical establishment. Afterward, I explore the corporate-led evolution of wellness culture, illustrating its consequences for the environment, and the security and health of marginalized populations around the world. Finally, I argue that holistic and community-centered concepts of productivity and wellness are necessary for combatting inequality and climate crisis.

### Keywords

wellness, Anthropocene, selfcare, productivity, health, neoliberalism, healthism

## Introduction

Over the past several decades, wellness culture has taken over the mainstream, encouraging people around the world, particularly in the west, to improve their health and increase their happiness through their participation in practices of so-called self-care, such as dieting, meditation, and yoga. As of 2019, the wellness industry was valued at $3.5 billion and growing (Global Institute of Wellness, 2019). The exponential growth of this industry can be attributed to the physical, emotional, and mental health toll of life in today's late capitalist society, including political instability, deeply entrenched social inequality, and the rapid degradation of our environment. Backed by corporate interests, the culture promoted through these wellness industries advances the idea that optimal health and wellness, and by extension, happiness, are achievable through dieting, exercising, and spiritual practices, often with an accompanying moralistic rhetoric. This rhetoric implies that partaking in these practices is a matter of moral judgement, which reflects the values and goodness of the individual, as is exemplified, for example, in notions such as "clean eating", and the counter "dirty eating" that the term invokes.

Such framing of self-care practices not only conflates happiness with morality and narrow definitions of health, but it ignores the multitude of sociological factors that influence health, including access to food, medicine, and a safe environment. This is indicative of an inherent problem within wellness culture, which places an emphasis on the importance of the "self", while negating the interconnectedness of the self with one's greater social, historical, political, and ecological community. Accordingly, this article offers an intervention into prevailing wellness discourse by exploring how the wellness industry plays into a cultural dis-ease about modern life, while promoting neoliberal narratives about self-care and personal improvement. First, I examine the capitalist co-option of the concept of self-care and its origins in the 1960s civil rights movement as a response to a discriminatory medical establishment. Afterward, I explore the corporate-led evolution of wellness culture, illustrating its consequences for the environment, and the security and health of marginalized communities around the world. Finally, I conclude by arguing that holistic and community-centered, or decolonized, concepts of productivity and wellness are necessary for combatting inequality and climate crisis.

## The history of self-care and the rise of capitalist spirituality

One of the driving forces of wellness culture has been the notion of self-care, primarily through the consumption of various lifestyle products and behaviours to improve personal health and happiness. While the practice has arguably become a way for some people to indulge in shallow and materialistic lifestyle changes, self-care as a concept was first introduced in the 1950s as a medical concept for patients to foster greater health through personal habits (Harris, 2017). The concept then expanded as a way for workers in emotionally taxing professions, such as therapy and social work, to mitigate the accompanying levels of increased stress. In the 1960s, with the rise of the women's and civil rights movement, self-care was transformed into a political act that was not only conducive, but necessary, for effective transformative activism: in the face of a racist and patriarchal medical establishment that failed to provide equal care and to fully acknowledge the needs of marginalized groups, controlling one's health via self-care was a way for these groups to reclaim their autonomy (Lorde, 1988; Harris, 2017).

In the context of her cancer diagnoses, Black Feminist writer Audre Lorde (1988) famously proclaimed that, within this harmful medical culture: "caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare" (p. 205). Similarly, the Black Panther Party, who also viewed self-care as a revolutionary concept, gave speeches and shared information about free community service programs, including basic preventative care, to compensate for the lack of adequate care available to Black Americans. These initiatives

prioritized basic survival needs, and recognized poverty and poor health as correlating forces that required community action, rather than relying on moralistic individualism and a discriminatory medical healthcare system. In other words, they posited that the ability to live healthy lives required the dismantling of oppressive hierarchies. It is no wonder then, that, decades later, Black feminist activist and artist Sonya Renee Taylor (2018) has taken to reminding us of the power of self-care with her seminal book *The Body Is not an Apology*, inspired by her company of the same name, with widespread success: the novel is explicitly committed to reclaiming the practice of self-care (or self-love) and reuniting it with its radical, anti-oppressive roots.

Unfortunately, however, the evolution of radical self-care throughout the 1960s to 1980s coincided with an emerging wellness trend, which focused, not on the need to grant marginalized communities better access to basic healthcare, but rather, on a hallow disillusionment with traditional western medicine. “Borrowing” heavily from Eastern religious and spiritual practices that were introduced by the New Age movement (acts now considered to be cultural appropriation), this wellness culture proposed the idea of healthiness as more than simply an absence of illness; it emphasized the responsibility all individuals have to both maintain and better their health. Largely described as the culture of “healthism” by critical health scholars (Carter, 2015), this framing coincided with the rise of neoliberal economics, with an increased importance and responsibility placed on individuals for the state of their health.

Healthism is a term coined by Robert Crawford (1980) to describe ‘a particular form of ‘bodyism’; in which a hedonistic lifestyle is (paradoxically) combined with a preoccupation with ascetic practices aimed at the achievement or maintenance or appearance of health, fitness and youthfulness’ (Dutton, 1995, p. 273). As Da Costa (2019) observes, “Healthism operates under the assumption that everyone has the obligation to maximize their own well-being, as it ensures the good of society as a whole…Here, self-care is not considered to be selfish, but rather, representative of one’s larger commitment to social welfare” (p. 3). Within this rising regulatory climate of healthism, the pursuit of health and the act of self-care have been increasingly imbued with an agentic quality that is equal parts productive and moralistic. It is thus unsurprising that, in the last few decades, a neoliberal spirituality has started to take form.

As Crockford (2020) notes, spirituality and neoliberalism share certain structural features. Broadly speaking, neoliberalism relies on the selective use of ideological assumptions that work to underscore the importance of self-governance through personal autonomy and individual responsibility (Carter, 2015). Similarly, spirituality is a deregulated religion without central authority or reinforcement that is also privatized, i.e., it is based on personal experiences that are determined by the individual. The actual neoliberalization of spirituality, however, can be said to have begun with the revitalization of religion in western societies a few hundred years ago to reconcile faith with modern scientific knowledge; because science could not measure the private experience of religion, religion became internalized (Purser, 2019). With this, the number of people who identify as “spiritual but not religious” has grown, enabling an excess of practices and material goods to emerge that supposedly represent spirituality, including healthy foods, yoga wear, and workshops (Jain, 2020).

Backed by the rise of healthism, this has prompted a widescale transition into what Jain (2020) calls neoliberal spirituality: a spirituality defined by acts of self-care that are achieved through the dominant actors of spiritual industries, corporations, entrepreneurs, and consumers, who then engender neoliberal modes of governance. A synonym for capitalist spirituality, this new spiritual practice has re-oriented the onus of self-care away from challenging the deeply rooted patterns of inequity etched into our society to reinforcing them, namely by holding individuals as solely responsible and capable of their own

health and happiness.

## The political economy of health

Spiritual organizations are located within a history of colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy, yet they mask these histories under new concepts of personal wellness and optimal health, "depoliticizing social inequalities by attributing them to individual moral failures and emphasizing the need for disciplinary obedience and purity" (Jain, 2020, p. 9). In line with healthism rhetoric, wellness culture operates on the moralistic assumption that participation is a personal choice, rather than a privilege dictated by socio-economic and geographic realities. For example, a popular wellness practice, "clean eating", which involves the consumption of organic foods or following a vegan diet, ignores the class privilege associated with the accessibility to enjoy a wide variety of food products. Indeed, food insecurity is far more likely to occur when compared to clean eating, with the former being exacerbated among Black, Indigenous, and migrant populations by food deserts, which make it especially difficult to acquire the nutritionally rich foods and fresh produce ascribed to the latter. Hence, like the rest of the wellness industry, this rhetoric obfuscates the political nature of who gets to eat what.

Wellness culture also masks the catastrophic effects of the global food industrial complex, while concertedly greenwashing products and practices to make them appear more environmentally friendly than they are, often using plant-based meals, and, to an extent, participation in wellness culture writ large, as a solution to the ecological crisis caused by settler-colonial-capitalism. Through greenwashing, consumers are led to believe that they are being environmentally conscious, when, in fact, they are consuming products that largely perpetuate and exacerbate environmental issues. Further, this is usually done to the cultural and economic harm of the populations who produce the products. For instance, soy products are typically hailed as great, environmentally friendly alternatives to dairy, but the cultivation of soy in South America, particularly in Brazil (the world's largest exporter of soy, as well as beef and chicken), has been a major factor in accelerating deforestation (Friedman-Rudovsky, 2012). Similarly, the production of almond milk, another popular staple in wellness culture, requires an exorbitant amount of fresh water and has dire consequences for biodiversity. The production of "healthy" grains and produce are similarly problematic, as they typically must travel long distances within our imperial marketplace, which requires various types of fuel, after being harvested by exploited racialized and migrant populations. Not to mention, the west's recent global market demand for quinoa, which has been considered a staple food in Bolivia and Peru for centuries, has priced out locals who have relied on the food as a part of their traditional diet.

Many of the foods named above are dubbed "superfoods" within the wellness industry yet contribute to major sociopolitical harms. Beyond the deep seated violences within food production itself, the assumption that plant-and-grain-based meals are a solution to climate crisis does not consider the reality that different cultural contexts produce varying relationships with food. For instance, in many countries, meat may not be as inexpensive and abundantly available and is thus not as harmful to the environment as, say, the west's meat industries are. Moreover, historically collectivist societies, such as those Indigenous to the land now called Canada, often have more harmonious relationships to the land, which are marked by the sustainable cultivation and use of resources, and similarly preserved via traditional ecological knowledge systems. Thus, their consumption of the products that wellness culture would deem "bad for the environment", are, in fact, far more ecologically friendly when compared to the greenwashed products that the west praises. This point is especially important in the context of confounding racial and environmental issues, as many populations in the global south are collectivist, yet are also disproportionately affected by climate crisis, which has been predominately led

by the western world/global north.

Further, just as a deeper examination of how "superfoods" are cultivated and distributed reveals the imperial underbelly of wellness culture, so too does interrogating the culture's push to consume said foods in the first place: it promotes a desire for the products of traditional knowledge within a larger cultural and economic structure that denigrates and commodifies them. The perception of some foods as "superfoods", for instance, is not only nutritionally questionable but results in the fetishization of Indigenous knowledges that is rooted in a desire to participate in more "traditional" ways of life, but from the comfort of western modernity.

Loyer and Knight (2018) illustrate how such "nutritional primitivism" (p. 450) has only worsened social and environmental issues within our current food system. Specifically, they posit that nutritional primitivism intentionally relegates largely racialized and non-western food producers to the realm of "traditional", thereby arresting them in time, which, in turn, obscures and flattens the complexities of agricultural production within the global political economy. Here, tradition, and its ideological twins, exoticness, novelty, and authenticity, are used to racially code health foods so that they can appeal to the wellness industry's white and monied consumers, while simultaneously primitivizing agricultural production within the global south and among migrant workers, who are then easier to exploit. Accordingly, it seems that much of the interest in superfoods is, at least in part, rooted in harmful assumptions and stereotypes about the racial Other.

As modern lifestyles in late capitalist economies entail more distant relationships to the land, food becomes a way to bridge the gap. The food grown and eaten by Indigenous peoples, such as ancient grains, can be seen as informed by a special knowledge, which in the context of the wellness industry, is misappropriated into a generalized avenue by which we (in the west) can get back in touch with the natural, pre-modern world. In other words, consuming these foods becomes a way to be part of these seemingly "ancient" traditions, a framing which, ironically, is laden with the same racist-temporal rhetoric that constitutes late western modernity – the same social milieu that the wellness industry promises us escape from. What we are being sold, then, is not a return to pre-modernity, but rather, modernity masquerading as its opposite so that we can feel better about ourselves without being accountable to others.

While writing about today's food commodity culture, hooks (2014) poignantly states that:

> ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture…from the standpoint of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, the hope is that desires for the "primitive" or fantasies about the Other can be continually exploited, and that such exploitation will occur in a manner that reinscribes and maintains the status quo (p. 366).

Consuming superfoods, grown in "far away" places by racialized peoples with stronger – even supernatural – connections to the Earth, becomes a way to bestow a closeness to these lands and the people who occupy them, without ever actually contending with the reality of living in a settler colonial state or amid an imperialized social order conditioned by white supremacy. The west's connection to the land only extends to the consumption of superfoods, rather than to the people who produce them. Within this context, the almost religious ways that people follow "clean" lifestyles, undergirded by the logics of healthism or environmental friendliness, becomes a way to reinforce one's morality, without questioning the effects of one's consumption.

## The Mindfulness Revolution

Another example of how the desire to utilize the cultural knowledge and products of non-western groups to "cultivate the self" maintains and bolsters the success of the wellness industry, is evident in the rise of mindfulness meditation. Beginning in the late 1970s, the west started to remanufacture the Buddhist tradition of

mindfulness meditation as a potential science, which ultimately resulted in its secularization and subsequent appropriation (Purser, 2019). Secular mindfulness movements reduce the Buddhist practice into a therapeutic response to the mental pressures associated with modern lifestyles under the west's capitalist regime instead of honoring them as deeply spiritual and cultural mechanisms (which would, in fact, challenge the consumerist and exploitative logics of western capitalism).

Carette and King (2005) argue that Asian wisdoms and traditions have been subject to colonialization and commodification through such secular wellness techniques since as early as the 18th century, whereby they have been diametrically used to produce a highly individualistic spirituality that accommodates and aligns with western dominant cultural values (such as individualism, consumerism, self-discipline). Purser (2019) links the formalization of this process back to 1979 when Jon Kabat Zinn founded his Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical School (MBSR) and created an 8-week mindfulness course for stress reduction that would be taught using a standardized curriculum. Although likely well intended, the popularity of Kabat-Zinn's therapy expanded the reach of MBSR into the mainstream by identifying new markets, such as corporations, schools, governments, but also the military, which shifted mindfulness mediation into mainstream society during the 1980s and 1990s.

While MBSR has been widely accepted as aiding in the reduction of stress for many people, the separation of mindfulness from its traditionally spiritual context has led to some questionable uses. The value of practices such as mindfulness, for example, ought to include the capacity to prompt individuals to reflect on deeper issues within our material reality, like the fundamental structural issues in our society and the causes of dis-ease that have accompanied modernity, neoliberalism, and the increasing capitalist control over our lives, mind, bodies, and souls. But instead, the neoliberal approach to mindfulness has transformed it into a mainstream effort to neutralize the emancipatory potential of mindfulness practices (Purser, 2019). So far divorced from its roots, a practice meant to increase empathy and connection with others is now used to improve the efficiency of soldiers on the capitalist battlefield, literally and figuratively.

The neoliberal capture of this spiritual technology has served to neutralize its affectual, ethical, and communal power by removing it from its original context and purpose, resulting in what Purser and Loy (2013) call "McMindfulness" (para 6). More than disconnected from its spiritual and religious roots, McMindfulness denotes how mindfulness practices have been (re)located to the broader positive psychology industry whereby stress is "depoliticized and privatized" (Purser, 2019, p. 8). McMindfulness is attractive to governments and corporations because societal problems rooted in inequality, such as racism, poverty, addiction, substance abuse, and socially manufactured mental health challenges writ large, can be reframed as an individual psychology that simply requires more therapeutic help (and not any structural transformation).

The rise in McMindfulness was accelerated by the corresponding rise of the popular psychology movement, which similarly emphasizes individual problems over structural issues. Rooted particularly in Stoicism, a philosophy of strengthening oneself through practices of self-discipline so to adapt to adversity, western mental health therapies embody the same healthism elements of wellness culture that valorize individual autonomy, freedom, choice, and relatedly, authenticity (read racial primitivism) (Cloninger, Salloum & Mezzich, 2012; Madsen, 2014). In turn, psychologists and other mental health practitioners often fail to consider the psychological and physiological effects of racism, sexism, classism, and ableism on mental health and, inadvertently, obscure our capacity to understand individual suffering in the light of major historical and political changes. This is especially insidious given that the same structural issues within the medical establishment that

produce dire health outcomes for marginalized groups are also reflected, if not amplified, in mental health care (Snowden, 2003).

Within this climate, self-care practices, such as mindfulness, tend to become a means through which to propagate neoliberal modes of governmentality, otherwise known as a "technology of self" (Da Costa, 2019, p. 3). Based on the work of French philosopher Michel Foucault (1997), governmentality is a term that describes how prevailing knowledge systems are developed to promote self-regulation in line with dominant modes of governance, exhorting a style of government that extends beyond mere political activity. Relatedly, technologies of the self are the actions individuals make to "transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (Foucault, 1988, p. 18) – a goal that is itself set by the standards of the prevailing governmental structure.

In our current social milieu, this has given rise to what is commonly called "neoliberal governmentality" (Roy, 2007; Carter, 2015), which describes how we understand and control our bodies in relation to neoliberal regimes, including "the technologies of power by which neoliberal rationality is imposed onto individual consciousness" (Da Costa, 2019, p. 2). It is from here that healthism emerged and, by extension, the corresponding positioning of mindfulness especially and self-care more generally as a technology of the self: under healthism, people use the technology of self-care to accomplish a state of idealized healthiness established under neoliberal governmentality, which then ensures the creation of subjects whose understanding of self is fostered in alignment with the larger economic production goals of free-market capitalism.

As one such technology of the self, mindfulness draws upon diverse forms of institutional expertise to govern and manage behaviours. Philosopher Byung Chul Han (2017) illustrates this point well by highlighting how contemporary capitalism has repurchased mindfulness in order to harness the psyche as a "productive force". In so doing, he reveals how the rise of both wellness culture and popular psychology within the western world has ultimately enabled a body to mind shift that has further supported the development of neoliberal governmentality. Specifically, he argues that the increasing emphasis placed on mindfulness and self-care is centered less on the ability to overcome physical, spiritual, and or emotional wounds, and more on the ability to optimize the psychic processes of the late-stage capitalist employee, who is underpaid and overworked (Chul Han, 2017). Through these optimizing forces, Chul Han explains, consumers of contemporary mindfulness therapies can keep functioning and producing within (and for) the same capitalist systems that hurts them. Further, the internalized character of mindfulness practices may also lead to the internalization of other prevailing systems and beliefs, from corporate requirements to structures of dominance in society, culminating into a submissive position that is framed as liberation. Thus, instead of setting practitioners free, mindfulness helps them adjust – if not become complacent – to the very conditions that caused their problems.

## The future of wellness

Neoliberal spirituality perpetuates values that equate salvation and liberation with capitalist class structures, whiteness, patriarchy, and ableism (Jain, 2020). Instead of encouraging transformative action within communities and societies, wellness practices generally promote the idea that health and wellbeing are problems that are exclusively within our control, rather than a product of the political and economic contexts that bolster and maintain our destructive society. By failing to address collective suffering and incite the systemic change that might remove it, capitalist spirituality robs mindfulness of its real revolutionary potential.

Jain (2020) asks: "what are the daily, monthly or annual activities through which many spiritual consumers create and condition their bodies and construct identities and communities? How can

these be politically subversive? Could they constitute forms of political dissent?" (p. 10). To begin to think through this question, I have argued that within today's neoliberal capitalist system, which emphasizes self-improvement and self-optimization for the purposes of increased economic and market productivity, there is no truly genuine healing modality. In the case of mindfulness and other psychotherapies, their effects have been neutralized by healthism culture, which relocates the source of unwellness within individuals, rather than addressing any of the structural reasons for dis-ease. So, while these practices may provide aid to some degree, in the context that these consumer practices take place, they can hardly be seen as subversive.

Ultimately, the evolution of wellness culture is a response to the problems of life in late capitalist society, including the pace of modern lifestyles, along with a disillusionment with the capacity of the medical system to holistically address dis-ease and illness (Kristensen, 2017). Despite originally being used as a radical way to reclaim autonomy in the face of discrimination, modern hegemonic understandings of wellness have evolved to reinforce the same structural issues that exacerbate, if not condition, poor health and disease. These new understandings pointedly place the onus onto individuals to improve their lives, promoting commodity culture in ways that harm the same groups that wellness practices were intended to help.

This is not to suggest that mindfulness and wellness practices cannot support us in achieving liberation. In a recent interview with Afropunk, well known Black feminist and abolitionist Angela Davis (2018) discussed self-care as a radical act that is not only necessary for the longevity of the individual, but the longevity of collective movements. She argues that for Black activists and organizers in particular, self-care is a way to fully immerse oneself in the present moment, and thus wholly give oneself to the work (Davis, 2018). She also suggests that it is a way to connect with the past, while laying down a deliberate foundation for future activists. These remarks echo the sentiments of Lorde (1988) and Taylor (2018) cited above, who also both advocate for a radical self-care that is located within the social justice ethos of Black feminism. When viewed like this, self-care returns to its origins as an integral practice for supporting the collective liberation of life and as thus a counter to the wellness industry.

But as it stands, wellness culture practices often foster complacency among the world's richest populations, while perpetuating harm against marginalized groups and the environment. There is therefore a dire need to continue interrogating the harmful neoliberal assumptions currently undergirding wellness and self-care practices. Most of all, there is a need to decolonize the concept of wellness by shifting our understanding of health back to its radical origins and towards a more holistic mindset. Decolonization refers to the process of addressing and rectifying the colonial power dynamics that shape much of the modern world's political, economic, and societal relations. Similarly, decolonizing wellness practices would involve decentering the white-settler-colonial-neoliberal notion of self-care that currently underpins mainstream wellness culture (Forristal, 2021). In turn, wellness practitioners could start to honor the histories and creators of various wellness practices, and therefore reimburse the communities who have had their cultures and spiritualities appropriated and fetishized, and their labour subsequently exploited. It would also re-orient wellness practices from being primarily based in an individualistic consumer culture, towards being rooted in a community of radical care.

A decolonized approach to wellness would consider the deeply intimate relationship between individual health and planetary health, while concertedly approaching our current ecological crisis as a consequence of our separation from the self, each other, and the environment via white supremacist-capitalist-cis-heteropatriarchy (Tuck & Wayne Yang, 2012). Specifically, we need to develop an integral understanding of the genesis of ill health and disease (particularly in the west) and continue to unpack and honor how health and

disease relate to one's access to basic survival needs, such as food and water, and its role in shaping, and being shaped by, basic human rights, such as education and a safe environment. When viewed in this way, pursuing health and wellness becomes a steppingstone, not a hinderance, to liberation.

Relatedly, the present desire within wellness culture for the products of traditional knowledge can be viewed, not as decolonial or anti-western, but as a modern colonialized response to the separation felt by consumers in the Anthropocene: a geological era defined by the impact of human beings on their environment.[1] The desire for more "primitive" or "authentic" ways of living and connecting to the self is a product of our modern western culture that prioritizes productivity, efficiency, and material consumption over our relationship to the Earth and its natural resources, while also arresting racialized and colonialized populations in time. Hence, the ascent of wellness culture can be thought to be the growing desire for a sustainable life in balance with the external environment, but which is achieved in antithetical, and deeply racist, ways. The balance that wellness practitioners seek will not be found here, as we cannot rebalance our lives with nature without also dispelling the excesses of commodity culture and the unrelenting stress and injustice caused by western capitalism.

A core consequence of late western modernity has been to maintain the primacy of science, thus separating human beings from the ecosystem from which they are naturally a part of. This separation from nature, fueled by the industrial revolution and cemented by neoliberal capitalism, has only further reinforced our lack of balance within ourselves, each other, and the environment. The individualistic and market-centred logic promoted across the neoliberal west is not conducive to an authentic health and wellness. A holistic approach requires decolonialization and would similarly merge the benefits of traditional knowledge with the technological advancements of western science and medicine to not only make this knowledge accessible and historically informed (thus acknowledging and reimbursing all its creators) but ensure that everyone can benefit from its fruits. Such an approach would be built upon mutuality, supporting cross-cultural collaboration without also reinforcing unequal colonial power dynamics. To foster the transformative potential of wellness practices, and thus ensure collective and environmental health and wellbeing, there needs to be action towards ensuring that the most marginalized people have access, first and foremost, to the basic rights that ensure good health. Ultimately, achieving this level of balance will require us to move beyond the narrow understanding of health and wellness promoted by neoliberal governmentality and capitalist spirituality.

[1] Importantly, I employ this concept in conjunction with those scholars who have heavily contested it for its even attribution of ecological responsibility, and subsequently flattening the racial and colonial dynamics undergirding modern western society (Davis et. al, 2019; Yusoff, 2019). I thus recognize the Anthropocene as it is (under white settler colonialism and western imperialism) and not as it is often used within much of the literature.

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NS?

# A Hoop with No Net

## David Jones

### Abstract

In the space where photographs elicit memory, I wade between the contours of the metaphor and our ever-present reality to look ahead. The photograph below portrays my cousin Bryan and our favorite pastime growing up. As kids, we would often challenge each other to one-on-one games of basketball. I can still remember my insistent hope that he'd miss every shot. We'd yell "brick!" at one another well before the ball left our dirty fingertips. Every miss became a celebratory moment, and each misstep an inch closer to trading possessions. Now more than ever, I hope he *makes* every shot. In basketball, as in life, we aim for something. From the moment we bend our knees and push away from the ground that holds us, there's no promise of whether the ball goes in; nor is there a guarantee that we will get to play the game again. The precariousness of Black life makes me wary of the possibility of a short game. I hope that we get to play all four quarters, on our terms; I hope that your ball is full of air and your shoes tied tight; I hope your arch is pure and that when the ball goes in the rim, it makes the sound of a hoop with no net.

### Keywords

photography, prose, African diaspora, basketball

*Photograph by author, 2019.*

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# A World Within a Block: Negotiating Space in Toronto's St. James Town

**Dominik Formanowicz**

## Abstract

St. James Town in Tkaronto (Toronto) was one of the biggest housing investments in so-called Canada in the 1960s. Each of the modernist high-rise buildings was named after a Canadian city, suggesting a vision of unity and coherence indicative of the country's national imaginary, while also reflecting the nation-building aspirations of the settler-colonial state. In this article, the historical development of St. James Town is analyzed using Henri Lefebvre's concept of production of space to depict how this site of nation-building and capitalism has been negotiated through an influx of im/migrant communities. Specifically, the term "cornerism" is used to convey the process by which St. James Town residents utilize spaces of interaction to facilitate exchange and foster information flows, thereby linking everyday life experiences with the formulation of a collective identity – as symbolized by the neighborhood's motto: "A World Within a Block". Two key points of discussion are considered. First, how the neoliberalized practices of urban development over the last few decades, namely the dominance of condo-towers in downtown Tkaronto, imperil "cornerism" as a practice of resistance by im/migrant residents in St. James Town; and second, the possible negative consequences of a large condominium investment planned in the central point of St. James Town on the socio-economic flows and rhythms of the neighborhood.

## Keywords

immigration, migration, urbanism, cornerism, nation building, condofication, neoliberalism

## Introduction

Racially, culturally, and ethnically diverse, St. James Town, a neighborhood in Tkaronto, Ontario, exists against the backdrop of a settler-centric Canadian identity. Originating in the 1960's as a housing project for young professionals, it was intended to reflect a straightforward vision of the young country's national subjecthood, including a deep-seated commitment to white supremacy. The largest housing development in so-called Canada at the time, with eighteen towers capable of accommodating twelve thousand inhabitants (Cori, 2018), St. James Town was intended to highlight the achievements of the growing nation by naming each of the building's towers after a major Canadian city ("The Halifax", "The Vancouver", etc.).

In many ways, the housing block reflects the ordering and confining spirit of modernist architecture (Shabazz, 2015). To demonstrate what I mean by this, I find Henri Lefebvre's (1991) theorization of space particularly relevant. According to Lefebvre, modernist architecture enforces a certain vision of the dominant group through the production of spatial arrangements, which is then mediated by the everyday lived experiences of those who navigate the space. In St. James Town, the dominant vision of the 1960s can be found not only in architectural arrangements that segregate the population in a way that determines how the space can be used (Shabazz, 2015), but also in the process of nation-building via place-naming practices: naming residential buildings after settler cities transforms the space into a carrier of a strong national vision, thereby reinforcing the white Anglo settler colonial character of Canada.

That said, St. James Town also illustrates how the production of space is conditioned, not only by the state's colonial settler agenda, but also, if not concertedly, through the everyday experiences of the inhabitants, reflecting Lefebvre's (1991) concept of "lived space". As demonstrated in the naming practices of St. James Town, spaces of enforced vision (like official names, architectural arrangements that separate inhabitants, etc.), and the lived experiences of its inhabitants, are intertwined in a dialectical process. This dialectical process is demonstrated in the way that spatial practices become a mediated expression of space and place, such as when inhabitants use street corners and public spaces for human interaction, economic activity, and information exchange, rather than merely crossing the street (as intended by the city planner).

What is particularly interesting regarding St. James Town is the current character of the area, which has shifted from housing young professionals (assumed to be white) to a mostly immigrant,[1] eclectic, and non-white neighborhood. As a part of a larger urban ecosystem, St. James Town was immersed in the 'racial capitalism' of the Canadian settler project (Melamed, 2015; Toews, 2018). This form of capitalism relies on an exclusively racist socio-economic order that hyper-exploits and oppresses non-white people in Canada for the purpose of maximizing profit for capital (Robinson, 1983). In turn, St. James Town has, over decades, become inhabited by non-white, migrant communities who subsequently changed the culture of the space.

Through the lived experience of its new inhabitants, St. James Town has organically transformed into an alternative vision of its intended place-making practices, becoming a space that counters the state's white Anglo settler agenda. We can apply a concept that I refer to as

[1] I use the terms "immigrant" and "migrant" interchangeably following the logic that every long-term movement is a "migration", constituting either (e)migration or (im)migration depending on the direction of the movement. Accordingly, I hold that immigrants and migrants are not two distinct groups. That said, I use both terms interchangeably, instead of picking one over the other, because I acknowledge that in so-called Canada, the public debate is largely shaped by the immigration authorities and their chosen terminology. In so-called Canada, "immigrants" is often deployed to refer to the people who came to stay ("landed immigrant status"), while "migrants" is used to refer to "temporary migrant workers", regardless of the actual realities of movement undergirding these trajectories.

"cornerism" to further illustrate this transformation: the practice of embracing and facilitating the spontaneity of urban interactions that transcends the original spatial design and constraints of a space. As a practice that facilitates interaction, exchange, and visibility, cornerism produces metaphorical and literal 'corners' that act as sites of resistance to the original intentions of how such a space should be used. In St. James Town, instead of solely using spaces in accordance with their designed purpose, whether residential (towers), movement (roads, paths, corridors), or leisure (parks, playgrounds), cornerism readily mixes them, actively seeking opportunities for interaction and exchange. This leads to utilizing literal street corners for *ad hoc* shops and food stalls, using benches for spontaneous social gatherings, and naming the local community centre "Corner", reflecting the importance of spaces of interaction for the local community.

This transformation into cornerism, while welcomed, was slow and not without turmoil. Originally, the influx of non-white, low-income immigrants resulted in the neighborhood being stigmatized as "dangerous" (Cori, 2018) and "poor" (St. James Town, 2020). Indeed, immigrants settling in St. James Town often found themselves in precarious economic situations due to a blend of racism, xenophobia, and classism. Yet, while the neighborhood's perception was shaped by the actual poverty of those who lived there, the racial prejudice of white settlers against St. James Town's inhabitants played a larger role in the stigmatization of the community. The lack of municipal investments in the community further led to the decline in infrastructure and services (Cori, 2018), which reinforced the negative perceptions of St. James Town.

Further, the decades following the 1990s brought a rise in neoliberalism that also had major impacts on St. James Town, leading, not to it cementing as a counter public of cornerism, but to changes that now threaten the community hub that the space has become. Neoliberalism promotes the idea that individuals need to work hard to secure their inclusion into society, while neoliberal policies, such as the neoliberal spatial fix, aim to transform spaces and urban landscapes to account for capital overaccumulation and a falling rate of profit (Harvey, 2001; Hackworth, 2007, Lehrer & Wieditz, 2009). The neoliberal spatial fix reflects the intrinsic need of capital to spread out over space to overcome its inherent crises of overaccumulation. It also means securing and deepening the presence of capital in certain locations to generate new profit-making opportunities (Harvey, 2001). By intensifying the presence of capital in urban spaces, the state is gradually pushed out as capital continues to find new sites of investment. Within this milieu, gentrification became one of the processes of ordering space by introducing residential buildings for more affluent populations, and increasing prices to push the poorer, typically non-white, inhabitants out of the city centres (Lehrer & Wieditz, 2009; Kern, 2016; August, 2018, DeVerteuil, 2018).

As regards St. James Town, gentrification has increasingly taken the form of "condofication" (Lehrer & Wieditz, 2009), with condo towers becoming the dominant mode of reshaping urban spaces. In turn, the nation-building ambitions of St. James Town no longer play a central role in the development of the neighbourhood, which means that its unintended impact of cultivating a booming community for non-white migrants is similarly waning. Like much of the surrounding area, St. James Town has been caught in a neoliberal spatial fix, which has driven recent development proposals, such as the Wellesley-Parliament Square Revitalization project (Mitanis, 2020). Released in 2018, the project proposes to develop a tall glass tower at the corner of Rose Avenue and Wellesley Street, placing it exactly in (or rather, having it replace) the core area in which the informal socio-economic activities of St. James Town's residents occur. Architecturally, the project mimics the condo developments in the surrounding area. This suggests that the heart of the St. James Town neighbourhood has already begun its shift toward "condofication", which will reshape the space

and threaten the character of the area.

Central to my analysis is the question of "who is desired, and who is allowed, in the St. James Town of today?" Responses to this question are constantly being negotiated in the area – not in support of, but against, the neoliberal economic agenda of racial capitalism. Upon the founding of St. James Town, the exclusive and ordering elements of said agenda reflected the *racial* element of exclusion and impoverishment by highlighting the 'otherness' of immigrants in a space designed for white Anglo settlers. With the neoliberal turn and the introduction of official multiculturalism, however, the *capitalist* element became more pervasive with wealth determining who can belong in the space. With the state's formal rejection of overtly racist rhetoric, access to wealth became the "justified" element of spatial exclusion, managing to more covertly marginalize the same non-white communities that were once explicitly disenfranchised. As a result, what was once negotiated in the formal access to 'being Canadian' (residency and economic and political rights) is now being renegotiated regarding access to space.

Nevertheless, not only is the access to space but the qualities of the space itself being negotiated by the migrant communities who live there. Communal spaces, both the official ones (such as the community centres called *Corner@200* and *Corner@240*) as well as the physical corners of the neighborhood's transit corridors, which are utilized in everyday interactions, seem to normalize cooperation, exchange, coexistence, and non-capitalist ways of being. For instance, trade is indeed an essential part of corner-based interactions, but it doesn't dominate the space. Existing-without-spending, deemed "loitering" in a capitalist city, doesn't seem to bother the users of the formal and informal corners of St. James Town. Even goods exchange itself, often taking place in a form of barter, repair, and reuse, gives some rest from the deeply internalized neoliberal pressure to consume. Aside from these practicalities of everyday life and living, the symbolism of the neighborhood's logo, "A World Within A Block", seems to actively embrace the values of cooperation and interaction, creating and upholding a corresponding sense of pride (for instance, via communal events organized by the Corners). Thus, in the context of Tkaronto, I posit that St. James Town illustrates how the dominant spatial vision of the capitalist settler state can be opposed and mitigated successfully by the everyday experiences of residents, leading to the emergence of an alternative vision that is decentralized and community oriented.

My article will be structured as follows: First, Lefebvre's elements of space production will be explained in relation to the spatial element of St. James Town and how the everyday experiences of the residents resist exclusion from the dominant, white Anglo settler project of Canadian nationhood. Afterward, historical knowledge and numerical data will provide an overview of the current demographic makeup of St. James Town to demonstrate the strong immigrant identity of the neighbourhood. Then, the naming of St. James Town as a nation-building practice will be explained to show how the state's vision of the community historically contradicts the lived experiences of its immigrant and non-white residents. From here, an analysis of "The Corner" community centres reveal how an alternative vision of St. James Town was initially birthed and grew from the lived experiences of residents who navigated these spaces. Following this, St. James Town, as a community of resistance to racial capitalism, will be situated in relation to the neoliberal shift, including the way neoliberalism draws on gentrification to deepen racial wealth divides along spatial lines within Canadian society. This will be further demonstrated via the example of the condo project investment proposed by *Greatwise Developments*, and the potential consequences it may have on the way the space has been used and reclaimed by the inhabitants of St. James Town.

## Analysis and findings

### *Lefebvre's triad of space production*

Like any other location, St. James Town can be

conceptualized as an arena for space production as described by Lefebvre (1991). For Lefebvre, space is a social construct that is constantly shaped by social activity, in which he offers three types (modes) of space to understand said activity: the conceived space, the lived space, and the more general "spatial practices". Conceived space exists within the realm of urban planners and designers, of "technocrats", as Lefebvre calls them (p. 38). This space is depicted in maps, plans, grids, scenarios, and rules, and is the one created by dominant ideas and conveyed by institutions (p.10). Marrifield (2000) calls conceived space repressive, and Rigg (2007) argues that it is crafted to fulfil the objectives of society. In essence, the conceived space decides what ideas are enforced, and whose visions are implemented, according to prevailing power structures.

Lived space is the space where everyday life happens, through which spontaneity and unpredictability come to shape the geography in question. Lefebvre (1991) describes lived space as follows: "[The] space is alive: it speaks. (…) It may be directional, situational or relational, because it is essentially qualitative, fluid and dynamic" (p. 42). As opposed to conceived space, lived space is the only space immersed in time, defined by the cycles of everyday activities. It is lived, which means it encompasses the sociobiological processes of growth and decay. Events, human lives, and spatial interactions are conveyed by the passing of time. Despite their differences, however, both conceived and lived spaces are intermediated by spatial practices, which consists of the material elements of space, and work to convey the patterns of flow through repetition and perpetuation, and by constructing routes and networks (Marrifield, 2000).

When applied to St. James Town, it appears that the Lefebvrian production of space has been dominated, in part, by a strong presupposed presence of the conceived space – of a certain vision imposed around what the neighborhood ought to be. This vision is strongly connected to the history of "Canada" as a spatial entity, where the prevalence of capitalism as a socio-economic framework is the means by which the nation constructs and seeks its identity (Toews, 2018). Capital needs exploitation to perpetuate accumulation, and racial categorization serves as an explanation for why some people are subject to hyper-exploitation for the benefit of others. This is why the identity of Canada as a capitalist project is historically linked to the dominance of white settlers – it allows them to exploit other groups for their own means.

The spatial history of St. James Town can be examined in three phases. First, it has been subject to nation-building, evident in the conceived vision of the city and its desired inhabitants being educated white professionals. Here, modernist architecture, and its formal division of spaces into work, transport, and leisure, functions to confine residents to spatial zones that are not easily transgressed and that impact how lived space can be produced. This vision, however, has clashed with the lived space of the residents, whose experiences have been predominately defined by migration, liminality, contestation, and community building. This has led to the emergence of a new conceived space produced through the practice of cornerism, which has been dominated by newcomers' agency, sense of resilience, and their mixed used of space. However, with the global trend of gentrifying urban spaces (Smith, 2002), the new form of space production in St. James Town is likely to take place in accordance with the neoliberal principles of "privately owned public spaces" (Mitanis, 2020). These privately-owned public spaces allow private actors (landlords, property managers, security) to exclude 'undesired' people, such as migrants and homeless persons, from St. James Town. In turn, access to 'public' space will be extended to the new, wealthy residents, while being selectively 'private' to others.

## *Towers in the park, im/migrants in the towers*

Throughout the 19th century, St. James Town, then known as "Homewood estate", was inhabited by Tkaronto's middle-and-upper-

middle class (St. James Town, 2020), and consisted mainly of Victorian houses (Cori, 2018). These houses stayed in place much longer than their original inhabitants. Given increasing developments of public infrastructure, the wealthy were able to move to more secluded areas of the city, while still being able to easily access services available in the city centre (railway, banks, etc.). Emptied townhouses were then converted into boarding homes and apartments, stretching from Regent Park, through Cabbagetown, up to St. James Town (Cori, 2018). The conditions of these buildings deteriorated throughout the decades, with many having increasing maintenance issues that forced residents to share amenities. As these buildings were primarily inhabited by folx who could not afford their own apartments, they served as a temporary housing solution for many occupants. The intended temporary nature of said housing captured the inhabitants, as well as the area in general, in a prolonged state of liminality, with residents having nowhere else to move, and landlords experiencing minimal pressure to maintain housing infrastructure (Bateman, 2014; Cori, 2018).

In the 1950s, on the wave of post-war optimism, St. James Town became subject to re-zoning plans. Influenced by Le Corbusier's concept of 'towers in the park', the neighbourhood faced a complete rearrangement, with heritage buildings being leveled from Bloor Street in the North to Wellesley Street in the South (Bateman, 2014). A decade later, city planners also attempted to level Cabbagetown's heritage infrastructure but were met with fierce opposition from residents and activists, including the future mayor of the city, John Sewell. Despite this, however, there was no organized opposition to the development of St. James Town as the city of Toronto's largest urban renewal project (Bateman, 2014; Cori, 2018), which resulted in the erection of eighteen high-rise towers across thirty-two acres. In turn, the population of St. James Town rose from under 1,000 to nearly 11,500 between 1967 and 1969 (Cori, 2018). Some of the previous inhabitants were moved to four of the newly erected public housing units built by the Ontario Housing Coalition (Cori, 2018), while others refused to be resettled and squatted in crumbling townhouses, delaying the completion of the investment (Bateman, 2014).

Eventually, between 1959 and 1967, the construction of St. James Town, in a form very similar to the one now known, was completed. Between 1959 and 1967, St. James Town became the biggest housing investment in so-called Canada, creating one of the highest-density neighbourhoods across Turtle Island (Barnes, 2011; Bateman, 2014). Each of the buildings was named after a Canadian city, purporting to represent the nation state, from Vancouver to St. John's. This not-so-subtle symbolism, mixed with the modernist separation of spaces of residence, work, and leisure, reflected the spatially deterministic conceived space of St. James Town. The development was designed for the newly graduated, single, white Torontonian, who would want to enjoy urban life during their first steps towards an inevitable suburban future (Cori, 2018).

**Figure 1: Photo by Harold Whyte (1965); Toronto Public Library**

But these white, professional bachelors never really arrived in St. James Town. According to Caulfield (1994), the envisioned population of the neighbourhood moved directly to the suburbs, typifying a broader trend in "North America" at that time. In contrast, St. James Town attracted lower-income populations, with many being new migrants to the country. This occurred as the Canadian state introduced official multiculturalism into its immigration policy, attracting large numbers of migrants from across the world and producing a widespread discourse of racial and cultural diversity (Kymlicka, 1995; Saunders 2017).

**Figure 2: Photo by Bob Olsen (1969); Toronto Public Library**

Eventually, St. James Town became an arrival city (Saunders, 2011) for newcomers from all over the world. The 2011 census of St. James Town noted that only 30% of inhabitants were born in the region known as Canada (Statistics Canada, 2011) with the 2016 census recording that 40% of residents were "Canadian-born" (Statistics Canada, 2016). The number of most recently arrived immigrants in the area (residing here for less than a year) reached almost 14% in 2016, with 7% being Toronto's average. These statistics support Saunders (2011) notion of the arrival city and recognizes St. James Town as one of the main sites of arrival for new migrants.

In the 1980s, St. James Town went into decline due to a lack of regional investment into the neighbourhood's infrastructure (Cori, 2018; St. James Town, 2020). In the late 1990s, however, interventions eventually took place, resulting in "a multi-service community centre, improvements to parks, and the maintenance and repair of St. James Town buildings" (St. James Town, 2020, n.p.). In 2004, a new branch of the Toronto Public Library and a new community center were opened at the corner of Sherbourne and Wellesley. At present, the buildings in the area constitute a mix of public housing and privately-owned housing corporations.

St. James Town now has over eighteen thousand inhabitants and a population density of over forty-four thousand people per square kilometre (Statistics Canada, 2016). It is worth highlighting that the 2016 census extends the perimeter of St. James Town up to Jarvis Street in the east, thereby increasing the population accounted for. However, keeping in mind that the area between Sherbourne Street and Jarvis Street is comprised mostly of townhouses, the inclusion of this population surely lowers the density measurements of the neighbourhood. According to the 2016 census, 51.6% of St. James Town's population is comprised of immigrants, which is Toronto's average, but, as mentioned before, the percentage of recent immigrants is twice as high compared to the overall city. Non-permanent residents constitute 8% of St. James Town, whereas Toronto's average is only 3.5%. Again, it is evident that over one in ten residents of St. James Town is in a precarious position of being new to the country of Canada. Only three out of four people are "Canadian citizens", with two out of three being a "visible minority", which is significantly higher than Toronto's average of 52% (Statistics Canada, 2016).

Further, and relatedly, 90% of households live in rented apartments, twice as many as Toronto's 47.2% average, with 44% claiming their housing to be unaffordable, and 23% calling their housing unsuitable. The median household income barely exceeds $41,000 CAD with Toronto's average being $65,800. Surprisingly, the percentage of people without a source of income is the same as the city's average of 4.7%, and government assistance is included in the incomes of only 13.7% (9.3% being the average). Despite unemployment rates being slightly higher than the city overall, the level of higher education

(bachelors or more) is almost 2% *higher* than the city's average (45.9% to 44.1%) (Statistics Canada, 2016).

The above statistics suggest a landscape of communities within St. James Town that are largely comprised of recent migrants living in economically precarious conditions. These communities, who are mostly non-white, live in St. James Town often without access to the full economic and political rights of "Canadian citizenship" because of their insecure and precarious migration status (e.g., foreign temporary workers, undocumented workers etc.). Quite literally housed within this complex socio-political landscape, the living conditions for the residents of the neighborhood are simultaneously poor, yet also, unaffordable.

## *Neighbourhood versus nationhood*

The original towers erected in St James Town in the 1960s promised "a modern, functional, 'radiant city' for 'the new man'", as Zahirovic writes regarding a very similar housing investment in the Dutch neighborhood of Bijlmermeer (Zahirovic, 2007, n.p.). Both projects are perfect examples of Lefebvre's notion of conceived space, not only in architecture and the "phallic erectility" of their forms, but also in their defining and ordering role in spatial practices (Merrifield, 2000, p. 167). In the case of Bijlmermeer, residents were confined into strictly residential towers, divided by large swaths of uninviting open spaces, while being deprived of common spaces to interact with one another or to exchange information. A complementary lack of public transport, justified by the assumption that residents would own a car, also cut the communities off from access to the city centre. These are only some examples of how architecture can order the movement and everyday life of newcomers. As regards St. James Town, we can apply this same logic to explore the symbolic meaning behind the decision to name the towers erected in the park after Canadian cities.

Place-naming can be instrumental in the occupancy of colonized land (Yeoh,1996). Studies show that symbolic representations in landscapes may "reinforce and naturalise prevailing social ideologies" (p. 298; also see Zukin, 1993). Such efforts of enacting spatial symbolism can be backed by nationalistic tendencies or aimed at enforcing a community identity. At times, they may achieve both, especially when nation-building takes place in opposition to a preceding regime. This was the case when post-independence Singapore attempted to distance itself and its collective identity from the former British colonial administration. Just as in Singapore, it can be argued that "Canada", which is still being formed as a nation-state, has "had to engage in a constrain[ed] struggle for political dominance, state power and ideological hegemony through a range of tactics" (Yeoh, 1996, p.298).

**Figure 3: Nation-building by place-naming**

The difference between Singapore and Canada, however, is that the latter has not radically severed its relationship to colonialism. On the contrary, it continues to perpetuate and rely on colonialism to establish itself as a country. This means that place-making for Canada works to transform the built environment "in the attempt to forge radical discontinuity with the colonial past" of a former colonial power (Yeoh, 1996, p. 298; also see Harvey, 1978). Here, nation-building and space-making continues to be constructed in opposition to the reality of Turtle Island and Indigenous communities' non-capitalist ways and traditional forms of knowledge. In other words, Canada's imperial

Anglo-Saxon legacy has, as a capitalist project, been used as a tool to justify and perpetuate its dominance over and across Turtle Island (Toews, 2018). With this in mind, we can note how naming the towers of St. James Town is a result of the Canadian nation state's project of racial capitalism; by naming each tower after a colonial city, a unified and coherent image of colonial Canada is produced and enacted (Figures 3 & 4).

The goal of such symbolism is to create the idea that Canada is one, single nation, just as such symbolism inscribes this idea into the space itself. By evoking the names of settler centres of governance, Canadian cultural production, and capital accumulation, the city of Toronto reproduced in St. James Town what the nation state wants to be understood as 'normal' – settler colonialism. In relation to this norm, everyone-and-thing either beyond or counter to the nation state (such as "foreigners", Indigenous folx, alternative norms of governance, different relationships to land or territory, etc.) are rendered abnormal. Such a narrative facilitates further ordering around who is deemed worthy of belonging, and thus deserving of equal rights, and who is not. Consequently, but not explicitly, this ordering also delineates who can be exploited by whom, thereby laying the groundwork for racial capitalism: unequal capital accumulation.

**Figure 4: Nation-building by place-naming**

As Yeoh (1996) observes , colonial rule in Singapore resulted in place-naming that derived from European public figures or administrators. At the same time, non-British spaces in the Singaporean urban landscape were represented by markers that had racial connotations, demonstrating "the colonial tendency to order society by separating the colonised into distinct, recognisable containers" (p. 300). Recognizable examples of such markers are "Chinatown", "Little India", "Korea Town", etc. Locally, one also finds more Mediterranean or Atlantic connotations, such as "Little Italy", "Little Jamaica", and "Little Portugal".

Independent Singapore was adamant about ending the colonial practice of using British names and so they replaced them with names stemming from local languages and cultures. But where Singapore disconnected from colonial symbolism in order to build a nation, the Canadian government embraced the legacy left by its British colonizers. This legacy is now needed to reinforce Canada's settler project, which continues to deny Indigenous peoples' sovereignty over their lands, thus allowing the state to claim ownership over these lands for the purposes of resource extraction and the accumulation of capital. This has ultimately solidified the nation's discontinuity with, and abjection of, Indigenous peoples, their cultures, and their territoriality.

**Figure 5: Ontario Street**

Metaphorically, the consecutive scales that constitute St. James Town show this same

historical pattern of claiming colonial identifiers for the purpose of furthering the Canadian state's settler colonial project. Placed in a city with an Indigenous name (Tkaronto), formed by a Christian-colonial legacy (St. James Town), St. James Town imploded in the 1960's with the conceived space of *Canadianness*, as it commemorated every major city of the country. St. James Town could have just as well been called Little Canada – if only the colonial mindset had not reserved such 'belittling" name practices solely for Othered spaces.

## Cornerism

How did the generations of immigrants who called St. James Town their home make sense of Canada's capitalist, colonial project? Through the everyday practices of their lived space, we can see how these communities have produced a counter-hegemonic conceived space of the neighbourhood, introducing their own vision of the place and, to some extent, making it official through the creation of self-governed community centres. I call this practice *cornerism,* and it involves the organic use of corners as mixed spaces of interaction and visibility that allow for the flow and exchange of information, goods, and networks. Saunders (2011) describes this pattern of utilizing public spaces of interaction as a typical practice of migrants, who often recreate similar spaces known from their homelands. In the case of St. James Town, these everyday practices have redefined the use of local spaces and places by introducing new forms of symbolism that have created alternative conceptions of the geography that run counter to dominant colonial constructions. Examples of this are outlined below.

In the last few decades, two Corners within St. James Town have emerged (*Corner@200* and *Corner@240*), becoming inviting spaces for meetings, bike repairs, and legal assistance, as well as acting as important hubs for "health, social services and recreational programs" (Murray, 2020, p. 3). *Corner@240* has free Wi-Fi that is easily accessible from the street, with the password "myhood240" written on the front door, allowing open access to anyone in the nearby area. All these described elements create the atmosphere of accessibility and openness. To this effect, in a report about the community centre, entitled *Envisioning and Promoting The Corner 2.0,* Murray (2020) asks: "How [can] a place so hectic and disorienting…feel so comfortable, welcoming, and safe?" (p. 9). Despite seeming to romanticize *The Corner@200* a bit, Murray's report rightfully acknowledges 'the virtue of cacophony' present at St. James Town, where "everyone and everything is accessible to everyone else" (p. 21).

Just next to *Corner@240*, there is a lively space at Rose and Wellesley (Figure 6), which is placed along the entrance to Food Basics. Right outside of the store, local street vendors put out their merchandise, elderly people hangout, and the daily paths of many of the residents cross. This crossing is a crucial spatial practice of cornerism: the proximity of the bus stop, of the affordable grocery store, of local shops and services – it all makes interactions hard to avoid. Still, the vivid local dynamic isn't simply a natural consequence of such an intersection. Rather, itis actively created around it, added to it, by street vendors and residents socializing, thus shaping, but also controlling, the rhythms of the street. This "creation around", this value added to a potential meeting spot, is the essence of cornerism.

**Figure 6: The corner of Wellesley and Ontario**

In writing this article, I did a walk through of St. James Town. A brief visit to the space at Rose

and Wellesley demonstrates that the place has a certain rhythm based on the errands and rituals of local community members, who all come from different cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. The 50-metre radius around the corner of Rose and Wellesley consists of a variety of stores that reflect the activity and needs of the neighbourhood and assures visitors that St. James Town is a transnational hub. However, there are some patterns that appear to be shared, whereby this space, delineated by a Food Basics on the one side, and Wellesley Fruit Market on the other, operates as a kernel, allowing informal economic exchanges, social gatherings, and information movement among the residents. Under the inconspicuous umbrella of Canadian poverty, one can observe remittance flows, ethno-entrepreneurship, and trans-locality (Levitt, 2001; 2011), as residents monetize whatever financial opportunities can be found.

A visit to the community centers located at 200 Wellesley Street and 240 Wellesley Street further demonstrates the comradery and communal intimacy of the space. The interior of *Corner@200* is filled with colourful posters, paintings made by community members, and pamphlets. Potted plants and landscaping add to the warm and welcoming atmosphere. The people working there are helpful and kind. The coordinator is welcoming and very professional, willing to describe how the place works, as they mention the multiple functions of *Corner@200*. It is a space that offers settlement assistance, connects newcomers to healthcare, cooperates with flu clinics and even has a newly established COVID-19 testing centre. Further, *Corner@200* provides many other essential resources and programs, such as a food bank, access to computers and a community kitchen, and music lessons for children. The coordinator also shows me dedicated rooms for community events and activities, the equipment reserved for said activities, and photographs of previous events.

We move onto *Corner@240* (Figure 7), another remarkable place with a humble name. Here we find more specialists and are guided by another professional and passionate coordinator. There is an IT specialist fixing computers and an electrician working on fixing housing equipment. The person working in the bike garage waves their hand. Amongst all this, there is "the tool library", which houses various tools that people leave behind or donate – carefully separated and stored in perfect order, so to be used later. The team is proud of the place but not nearly as proud as I am impressed. Team members describe their contributions to the space: "We fix everything that regular shops won't fix. We store the parts. Nothing gets wasted, and we give back to the community". I ask if they can define the 'community' and inquire whether someone would have to live in the area to access the space, its resources, and to receive help. They laugh and respond: "No. Recently we had someone from Scarborough come in." The services are free.

**Figure 7: *Corner@240* Community Centre**

The staff members working at *Corner@240* are recruited from and by the community. There is always someone available with skills to share and, as I learned during my visit, St. James Town is blessed with a number of relevant specialists. Further, some of the staff used to be on the receiving end of the Corner. Now, they work there. The sign at the Corner's door, the motto of the St. James Town community, sends a clear message of how the residents imagine the space and what they work for within it: *St. James Town: A World Within a Block* (Figure 8).

**Figure 8: Inside *Corner@200* Community Centre**

## *The Condofication Phase*

While the nation-building efforts of St. James Town were met and contested by the reality of cornerism, neoliberal interests continue to reshape state policies and thus, redefine urban landscapes. These neoliberal priorities are accompanied by the retreat of the state that was once a dominant actor in the realm of housing, public assistance, and spatial planning, and have led to an increase in corporate developers being able to redefine and reorganize space for their own profit-based interests (Lehrer & Wieditz, 2009, p. 144).

Currently, the conceived space of cohesion, imposed unity, and the preservation of settler colonialism, seems to be safe in the official framework of multiculturalism. The everyday vision of who "a Canadian" is, has became intermediate, perpetuated and secured by consecutive generations of officially welcomed newcomers with no memory of the place. Accordingly, they are not equipped to contest its colonial legitimacy or coherence. Relatedly, even when they are equipped to do so, it is unlikely that they will or want to. In the words of Brand (2005), migrants "are used to the earth beneath them shifting, and they all want it to stop – and if that means they must pretend to know nothing, well, that's the sacrifice they make" (p. 4).

Left uncontested by newcomers, the state's colonial imperatives (as disguised within the seemingly innocuous project of multiculturalism), leaves even more room for racial capitalism. This is reflected in the increasing deregulation of the housing market and pervasive notions of individualism and responsibility that have resulted in new crises within the public sphere. In this case, deregulation by the state creates more opportunity for capital (re)investment, as capital aims to reconstruct space in cycles of creation and annihilation in search for a new "fix" (Harvey, 1978; Lehrer & Wieditz, 2009). In other words, capital builds the landscape "necessary for its own functioning at a certain point in its history only to have to destroy that space at a later point in order to make way for new […] openings for fresh accumulation" (Harvey, 2001, p. 25). This mechanism described by Harvey as a "spatial fix" is caused by capital's "drive to resolve its inner crisis tendencies by geographical expansion and geographical restructuring" (p. 24).

It can be argued that the deregulation of the housing market and the absence of the state within the public realm have resulted in the "*neoliberal* spatial fix" (Lehrer & Wieditz, 2009; August, 2016), where the individualization of responsibility for one's own fate has become the new conceived space. The advent of this spatial practice, dominated by "new-build gentrification" (Lehrer & Wieditz, 2009, p. 142), has brought an omnipresence of condominium towers within Tkaronto (Figure 9).

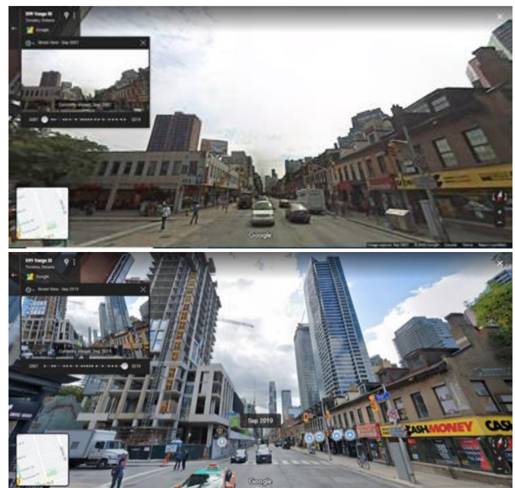

**Figure 9: Yonge Street in 2007 (top) and 2019 (bottom); Google Street View**

Writing about the 'condofication' of the Torontonian urban sphere, Lehrer and Wieditz (2009) describes the neoliberal spatial fix as: "1) Continued rapid suburban growth, 2) decline and disinvestment in the inner suburbs, and 3) considerable inner-city reinvestment, often in the form of gentrification" (p.141-142; also see Hackworth, 2007). They argue that condominium towers can be perceived as a new form of gentrification, as 'condofication' is generally accompanied by increasing urban poverty in surrounding spaces of accumulated wealth (p. 142). One might argue that gentrification, the spatial transformation tool employed by the new neoliberal conceived space, could bring prosperity to a run-down neighbourhood. But such an argument is misguided, as the very nature of gentrification "transform[s] working-class neighbourhoods into middle and upper-class" ones (Lehrer & Wieditz, 2009, p. 142), resulting in the displacement of low-income, mostly non-white, communities. This new reality has not yet arrived at St. James Town, but it is visible all around it. Condo towers are looming from every corner, surrounding the neighbourhood from the West to the North. The South edge seems, for now, to be defined by the townhouses of Cabbagetown, and the East border is delineated by parks and a cemetery.

While the first phase of negotiation of space described by Lefebvre has resulted in St. James Town becoming a robust and stable lived space that counters the hegemonic ideals of the city's conceived space, the effects of gentrification around, and thus on, St. James Town are yet to be observed. Accordingly, the last section of my analysis will describe the new development project in St. James Town, including its main spatial premises, to make the argument that these new changes could lead to the neighbourhood being, at least partially, gentrified.

## *A great, not-so-wise development*

In April 2018, *Greatwise Developments* submitted their application, proposing a new development to St. James Town as a part of the city's call for the "comprehensive revitalization" of Wellesley-Parliament Square (Mitanis, 2020, para 1). The goal of the project was described as prompting "the introduction of new public streets, open spaces, and a range of housing typologies" (para 1). Since then, the project has been revised, but its scope remains destructive to the current social and economic constitution of St. James Town. Namely, six new buildings, designed by IBI Group, are scheduled to be added to the existing infrastructure of the neighbourhood (para 3), including a 47-storey tower (Figure 10) situated between Rose Street and Ontario Street – exactly where the novel and socially innovative *Corner@240* resides.

**Figure 10: *Greatwise Developments* project; Urban Tkaronto**

The initial project included a 51-storey tower, but this was scaled down in the newest proposal, perhaps because most of the surrounding environment, including the original "towers in the park", do not exceed thirty floors. The five-storey podium is supposed to contain amenities and retail space. The condo tower will absorb the lower floors of the existing 240 Wellesley – the building currently containing the Food Basics shop that constitutes the spatial framework for the informal economy and the cornerism of St. James Town. It will also cut off "240" and its east-facing residents from sunlight, leaving a twenty-five-metre gap between the eastern façade of "240" and the new tower (Mitanis, 2020, para 3).

According to the plans, five lower buildings

will also be squeezed in-between the existing buildings, displacing some spaces of local utility, such as an open swimming pool and a sports field. Further, instead of the existing green and leisure infrastructure, a new park is planned, including street furniture and 'shade streets'. Three "publicly accessible private open spaces" are being proposed with a prominent "urban plaza", designed to be a place for a variety of programmed functions and informal gatherings (Mitanis, 2020, para 4) (Figure 11).

The public relations release regarding the development plan describes it as follows:

> The plaza fronts the extension of Rose Avenue from the south, a new public street that would replace the porte cochères for 240 and 260 Wellesley Street East. This new roadway will link north [part of the neighborhood] to St. James Avenue, where an elongated block of four-storey back-to-back townhouses is proposed to the west (Mitanis, 2020, para 5).

Not only are buildings going to be introduced, but existing networks of connections will be reshaped and redefined, influencing the possible trajectories of residents' movements. On top of this, "a new private street between the easternmost tower blocks at 650 Parliament and 280 Wellesley would bisect two more four-storey townhouse blocks. An eleven-storey mid-rise rental building would front this new roadway to the north" (para 6).

Adding 817 residential units, 24% of which would consist of two- or three-bedroom units (Mitanis, 2020), the project will completely dominate St. James Town, introducing new, wealthy residents, and new economic infrastructures that are predominantly only accessible to these new residents. Also, spatial trajectories of meaning and use will reformulate how space is being utilized, delineating *what* can happen in a space and *how* it will be policed. Community presence and horizontal, day-by-day self-regulation may be replaced by a more vertical structure of what is *desired* and what is *welcomed* by the developers, the new residents, and the security workers employed to carry out these values. This will lead to new, imposed perceptions of what is *possible* and what is *allowed* within this space, as opposed to reflecting the perceptions and needs of the inhabitants currently living there. In other words, the rhythms of St. James Town will change, most likely to be overseen by private security and surveillance infrastructure.

**Figure 11:** ***Greatwise Developments*** **project; Urban Toronto**

Such an intervention requires skillful public relations. In a statement following the second community meeting, *Greatwise Developments* highlights its family-run history (Pooni Group, 2018, p. 2) and its devotion to the betterment of current residents' lives. "We want you to stay in your community", the statement exclaims (p. 14). By promising new rental opportunities and homeownership options, the developer state it "will not displace current residents from their home or change rents, and the existing tenants will have [prioritized access to] opportunities for purchasing new units" (p. 14). *Greatwise Developments* is aware of the possible consequences of their actions as evidenced in their attempt to address gentrification-related

concerns. What the developer is also likely aware of is the fact that the current annual income of the neighborhood is more than a third lower than Tkaronto's average. The units might be there, but neither the rental possibilities nor the mortgages will be accessible to most of the current residents. Such a situation reflects the evasive nature of neoliberal urban development and the increasing gentrification of neighbourhoods that aims to secure neoliberal interests.

The developer also promises to improve the existing buildings by installing thermal windows and new elevators (Pooni Group, 2018, p. 24). However, these developments pose many questions: Why would a private company intervene in public housing in the first place? If the company is not directly profiting from these interventions, how motivated would they be to undertake the improvements properly? Lastly, who would take care of the maintenance of this improved infrastructure? The answers to these questions remain unclear, although the program objectives include "renovating and re-purposing common areas to be used by current and future tenants" and "[improving] security around buildings" (p. 24). Much of the project seems to be concerned with, and focused on, aligning the area with its neoliberal objectives and goals of creating a condo-zone for individuals with the means to participate in a neoliberal economy.[2]

Regardless of how the *Greatwise Developments*' project unfolds, some of the possible negative consequences seem inevitable. For one, most of the natural corners of St. James Town will disappear and be replaced by new transport corridors and 'privately owned public spaces'. That said, the community centres will likely stay, even if *Corner@240* is relocated. Still, the natural points of path-crossing, of visibility, the informal economy, and information exchange that constitute the cornerism of St. James Town, are destined to disappear, at least in the condofied part of the neighbourhood. The promised green spaces and street furniture sound deceivingly harmless, but with the similarly promised private security and introduction of poverty-averse condo residents, the narrative of "who is allowed" within the space will likely shift. 'Privately owned public spaces' seem to be the new conceived space that puts regulatory powers in the realm of private investors, property managers, and security employees.

Next, the cost of housing and services in the neighbourhood are likely to increase because they will be aimed at the financial capacities of the new residents (Lehrer & Wieditz, 2009; Kern, 2016; August, 2016). The composition of retail is also likely to change, and the ownership of newly emerging businesses will be taken out of the hands of the current residents of St. James Town. All these changes should force some of the residents out of the neighbourhood. Further, even if not physically displaced, residents may become functionally displaced. According to Kern (2016), "displacement may include outright evictions from shared space or symbolic exclusion from a sense of place or belonging" (p. 442). Here, displacement takes the form of "symbolic exclusion", where current residents are deprived of access to the very lived space that they have been creating for decades.[3] Put differently, 'publicly owned private spaces' are likely to reiterate the production of space again, ending the era of cornerism.

This rather bleak vision outlines some of the direst consequences of neoliberalism and gentrification on St. James Town. However, the history of the place shows that the dialectics of the elements that conceive space are never based on a simple conquest-and-replacement dynamic. Immigrants have created St. James Town, as we know it, based on, and despite of, Canada's capitalist, white settler project. In ongoing opposition to this project, residents of St. James Town have replied with the motto "A World Within a Block". So, while condofication will

[2] The document cited here was initially available at the website of Pooni Group, "an urban planning and communications company" (2020), but it has been removed while this text was being prepared.

[3] The city of Toronto is rich with examples of such practices, just to mention developmental interventions in Downtown West (Mazer & Rankin, 2011) or Regent Park (Lehrer et al., 2012).

inevitably change St. James Town, we must not underestimate the potential of the lived space of that "World" to respond, adapt, and resist to new spatial conditions.

## Conclusions

The historical development of St. James Town illustrates a trajectory of how the Canadian state has imposed its white-Anglo, settler vision and capitalist project onto the landscape. This vision, evident in the naming practices of the built environment, quickly became reshaped by the residents of the neighbourhood, who brought their own stories, experiences, and struggles into the environment, developing an alternative and robust conceived space that can be understood through cornerism. Cornerism regards spaces as comprised of interactions and exchange, with spatial inclusion being fundamental to its framework. What is exchanged in these spaces is not only goods and financial assets, but also information, knowledge, networks, and access. This prevailing narrative, summarised in the motto of St. James Town being "A World Within a Block", reaches outside the borders of the neighbourhood; it acknowledges the strong transnational and trans-local ties of the area and its residents, providing the infrastructure of this transnational existence, making St. James Town a hub within Tkaronto's migration reality.

The project proposed by *Greatwise Developments* threatens this. What is at stake can be summarised with a reformulated version of the question I posed at the beginning of my analysis: "who is desired, and who is allowed, in the St. James town of the *future*?" At first, St. James Town was meant to attract educated, white Canadian men who never really moved in. Then, St. James Town became a space for newcomers, who created new homes in Tkaronto and beyond, while keeping strong ties to their homelands. The spaces that these newcomers created replaced Canada's grand visions of settler colonialism with everyday inclusion, demonstrated in the functionalism of physical and metaphorical corners. The introduction of condo-towers, new townhouses, and "privately owned public spaces" will most likely cause us to reflect on the question of "who is allowed?". But in thinking about this question, we must consider who will have the agency and resilience to answer and respond.

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## Author Biography

Dominik Formanowicz is a PhD student in Human Geography at York University, interested in transnational ties between the Global South and Global North, particularly in how people navigate immigration regimes, securitization of borders and other colonial frameworks. After acquiring two master's degrees (a Law degree in Poland and a Human Geography in the Netherlands) and years of diverse work experiences, he seeks projects at the intersections of disciplines. Privately, he is a volunteer at St. James Town Community Corner, an author of a novel published in 2017 and a blog, and an immigrant.

# PostCOVID

NS?

# Unmasking Intimacies of Death and Dying

SK Sabada


## Abstract

This article was written during the early days of quarantine (circa Spring 2020) as a direct response to the concerns I and other disability justice advocates, and I began to feel around the treatment of disabled people amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Chief among these concerns was the killing and letting die of disabled folx, as well as other "expendable" persons, such as frontline workers. Grounded in a radical approach to disability justice, below I analyze the constructions of death, dying, and personhood during the start of the global pandemic through the lens of “bare life” and the “state of exception". Drawing on these concepts, I examine the Canadian state’s response to sickness as an invocation of catastrophe politics, something, which I argue, has led to an irrevocable change in how the deaths of marginalized populations, especially disabled folx, may be justified as inevitable, despite being completely preventable. These attitudes, which allow us to accept death for some and not for others, are another form of normalizing the culling down of life through state-sanctioned control. I thus conclude that COVID-19 has proven to be a state exercise in violence against “expendable” populations.



## Keywords

bare life; state of exception; catastrophic politics; disability justice

## A conversation in unmasking

When I am in class, at work, or generally near someone who is not a part of my immediate family or circle, I bite my tongue to suppress the many compulsions that I have, and that I know the non-disabled, neurotypical person who is (usually) nearby, does not. I ball my hands into fists to stop them from reaching toward the spaces I ought not to exist in; to stop myself from letting them shake and to try and release the energy vibrating throughout my body. Engaging in such behavioural modification in response to self-surveillance is not a new or ground-breaking phenomenon; indeed, it is so well-known within neurodivergent communities that we call the practice “masking". Masking functions similar to other social-survival strategies, such as “code-switching” and “passing” among non-white and trans communities, which are comparably aimed at navigating dominant culture in space and time. Further, the neurodivergent mask also functions similar to its material counterpart, the facemask: it may hide or reveal something about the wearer, and how it “looks” may change over time, based on affect and depending on location. However, unlike literal masks, the metaphorical-embodied masks of neurodivergent people operate in relative performativity. For many of us, such masking is critical to our survival, and we have been performing it for so long that we may be unable to stop or have long since forgotten what it means to stop. For some, unmasking may not be possible at all.

As an autistic person who verbally communicates, I rarely make the conscious decision to mask. It is something I do to protect myself in regular life, whereby I have long learned to prioritize my safety over my desire to exist unrestrained by ableist conventions of conduct. However, in the wake of COVID-19 (hereafter, COVID) forcing everyone into self-isolation (or at least, in Ontario, where I currently reside), I have had to cope with the trauma that this highly contagious virus has actively produced, which, in turn, has allowed me to begin to unmask. Within this viscerally violent socio-health climate, I have permitted myself permission to deal with the more sordid experiences of being mad and disabled during a global health crisis that takes my apparent sub-or-non-humanity as a given; ranging from stimming to performing rituals to insomnia, all of which has been triggered by the increased discussion of death within the media.

The ironic thing about death is that our culture, particularly within the context of North America, is permeated by a morbid fascination with death while simultaneously remaining incredibly death shy. Even more so, this fascination with death takes careful consideration of the deaths of marginalized people, namely Black and Indigenous people, poor people of colour, migrant workers, sex workers, trans folx, and disabled people. It is no secret that Indigenous, Black, and disabled lives have especially been made and remain precarious within our white settler ableist society (Weheliye, 2014; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018). From the colonization of Turtle Island to the transatlantic slave trade and the institutionalization, social sterilization, and mass euthanization of disabled people that led up to and persisted throughout the second world war, we have known what it means to lead conditional lives (Grue, 2010, p. 37).

For as much as western popular culture derides and sensationalizes death, it cares very little for it, particularly when it happens to vulnerable groups that have been discursively constructed as “the undesirable” through hegemonic notions of normalcy and the compulsory ableism, sanism, and racism therein. As specifically regards compulsory ableism, such hegemony is achieved through the naturalization of able-bodiedness as the only acceptable way of being (Campbell, 2008), which then works in tandem with other normalizing oppressions, like whiteness and sanism, to discursively regulate embodiments that counter it.

In the wake of my unmasking, I have had to reckon with these truths more than ever before and, more specifically, their role in my care networks with other marginalized and disabled people. Although I have always been aware of the precarity of our lives, the fact of said precarity has

shifted its position from my peripherals to the forefront of my conversations with others. No longer am I finding myself trying to assess and meet the needs of the people in my care network who also experience disability, but I also need to focus more clearly on my own, ever-increasingly hard to meet, needs – and I am not the only one. When many of our lives are under duress, meeting each other's access needs becomes more and more difficult. For instance, how can we begin to consider the best way to support a friend as they try to get medical care for a flare-up when even meeting with a doctor is nearing impossible?

It is in the roots of critical disability studies and disability justice activism that I begin to find answers to questions such as this. These perspectives make clear the necessity in examining the implications of having a body-mind orientation that is neither desired by nor protected from the state's violence and what this then means within our postCOVID worlding. Accessibility cannot be parsed out from its core motivation: to give disabled people the access we require to live in the world; to always secure said assistance, whether be it through law or technology, design, or education; to be able to live—actions that often indicate an individual's movement away from precarity and, by extension, from death. It is for this reason that disabled people and those who support us (namely migrant and non-white care workers) have no choice but to push back against the dominant discourses that are emerging during this pandemic regarding the "scarcity" of medical resources and the ethics of deservedness.

That this is the case has become increasingly more evident as the world has become both more medical and more digital. For example, folx who rely on ventilators (beyond COVID), may find themselves making plans to move, despite stay at home mandates, in the event that they need to access hospitals in the United States because they are at risk of having their ventilators taken from them.[1,2] Similarly, older folx who live in care homes may also feel a heightened sense of isolation as they are cut off from the outside world because the risk of contracting the virus is so high. These people—alive by all accounts—are taking on the role of living ghosts, forced to cheat unnatural deaths by violent logics, of total and unflinching supremacies based on the dehumanization of disabled people and the elderly.

Taking these and the other deathly realities of COVID life as my point of departure, I press the importance of acknowledging that there is no neutral position regarding death because death, just as life, is never a neutral state of existing. This pandemic has provided ample opportunity for nation-states and popular culture to reaffirm systems of oppression aimed at controlling and limiting access to support systems for marginalized groups most affected by the crisis. As someone whose body-mind orientation could easily render them disposable through the logic of ableism and eugenics, I have myself become somewhat of a living ghost. Yet, at the same time, as a *white* disabled person, I too am complicit in the harms experienced by non-white folx, who are also at-risk, largely due to the working conditions mobilized under COVID. Even if I do not directly rely on care workers or other essential workers that provide access to things, my whiteness renders me complicit in our current climate of racial violence, as this crisis is being sustained by the white supremacist, colonial, and capitalistic domination of non-white workers.

The palate of the Canadian government, which functions primarily through its exploitation of Black, Brown, Indigenous, and Asian workers, can do so because it forces marginalized people to believe that our survival depends on the state. It is for this same reason that government officials have framed its exploitation of non-white workers on the COVID frontlines as "essential", while simultaneously treating them without dignity. By framing the pandemic and this section of the labour force in this way, those who rely on the

[1] New York State Ventilator Allocation Guidelines 2015, p. 42.

[2] Guidance for the Ethical Allocation of Scarce Resources during a Community-Wide Public Health Emergency as Declared by the Governor of Tennessee, 2016.

medical institution (i.e., those most at risk of contracting the virus) experience subjugation through the "ethics" of deservedness in a crisis that the state frames through a scarcity of resources. This then fuels disabled people, who require access to food services and healthcare, to exploit and expose racialized and poor essential workers to avoid possible contraction of the deadly virus.

In turn, disabled people and non-white workers are concertedly implicated in and targeted by the death logics of COVID: The only way for disabled folx to survive is to exploit largely racialized and Indigenous workers and to put both them and ourselves at risk. Similarly, frontline workers in the medical world are called upon to fight COVID without proper protection or resources, rendering them at risk physically and mentally, while also acting on behalf of state interests that live and let die according to ableist, ageist, and racist ideologies. Further, despite the considerable differences in power between medical frontliners and disabled patients, both outcomes are okay by the Canadian state because, even if either disabled people or non-white workers contract the virus and die, our lives held little to no (real) weight in the first place.

It is within this conversation of dual precarity that my sense of unmasking finds its grounds. Amidst this pandemic, one which feels increasingly more digital due to quarantine and self-isolation protocols, I am discovering affective shifts in our culture related to the intimacies of death and dying. I am increasingly concerned about these intimacies because of the shift in the way we not only provide care (in both life and death) but also in how new this territory is concerning catastrophe politics and what that means for those navigating the blunt of local landscapes of death and dying. I especially fear the kinds of masks we will be expected to cultivate during times of grief and crisis; I fear how we may come to accept death as an isolating experience (even more so than it has already been featured in our death-shy culture). Specifically, I ask: "what new intimacies will emerge around COVID from our culture's heightened fear of subjugated bodies, living and dead, and how this shift might further erase the rights of, not only the actual dead but the 'socially' dead; the living ghosts, like me?"

## Dying during a pandemic

### *Unmaking personhood through death*

Before discussing how the rights of the literally or socially dead factor into catastrophe politics, it is important to recognize how death (that is, what it means to be a dead person) is currently articulated because the ways we recognize death have violent implications for disabled people. Given that death is often interpreted in multiple ways; from the literary and the fictional to the spiritual and religious; from the psychological, biomedical, and technological, to the social, political, and cultural, I wish to focus on the current biomedical tools that are used to define what it means to be dead. Specifically, I focus on the framework that the legal courts use to decide when and how lifesaving intervention may be used in the case of someone who is dying or is considered neurologically dead. The courts refer to criteria published in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* guidelines, which constitute brain death as grounds for a death-diagnosis (Washington, 2018). The neurological definition identifies three kinds of brain death: whole-brain death, higher-brain death, and brain-stem death, with whole-brain death being the grounds for the official diagnosis of death. According to the Royal Canadian College of Physicians (2015), "whole-brain death implies that the entire brain, cortex and brain stem are involved with the complete and irreversible cessation of function of the brain at all levels".

Interestingly, in the *McKitty v Hayani* (2019) decision, the preceding judge, Justice Lucille Shaw, concluded, based on these guidelines and, more specifically, the above working definition of brain-death, that a brain-dead individual does not qualify as a "person" who can assert their Charter rights. This ruling is especially significant for my analysis because it, and the case in which it was based, ended up having strong implications for the current death-scape of

the COVID-19 pandemic. Back in 2017, McKitty was found unconscious on a Brampton sidewalk where it was later discovered at a hospital that she had significant brain damage caused by hypoxia. Her physician, Dr. Hayani, placed McKitty on a ventilator and for a while, her brain stem continued to function, allowing her to breathe infrequently without the machine.

After suffering a second hypoxic event, however, McKitty was placed back on a ventilator, but this time was unable to regain the capacity to breathe independently. By September 2017, the doctor conducted the diagnostic tests required to determine whether McKitty met the criteria for whole-brain death, and they concluded that she did; however, McKitty's parents and substitute decision-makers sought an injunction that would prevent Dr. Hayani from removing life support from their daughter and this injunction was granted. McKitty's parents sought additional treatments and requested that her death certificate be rescinded. They argued that their daughter would not be dead until her heart stopped beating based on their religious beliefs. The constitutional question in the Superior Court challenge was in respect to the requirements used to determine death and, ultimately, the family's beliefs were overruled, and Ms. McKitty was taken off life support against her faith, as well as her parents' wishes.

The precedent this outcome set is troubling, not only regarding the injustices experienced by the McKitty family but in relation to how the outcome of the case provided a basis for the total reconfiguration of what it means to be a dead person. In the biomedical sense of death utilized by the court against the McKitty's, a person considered dead is not considered a person in the capacities that would allow them to be recognized as being human at all. Despite the justifications proposed by ethicists and physicians alike, in cases like McKitty's, the fact remains that, McKitty, and others like her, did not die on their terms. *Their lives were forcibly taken.* The qualifying factors for such death were not necessarily based on the notion that McKitty required *support* with breathing, but rather, that her *perceived* lack of intellect – of thinking and of doing – denied her and her family the right to act in accordance with her beliefs (beliefs that she had held in her waking life). Even then, this factor was only deemed significant based on the perception of the care provider, not McKitty (re: a medical directive) or her kin.

In Justice Miller's statement on the definitions of total brain death within common law in *McKitty v. Hayani,* 2019, they wrote that:

> The determination of legal death is not simply, or even primarily, a medical or biological question. The question of who the law recognizes as a human being – entitled to all of the benefits and protections of the law – cannot be answered by medical knowledge alone. Facts about the physiology of the brain-dead patient are needed to determine what obligations are owed to the brain-dead patient, but the enquiry is not ultimately technical or scientific: it is evaluative. Who the common law ought to regard as a human being – a bearer of legal rights – is inescapably a question of justice, informed but not ultimately determined by current medical practice, bioethics, moral philosophy, and other disciplines (para, 29).

Doctors have no right to unilaterally claim what constitutes death, yet they are afforded the absolute right to evaluate whether the state can take a life. Their evaluation is also often based, not on their medical expertise or hypocritic oath, but on outlying factors related to the cost of keeping the individual alive; the need to open up space for another critical patient; or on whether another patient's survival is considered more worthy of providing intervention – all of which were confirmed in an open letter from ARCH Disability Law to the Ontario Provincial government, citing how the current triaging program is designed to exclude disabled folx from receiving critical care based

on their respective disabilities[3].

For physicians, ventilator users are being evaluated based on their net worth. Here, the chances of survival are circumstantial at best. Would a patient be taken off the machine at another hospital? Or under another doctor? What would have happened if they were given all treatments before their attending doctor decided to check whether or not they met the criteria for a death diagnosis? Of course, in acknowledging the extent to which such sensitive decisions have been left up to attending physicians to make, it should also be noted that blame for the inadequate treatment of disabled people does not solely fall on healthcare workers. These decisions would not have to be made at all, if the state provided enough adequate resources in the first place. Instead, the state puts healthcare workers in agonizing positions wherein the very lives that they are responsible for are subject to the whims of a genocidal social order that shows little in its capacity to understand the significance of providing care for, not only as many people as necessary, but in ways that are human and dignified.

The McKitty v. Hayani case best emphasizes the problem. This decision was made pre-pandemic and indicates that those who are afforded the recognition of being a human being are beholden to notions of functionality. When the recognition of human life is only understood through the lens of functionality, it puts both disabled and elderly folx who need care at risk. According to state regulations, if one is perceived to be low-functioning by attending healthcare workers, this can determine their access to life-saving and life-extending care. Take, for example, recent reports from the United Kingdom, wherein autistic adults and adults with learning disabilities were automatically given "do not resuscitate" notices should they require COVID-related care (Tapper, 2021, "Coronavirus: Autistic Support," 2020). Although this was widely condemned by the Care Quality Commission (Tapper, 2021), it should have never even happened. There was no adequate justification for applying blanket DNR notices to autistic people and people with learning disabilities beyond the fact that they were disabled, and subsequently considered "less functional". In this and in many other postCOVID instances, disabled people are being constrained by pervasively ableist and capitalist understandings of disability that favour high-functionality, which, in turn, means that being disabled, being possibly "low-functioning", can be taken as an indictment against one's access to care.

Fast forward to the present, people who are critically ill with COVID, most of whom are the elderly, the disabled, the poor, the non-white, and migrant workers, exist on the same continuum of life and death that has long haunted our medical system. The sicker one is with the virus, the closer they are to death, and the less they are to be recognized as a person, just as the more marginalized one is, the more likely they will be infected with COVID. We are hearing and reading more stories of people dying (whether they are succumbing to the virus "naturally" or are being culled) at alarmingly progressive rates, specifically in long-term care homes and in migrant and non-white workplaces, and in more uncertain and terrifying conditions, no less.[4][5] Within this terrifying milieu, the careful intimacy between those dying and their support networks is being destroyed as the former is forced to die alone.

Further, while essential workers are crucial to the containment of the virus, they are being put in increasingly precarious positions. They are overworked to the point of exhaustion and are being ordered to make life and death decisions because the state did not prepare them with enough supplies to save lives and protect themselves. Hence, they too are being treated as

[3] ARCH Disability Law. (2020, April 8). OPEN LETTER: Ontario's COVID-19 Triage Protocol.

[4] Alexiou, G. (2020). *Doctors Issuing Unlawful 'Do Not Resuscitate' Orders For Disabled COVID Patients 'Outrageous.'* Forbes.

[5] Kirkey, S. (2021). *Ontario urged to suspend the need for consent before withdrawing life support when COVID crushes hospitals*. National Post.

non-human subjects as their labour becomes the ground that can be used to constitute their exploitation by the state. Relatedly, the rate of infection among marginalized folx, including racialized frontline workers, is astronomical; reports from the CDC and WHO were wrong in their initial claims that the only *real* at-risk groups are those who are chronically ill and elderly.[6] Indeed, it is the chronically ill and elderly *without support* who are dying; it is the Brown Amazon courier who is getting sick, the *poor* disabled person in isolation struggling, and the Black and Indigenous communities whose bodies are plagued by centuries of systematic violence and neglect who have the "pre-existing conditions" necessary to succumb to the deadly virus.

It should come as no surprise that the pre-existing legal definitions of death have had horrible implications for the intimacies of death and dying in the wake of COVID. On the one hand, who gets to live (who deserves a ventilator and who does not) is steeped in ableist, ageist, capitalist, and racist state sanctioned definitions of life and death that do not serve everyone equally or equitably. However, on the other hand, the inadequacy of the pandemic management and treatment of those at-risk of COVID has put essential workers in a position where they (and by proxy, the rest of us) are forced to accept new intimacies that are primarily sustained through isolation, thereby leaving us with a totalizing form of grief that we are unequipped to handle.

## *Bare life in the catastrophe zone*

In examining questions of death amid COVID, it is important to consider Giorgio Agamben's concepts of "bare life" (1998) and "state of exception" (2005), especially regarding how they appear in Alexander G. Weheliye's (2014) seminal work in *Habeas Viscus*. Here, Weheliye mobilizes Black feminist theories of the human to question larger constructions of the human/man and, more specifically, how western categories of the human actively render certain groups non-or-not-quite-human to give other groups more power and control.[7] In his explanation of Sylvia Wynter's critical intervention into theories of western humanism, or "the genre of human as Man", Weheliye acknowledges that the epistemic order of "the biological selectedness of man" also emerges from that which it categorically separates, including other non-white people, poor people, trans and queer people, and disabled people (p. 28).

This observation is important because it provides a way to understand the figure of *homo sacer* (sacred man) as it relates to bare life and a state of exception. Agamben (1998) uses the figure of *homo sacer* to describe a figure "who *may be killed and yet not sacrificed*, and whose essential function in modern politics we intend to assert" (p. 21). The life of the *homo sacer* is rendered bare by their isolation both from the state and others, ergo, bare life. Alternately, a state of exception refers to the process by which a sovereign "decides when the rule of law is suspended" (Downey, 2009, p. 111). When a state of exception becomes the rule, the boundaries between what is included and excluded (i.e., bare life) begin to blur. That blurring creates a zone of indistinction in which those within boundaries of life and death, are both subject and excluded from the larger projects of the state (Weheliye, 2014, p. 34).

Regarding the pandemic, the Canadian government must exercise a state of exception in reference to both patients and health workers as the site of the hospital transforms into a catastrophe zone. The catastrophe zone is best

[6] In an update published by the English Office for National Statistics, research showed that 60% of those who died from COVID-19 were disabled (Ayoubkhani & Bosworth, 2021).

[7] Weheliye's (2014) work is grounded in a terrain of Black feminist studies committed to examining how anti-blackness and white supremacy are woven into the very core of western humanist frameworks. It would thus be inappropriate to utilize his insights and general insights to conflate the dehumanization of white disabled folx with the abjection and subjugation of Black and other non-white groups. For this reason, I turn to his work not because all configurations of the non-or-sub-human should be treated as the same, but rather to explore how these experiences of non-human personhood circulate in relation to one another.

understood as a space in which the boundaries between bare life and "normal" life become blurred through the indistinctions caused by the space serving as a state of exception. The pandemic created an environment that defamiliarized the hospital grounds in such a way that all life that moves through it, moves through zones of catastrophe, and those lives, in turn, are affected to varying degrees of intensity. More specifically, the catastrophe zone becomes a limbo of sorts, in which patients and staff alike are never featured as living subjects, merely subjects who will or will not survive.

To exercise total control and containment in this death-laden climate, the state requires a suspension of the law (which we might read as the suspension of legally or even morally “correct” beliefs and decisions, creating a state of exception). The state of exception in this way, identifies that those within the catastrophe zone are prohibited from the kinds of life that exist outside of it (Agamben, 2005, p. 1). In turn, the presence of death among our postCOVID medical world becomes twofold, with both clinical death and social death at the forefront: a person who requires support to be sustained can already be made dead before they are, as those left working are given the authority to take life, while being denied the resources to save it. At the same time, medical workers are also forced to work longer hours without the adequate resources to protect themselves from contamination, and, subsequently, are disavowed of the kind of life they were once granted outside of the catastrophe zone.

Frontline healthcare workers thus embody a dual state of exception because, although they may be instruments of the sovereign state, they are also without state protection. In other words: “this 'state of exception' does not refer to an exclusion, but rather an abandonment that implies survival in a 'legal limbo' where 'life is held in suspension, neither inside nor outside the polis, neither fully alive nor dead’” (Lewis, quoted in Adams & Erevelles, 2017, p. 355). The labour of essential workers amidst COVID positions them within the frame of bare life because they are essentially not yet in a state of dying but are always on the precipice of doing so. As pointed out by Goodley, Lawthom, and Runswick-Cole (2014), it is important to recognize the use of the state of exception as it relates to health workers in tandem with the idea of slow death: “a concept that refers to the physical wearing out of a population and the deterioration of people in that population, which is very nearly a defining condition of their experience and historical existence” (p. 981). For those doing frontline health labour in a state of exception, and who have essentially been abandoned to work until they can work no more, using slow death as a means of naming harm is critical when accounting for how these workers cope with and push against the toll of a mismanaged pandemic, thus highlighting the evolving scope of social death via COVID.

That said, despite sharing the experience of bare life, it would be problematic to argue that dying patients experience bare life in the same way as their care providers do. Although patients and staff each retain their identities as products and mechanisms of the state under COVID (as nobody is immune from its biopolitical power), the bare life experienced by patients is more visceral, more literal, than that of the staff. Patient lives are generally understood to be less important to the state because they are less commodifiable (as well as also less monied, less white, and generally less privileged). Even the lives—or, better yet, the *deaths* –of patients otherwise considered young and/or non-disabled (which is often conflated with healthiness) only matter in terms of the volume at which they are happening. For disabled and elderly (coded “unhealthy”) populations, the loss is not even registered, as it is considered insignificant outside of the context of the value that they add to their respective communities. So, unlike health providers, who are pushed to the brink of bare life during COVID, the patients of this same crisis have long resided in or near the zone of social death that constitutes this ghostly social realm.

Nonetheless, bare life is a common attribute across medical worldings postCOVID. For as

much as care remains lucrative concerning care work as an industrial complex, the actual value attributed to care-workers and their patients alike, remains largely cultural, and our culture is hierarchical and inhumane. Thus, if anything, the deaths of medical frontline workers may be considered "more" tragic, but there is still no real political significance afforded to them. Similarly, while disabled and elderly populations were advised to self-isolate in the wake of COVID, there was still initial irritation from the invulnerable population (invulnerable here is a reference to those not identified as at-risk, i.e., largely the young and able-bodied, and implicitly monied) before it became clear the COVID-related deaths were wide-reaching.

The original dismissal of social distancing from invulnerable people highlighted the ableist underbelly of our culture: vulnerable people's deaths were expected, even naturalized to an extent. Ever so casually, vulnerable groups were simply meant to die. Even in the case of the invulnerable who argued in support of social distancing to "protect" our fragile states, this further fed into the belief that we have a natural disposition towards death. Social distancing was articulated as a defensive position invulnerable people were supposed to do to protect us but realistically functioned as an offensive position backed by the government, who suggested they could control the volume of deaths, not including those who were already inclined to die.

In some sense, dying while old and disabled is likened to cheapening the full effect of dying while young and healthy. Similarly, dying while on the medical frontlines during a pandemic is likened to an unavoidable or necessary cost of life for the state as such. Hence, those who are disabled and/or work within the catastrophe zone become the *homo sacer* of the time of COVID precisely because they have been disavowed of their lives (both literally and politically). Keeping with the definition of *homo sacer* as "someone 'who may be killed and yet not sacrificed'" (Reeve, 2009, p. 204), we can easily acknowledge disabled people and health workers as those who have been abandoned both by the state that triages and mitigates care and through the corresponding death logics that decide what constitutes a life worth living.

The undergirding implication in the connections I have drawn here, specifically between disabled people and health care workers under COVID, is that catastrophe politics are the binding force between the two groups: although we have all entered into a state of bare life in the site of the catastrophe zone, i.e., the COVID-19 pandemic, disabled and elderly people are not killed or let to die, so much as they are *culled*. As soon as our bodies require more substantial support (i.e., ventilation), the act of dying (with the result being simply dead) transforms into dying, necessitating culling (to be killed). Ironically, the decision to use life-saving intervention is coded as an invitation addressed to health workers to partake in the act of killing. The decision to provide support exists in tandem with the exception (ultimately configured as necessity) to kill.

Other than COVID, I would argue that the politics involved in killing the systematically socially dead (such as disabled people) and the catastrophically socially dead (such as healthcare workers in crises) are different, and that the overlap here, is due to the sheer volume of infections generated (and how). In previous cases like H1N1 and SARS, the transmissions of the infections had been relatively small, and the progression of these respective viral transmissions had been much slower. Because COVID has infected and "killed" so many people, in such a short range of time, the fear of the pandemic seems to invite the state, and by proxy, health workers, to increasingly rationalize situating some people as inherently more disposable than others. Moreover, it is not like either the workers or the state will ever truly be held accountable for acting upon such ideologies. In fact, what we will have in archiving the evidence of such atrocity will be located in state data collection databases. Here, it is only of significant consideration to acknowledge that the state has chosen to reflect the deaths of disabled people within their statistical analyses amid a

pandemic, and not to prevent or respect said deaths in any meaningful way.

## Troubling what it means to die in catastrophe politics

Now, I want to turn to the underlying affective politics at play within the climate of catastrophic social death I have described above. So much of my thoughts have been formed in response to the fears I, and those in community with me, feel toward health workers postCOVID. The same people who would very likely be directed to kill me, should I become infected, also feel the pain of the catastrophe and, within that, I worry about how the consequences of death happening at such a massive scale will impact the intimacies of death and dying. Specifically, I fear the pain of those who are dying alone, who wish for the presence of their family and friends, and who will never have an opportunity to say their goodbyes as they transition from life to death. I fear how their bodies will be cared for once they are no longer alive. I fear the suffering their kin will feel after they lose the right to say goodbye to their loved ones. I fear the trauma they will hold with the weight of knowing how their loved one's body were discarded. I fear how we will remember these losses. I fear the immense number of people dying will outweigh the significance and the quality of their lives as they become statistics. I fear that this catastrophe, like so many others felt by marginalized communities, will be overlooked, and that this will reaffirm to the powers that benefit from our losses that we can be forgotten.

I cannot shake my fear, and the more it grows, the more it only seems to fill me with a kind of anger and sorrow I have only recognized in the intergenerational trauma I inherited from my queer elders who lived through the onset of the AIDS pandemic (in the west), and from mad and disabled elders who have been the targets of ableist and sanist violence for their entire lives. Moreover, although I did not inherit the legacy of racial trauma (or I have, but only as a benefactor), I also acknowledge the trauma and pain of non-white communities whose experiences with centuries of racial and colonial violence have constituted the politics of death that condition our entire social climate, and who will thus, without a doubt, similarly feel the affective shifts in the intimacies of death that I describe here. To live through COVID is to go through yet another disaster in a long list of disasters experienced by us "not-or-not-quite human" subjects (Weheliye, 2014, p. 22), and the ramifications of what it means to keep having to live through our ongoing, "deeply atemporal" state of exception (Sharpe, 2016, p. 5).

In an interview between Brian Massumi and Erin Manning (2015) featured in *Politics of Affect*; the two scholars discuss how major ecological crises, like the 2011 Fukushima Catastrophe, have dramatically shifted the politics of catastrophe. In the interview, Manning suggests that catastrophes are no longer considered horrific "exceptional" events, but rather, "ubiquitous" (p. 112). Massumi responds by acknowledging that he does not believe the culture has become desensitized to catastrophe, but rather, that the contact between ourselves and others (which once was interpersonal) has become dispersed. He contends that this dispersal signals, not the abject removal of affects related to collective trauma, grief, and suffering, but how contact sites have experienced alterations in affect (p. 113). Massumi writes:

> We're absorbed in the immanence of catastrophe, always braced for it—which means it has become immanent to our field of life. That imminence-immanence is a mode of contact, of direct affective proximity, even if it occurs 'at a distance' through the action of the media, or more to the point, within an increasingly integrated media technology. (p. 114).

This sentiment holds true as we reflect not only on how COVID is impacting us right now but on how the catastrophes that came before it impacted, if not primed, us as well.

Namely, we are not reconciling or coping with what is happening via COVID because

catastrophe is always, and has always been, happening. Just as Massumi (2009) observes elsewhere, the source of our anxieties, that which threatens our states (nationally, physically, emotionally, spiritually, etc.) are always on the horizon, so we are never post-trauma. He specifically writes that this "threat does have an actual mode of existence: fear, as foreshadowing. Threat has an impending reality in the present. This actual reality is affective" (p. 54). In other words, our culture is hardwired to brace for threats that do not exist based on the fears we developed in response to both past traumas and fictional futures. Unlike natural disasters, however, pandemics are harder to prepare for because they occur with less frequency than, say, that of a hurricane, just as the systems that become the catastrophe zone (such as healthcare) is constantly at risk of being underfunded by the administrations that govern them (save the profitable parts, like the pharmaceutical industry). Put differently, our culture responds to the needs of the people in a pandemic by instead appealing to the nation's economic prowess.

Further, the dispersal of contact between people during COVID has only worsened the negative impact of the pandemic on our psyches and affectual wounds. Though I am certain we will return to being allowed to say goodbye to loved ones eventually, I fear the damage will have already been done COVID has revealed on a widespread level that our culture is willing to accept the culling of specific groups in the name of a greater reward for the masses. This is not a particularly startling realization, given that this is the basic premise of eugenics. However, what is startling is how we are actively reconfiguring death - how we have translated the condition of dying into a set condition, even though we know that dying does not remove the truth that to *be actively dying* still implies that one is still *living*. Such erasure has obvious biopolitical consequences, but it also creates the conditions for a preternatural memorialization of living people. In our current state, preternatural memorialization refers to the act of pre-emptively cultivating a robust narrative about the loss of an individual to COVID that becomes enmeshed with the rituals of grieving and responding to the wider pandemic at large.

For comparison, preternatural memorialization occurred during the early years of the AIDS pandemic, but it occurred with consent. HIV-positive people, especially queers, knew and had grown accustomed to accepting the reality that they would likely die before the state would be willing or able to intervene. Ann Cvetkovich (2003) writes of this phenomenon regarding the lesbians who became caretakers and memory holders for their terminally ill gay and MSM friends. Cvetkovich admits that the process of memorializing losses before they happen is a complicated one, noting that to memorialize something in the act of its happening runs the risk of being reductive. In that process, we lose the nuances of the circumstances of those deaths and their adjacent traumas. This point is especially prudent in relation to the current COVID-19 pandemic: Like AIDS, COVID is a population-wide crisis that has incited preternatural memorialization, but, unlike the AIDS pandemic (at least, in the west), the wide-scale grief that emerges from it is incredibly culturally specific because the people who are dying, belong to wide ranging communities (i.e., the disabled, Indigenous, poor, Black, elderly, etc.).

The issue that emerges with preternatural memorialization during COVID is that this form of memorialization is at risk of becoming a national trauma, which Cvetkovich (2003) defines as an event that stirs up world-defining [inter]national attention (p. 16). The problem with national trauma is that there is always the danger of it becoming national*ized* and, therefore, naturalized trauma. The world-defining nature of such events often takes away from the very lived experiences of oppression that led to the catastrophe in question, which is astronomical in the first place. We can thus understand COVID's body count from disabled, Black, Brown, Indigenous, migrant, poor, and elderly populations as being underscored by this logic and, more specifically, what Cvetkovich calls the "insidious and everyday forms of trauma

generated by…other forms of oppression" (p. 161). This trauma will likely not retain a high affective potency because these deaths are being subsumed and naturalized via nationalized rhetoric contextualized by western humanist ideologies. If we allow ourselves to acknowledge COVID-deaths as sequential, then we risk acknowledging COVID being a public health crisis, which can cheapen the losses of marginalized people through the generalization of their subsequent deaths.

Because many deaths are being positioned as inevitable and therefore natural, which I identify here as the consequence of the body being unable to sustain itself without intervention, the grieving and caring practice under COVID will become highly individualized. By placing the responsibility of care onto frontline health workers, many of whom are non-white, the state has already excused itself from being held fully accountable for healthcare as a set of inadequately prepared institutions. Because the state has also imposed a state of exception (that which necessitates the death of some bodies over others), health care workers will also ultimately be held unaccountable for the total losses accrued.[8] The hospital as a zone of catastrophe is underpinned by the logic that every decision made within the confines of the zone, are those of necessity, as this zone makes every decision a "life or death" decision.

Outside zones, like gathering places or households, are not considered parts of the catastrophe zone per se but may take the blame for the widening of the catastrophe via "increased" contraction and spread. Because of this, each death is crafted to appear zone-specific, which, in turn, plays out in the media by reinforcing the importance of the individual cases highlighted therein. "*A beloved parent, grandparent, sibling, friend, co-worker*…" each death is emphasized by their attachment to their living counterparts. The personhood of the deceased is only reconfigured posthumously when their loved ones invoke a particular memory. Hence, their death is not merely grievable because the person has died, but because those still alive, and who attribute a social or affective weight to their physical absence, miss them.

To borrow from Butler (2009), the intimacies of performing trauma and loss by those left alive in a period of catastrophe are only validated when the frames through which the performance occurs can be made intelligible (p. 7). The major framing of death during COVID is the one provided to us by the state and its regulatory bodies (primarily healthcare and the media): we have already been told that these people are *dying*, not that they are being *killed*. Here, their deaths are, again, natural, even *if* loved ones deploy the rhetoric of memorializing individuals as someone who was "gone too soon". The performative memorialization of their loved ones is framed in ways that better contextualize the frames already established by the state, whereby posthumous recognition intends to highlight individual tragedies, not a population-wide travesty.

## Concluding remarks

### *Removing Intimacy*

As I have emphasized throughout this article, death is intimate. Dying is inevitable. But throughout time, *how* we die and [are] mourn[ed] has transformed. The politics of touch have also changed, especially now, because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Circumstances may prevent or alter the ways dead people are touched and when it is appropriate to touch them—*if* they can be touched at all. Generally, in the process of dying and in the process of preparing a dead body for disposal, touch is permissible. People often die surrounded by their families and friends, usually described as passing away, after a final goodbye (verbal and/or

[8] As of April 19· 2021, the Ontario government has yet to be fully transparent regarding Ontario triaging protocols despite numerous recommendations made by the Triage Advisory Committee formed by ARCH Disability Law and the AODA Alliance. As a result, the current "critical care Triage Protocol has been sent to all Ontario hospitals, and subsequent training has been offered to hospitals and doctors that urges doctors and hospitals to use it" but has not been officially endorsed by the Ontario government (ARCH Disability Law Centre, 2021).

physical) is made in proximity to the recently deceased. In normal circumstances, people who die in hospitals are often afforded these final acts of intimacy. These acts range from the relationship formed between the dying person and their conceptualization of death; the dying person, and the afterlife (if that is what they believe is waiting for them); the dying person and their caretakers; the dying person and their selected visitors, and finally, the dying person and those who will prepare their bodies when they are no longer alive. These relationships represent the many different forms of intimacy that fall under the reality of death. While they may span the range of the innately spiritual, to the physical, to the emotional, to the mental, they are all bound by caretaking.

COVID disrupts these processes through the militant surveillance and monitoring of touch. Folx in catastrophe zones are denied not only physical touch and spatial proximity with the outside world. This means that, although health workers cannot contact people outside of the catastrophe zone, they are still able to touch those who are infected. However, because of the lack of personal protective equipment, many staff are afraid to make more contact than what is strictly necessary with those who are infected and/or dying (Loriggio, 2020). They are also responsible for ensuring that visitors are prohibited from entering the catastrophe zone. While this generally makes sense because of how easy it is to contract the virus, the concern at play here is the restriction and total removal of intimacy from a space of both caretaking and dying.

Just as visitors are prohibited from contacting their loved ones in what could be their last chance to spend time together, patients are essentially being left to die alone because of the pervasive fear of contamination. With HIV/AIDS, as Cvetkovich (2003) reminds us, the fear of contamination demarcated queer (or queered) bodies to be bodies of risk and, in that process, made it so that the similarly queer were the only ones willing to interact with folx sick, dying, and/or dead from HIV or AIDS. Moreover, the trauma that manifested as a result of further alienating infected people made regular intimacies like death and care work insidious. Speaking of trauma generally, she writes that it "makes itself felt in everyday practices and nowhere more insidiously or insistently than in converting what was once pleasure into the spectre of loss or in preventing the acknowledgement of such losses" (Cvetkovich 2003, p. 163). That is, the love in ordinary relations becomes permission to grieve what the trauma holder perceives as a loss.

Healthcare workers and patients have lost their closeness to each other and their families and because the motivation to refrain from contact is a necessity (made possible by state failure), they are, in turn, radically losing intimacies that are otherwise innate to the conditions of the hospital as a site of caretaking, while also rendering the mere existence of sick, dying, and dead bodies, into threats. Even then, as those dying are left alone, they may not have access to alternative forms of communication (i.e., through text or even video-chat) and are thus disavowed from their right to feel the more natural and ritual experiences of dying and death. People are being intubated, often without the option of saying goodbye, lucid, and in pain, knowing very well that they may not survive the experience. Even though dying is a sad event for many, knowing that oneself is being perceived negatively by others due to the fear of contamination, and being left alone as a result, can be even more heartbreaking.

In essence, what we are reckoning with the further that we move into this current health pandemic, is the total excision of the right to feel and be intimate toward each other under the premise of catastrophe politics. I began my article with a conversation on masking because the pandemic is radically shifting what it means and looks like to die, and those shifts bear significance in terms of how we relate to ourselves and one another within and through a catastrophe. That is to say, that the deaths of those from COVID are *unmasking* something darker within our world order, revealing the everyday violence that the state enacts as it handles a catastrophe, it very

well had a hand in creating, and it is important to acknowledge the brutality of these losses. Such brutality does not bode well for cultivating a greater appreciation for the intimacies of death and dying in a death-shy culture, nor does it bode well for how we relate to each other amid communities experiencing crisis, and I feel very troubled by these truths.

As we now know, many changes to care work have happened as a direct result of a total lack of regard for (many) human lives in catastrophic events. The current pandemic has been catastrophic, for instance, for those within long-term care facilities, both at the level of contraction and isolation. The marginalized communities to which I belong and can relate, are being essentially punished for trying to survive this pandemic, and as a disabled person, I am not surprised by the violence and cruelty of the state - we have been programmed to brace for a catastrophe like this before, if not always. But this has never been to the extent that it now is – to the extent that we are being stripped, *en masse*, of the right to mourn, grieve, and die. This traumatization is the direct result of systemically destroying the intimacies of care work and community, and of death and dying. There is a strong disconnect between the management of this crisis and the actual feelings of people as our affects are being managed and framed for us.

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## Acknowledgments

To the sick, dying and dead among us, I love you.

## Author Biography

SK Sabada is a white, nonbinary, mad, disabled PhD student in Gender, Feminist and Women's Studies at York University. Their own work is situated at the intersections of queer theory, mad studies, disability studies, trans studies and performance studies. Their own research focuses on questions related to how and why mad and trans people die and how these deaths require critical interrogation that moves beyond the mere acceptance of their happenings. It is SK's wish that by developing a notion of the critical intimacies of death and dying and by critically caring about how we respond to and interact with death in a death-shy culture, that we can collectively make the ways everyone lives and dies, better.

NS?

# Who Holds the Knife

Naiomi M. Perera

## Abstract

Ma'Khia Bryant was killed by a police officer on April 20, 2021, at the age of 16. Ma'Khia held a knife, as the officer pointed his gun and fired four shots. Police officers across the globe have taken the lives of many since, and if the current "justice" system is not transformed, they will continue to take many more. Through the following poem, I ask the reader to reflect on the violence and collective suffering that is perpetrated through state power and policing. I ask them to look upon the world through the lens of Foucault's biopolitics and Mbembe's necropolitics, to recognize the insignificance of Ma'Khia's knife within a social order that marks us all as either deserving of life or deserving of death. By including the voice of white supremacist carcerality within my account, I encourage readers to consider how they hold this knife; that is, how they help to fix this violent, punitive system in place. Most importantly, by inviting readers to participate in the healing of collective wounds, I offer an abolitionist call to action. Content warning: this poem contains discussion of state violence, police brutality, and blood.

## Keywords

biopolitics, necropolitics, state violence, police abolition, prison abolition

When the cops saw Ma'Khia Bryant, they saw a
problem to be managed

Well, she should have dropped the knife

When I saw Ma'Khia Bryant, I saw a scared child
When I saw her run Eco Styler gel through her hair
in a Tik Tok, I saw myself
But my life goes on
Hers gets cut short
Cut out of this world
When state violence takes one of us
The cut hurts us all
The knife sharpens instead of getting dull, and
moves closer to our throat
Some of us get cut deeper than others
Some find a cut-out where a loved one used to be
They are cut the deepest

These things happen

Why do they happen
Can we stop the bleeding
Can we prevent the cutting

Somebody has to do it

To draw blood
To selectively carve
To cut in the interest of others
To draw out, to extract, to drain

What is the alternative

To triage

To repair

To heal

To move on

I cannot be held responsible for what my ancestors

did

Your ancestors' work is unfinished

Ongoing

My ancestors' work is too

But while we do our work, we bleed

We all bleed

All blood matters

Blood is spilled and we are made to watch

We look upon death, upon murder

Searching for the facts of the matter and finding

our own blood

Who is "we"

Go ahead

Make it about race

Make it about colour

It pours out red

The blood will always be red

It will never be any other colour

Blood can't be blue

And lives can't either

Our bodies alike, our functions at odds

They cut and we bleed

The blood hemorrhages

But it is politics, not biology, that assures its flow

Biopolitics

Necropolitics

Carceral capitalist politics

Don’t talk about politics

Then I can hardly speak at all

Find me a subject devoid of politics

An object of truly apolitical speech

Consider what politic apoliticism advances

Please drop it

Please drop the knife

Let it fall

Tend to the wounds

## Author Biography

Naiomi Marcia Perera is a Black and South Asian MA student and sociologist at York University who uses she/her pronouns. Her research interests include critical technology studies, race, culture and social regulation. She is currently researching the use of Internet filtering software for the purpose of countering radicalization to violence. She hopes that this research will allow her to develop recommendations for, and additionally, facilitate, the exploration of intervention strategies that do not rely on surveillance and punishment. Naiomi began organizing with the Toronto Prisoners' Rights Project in 2020 and incorporates her abolitionist activism into her thinking and research.

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# White Supremacy in Rainbow: Global Pride and Black Lives Matter in the Era of COVID

**D. Alex Piña**

### Abstract

Written in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, this article explores the limits of solidarity between LGBTQ Pride and Black Lives Matter (BLM). In 2020, most Pride events around the world were cancelled due to COVID-19; however, many were reimagined in new forms that centered BLM. Using Global Pride 2020 as a case study of one such event, I argue for an understanding of Pride organizations' cooptation of BLM that extends beyond clichés of performative activism to consider how such solidarities serve to legitimate logics of white supremacy. At a time when global pandemics of disease and racial violence made clear the importance of reimagining existing systems, and radical change became increasingly conceivable to the global public, I question the compatibility between conventional discourses of LGBTQ progress and Black freedom. Specifically, I examine how Pride organizations used the global disruption and devastation of COVID-19 to summon support from the BLM movement while simultaneously perpetuating anti-blackness especially and racialized homonationalisms more generally.

### Keywords

white supremacy, Pride, Queer of Colour, BLM, COVID-19

## Introduction

In June 2020, a banner emblazoned with the words "Pride is a riot! #BLM" was affixed to the facade of the Stonewall Inn in New York City. Signs like this one were already floating around the internet, stylized in bright colours and ornamental typography, posted on blogs and social media newsfeeds. The message was clear: Pride and Black Lives Matter (BLM) are interrelated social movements. Such messaging suggests that similarities in how each of these movements began, highlighting their founders' opposition to police brutality, make them naturally complementary. However, the trajectories of each movement have been quite different.

Cities around the world that host Pride tend to benefit from discourses of progress that are associated with the expansion of human rights, the logic of which is rooted in western-centric philosophical thought and maintained by international bodies like the United Nations. Conversely, BLM demonstrations reject progress narratives and tend to be regarded with suspicion and fear. Given these discrepancies in aim and reception, it is important to question what it means when, amidst the cancellation of hundreds of Pride parades and festivals due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many were reimagined in new forms that centered BLM. Taking up such questioning, this article offers a critical analysis of one such event, Global Pride 2020, to explore larger issues of solidarity between LGBTQ organizations and Black communities. Particularly informed by the ways that modern gay politics prioritize pragmatism and assimilation to the exclusion of marginalized populations, this article considers how Pride's recent embrace of BLM seeks to uphold, rather than dismantle, global white supremacy.

In what follows, I provide a brief overview of Pride as an institution situated in the larger trajectory of the gay rights movements. I then discuss the reconstruction of Global Pride amid COVID-19. Using this event as a case study, I analyze Pride and BLM movements relationally. I go on to interrogate the meaning of solidarity in the context of both a global health crisis and a global reckoning with racial violence triggered by the murder of George Floyd. Pushing back against easy solidarities, I treat the circumstances of Pride's newfound interest in BLM as a site of precarity and I analyze their relationship from a perspective that considers the ways that non-existence is actively produced to normalize logics of oppression. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of Pride's discursive practices that limit visions of Black futures, pasts, and presents.

## A brief background

The Stonewall Riots of 1969 are typically viewed as the spark that lit the fire of gay rights liberation around the world (Bain, 2016; Bruce, 2016). Often referred to as 'Stonewall', these riots were a series of public demonstrations held in response to the violent policing of LGBTQ folx, especially Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (QTBIPOC). The week-long uprising followed an early morning police raid of New York City's Stonewall Inn on June 28, 1969, and its momentum has since been attributed to butch and trans Black and Brown women, such as Stormé DeLarverie, Marsha P. Johnson, and Sylvia Rivera, who went on to cofound the Gay Liberation Front. This fact, that the movement for gay liberation was ignited by trans and gender nonbinary women of colour, is increasingly regarded as both a significant historical contribution and a glaring historical omission by QTBIPOC scholars.

It should be noted, however, that Stonewall was not a "universal moment of liberatory social change", even if it is often regarded as such due to "the homogenizing tendencies of certain processes of globalization" (Puar, 2002, p. 1061). Such Americentric histories tend to occlude the variable outcomes of rights-based western development projects that originate in the Global North, both across (Greensmith & Giwa, 2013; Dhoot, 2015; Bain, 2016) and beyond (Puar, 2002; Gentile & Kinsman, 2015) the region. Nevertheless, the first gay pride marches in the United States were held to commemorate the first anniversary of Stonewall in 1970 (Bruce, 2016).

Radical activists of New York City's Gay Liberation Front (GLF) organized an event originally called "Christopher Street Liberation Day" and encouraged similar organizations across the country to hold parallel demonstrations (Bruce, 2016). Organizers in Los Angeles heeded the GLF's call by planning a parade called "Christopher Street West". Though different, these events had the same goal: "proclaiming the cultural worth and dignity of gays and lesbians" (Bruce, 2016, p. 32). These June 28 demonstrations would later come to be known to the world as Pride Parades, and, eventually, just Pride.

In the 50 years since Christopher Street Liberation Day and Christopher Street West, many more cities in the United States, and in other parts of the world, have begun hosting their own Pride celebrations. For example, in 2019, it was estimated that over 1,500 Pride events were held globally (Evans, 2020). As a result, Pride has become a strategic site of marketing where many corporations invest millions to attract the lucrative "pink dollar" (Coon, 2012; also see; Greensmith & Giwa, 2013; Gentile & Kinsman, 2015; Bain, 2016). This has been referred to in activist circles as "pink-washing", a practice through which businesses, cities, and nation-states, market themselves as uniquely tolerant of homosexuality, and thus cosmopolitan, developed, and democratic, to promote and conceal the larger colonial and imperial formations through which they are constituted (Puar, 2014). The potential for profit through pink-washing is clear, as CNBC reports that, in a single month, 2019's Pride festivities brought hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue to just the businesses of New York City (Evans, 2020).

In 2020, at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Pride-related revenue trends were markedly different than years prior as most events were canceled. Nonetheless, the profitization of Pride is a well demonstrated phenomenon that not only disproportionately harms QTBIPOC, as it slowly pushes them out through economic liberalization and gentrification (Bain, 2016), but similarly erases the historical role that these communities have played in the creation of Pride and other such queer mobilizations. This becomes particularly clear when we consider modern spectacles of Pride as superficial versions of events past, unrecognizable from the riots that once inspired them. As observed by Nadijah Robinson with Amalia Duncan-Raphael (2018), Pride events have become overtly celebratory, focusing less on activism, and serving more as sites for the strategic branding (or re-branding) of "corporations, police, and other institutions that otherwise play little to no role in generating well-being in queer and trans communities" (p. 215). Further, as Robinson explains, "Festivities [center] primarily around the interests and desires of moneyed white cisgender gay men, while marginalizing or tokenizing the presence of Black and Indigenous people and people of colour" (p. 215). This sidelining of the multiply marginalized members of the LGBTQ community is far from accidental. Rather, it reflects precisely whose interests are now served by Pride: the white and the wealthy.

## Analysis and findings

### *Global Pride 2020*

"Pride season isn't canceled. It's moving online," an LGBTQ news outlet proclaimed in April of 2020 (Marr, 2020, para 1). After the majority of Pride events were canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a coalition of Pride organizations across the world decided to organize a virtual event called Global Pride 2020. On the event website, Global Pride is described as a collaboration between Interpride (an organization that promotes Pride on an international level by linking national Pride organizations), the European Pride Organizers Association, the US Association of Prides, Orgullo Latin America, and many other national and regional groups (Global Pride 2020, 2020a, para 1). The event took place on June 27, 2020 and reached over 57 million viewers in at least 163 countries during its "27-hour virtual parade" (Global Pride 2020, 2020b, para 1).

In multiple press statements leading up to and following Global Pride 2020, event organizers

declared a commitment to "amplifying black voices across the world" (Global Pride 2020, 2020c, para 2; see also Wareham, 2020, Global Pride 2020, 2020b). As Global Pride organizer Steve Taylor explained to *Forbes* Magazine, "It's only right that we use Global Pride to raise the voice of people of color from within our community, and so many Prides have already provided content that really shouts the Black Lives Matter message loud and clear" (Wareham, 2020, para 7). However, this commitment seems rather hollow when the lineup of scheduled guests is considered. Though Alicia Garza, a co-founder of BLM, was featured during one of the "main stage" segments of the event, she was one of only seven Black voices heard during the entire 27-hour livestream (Global Pride 2020, 2020b).

Over 70 musicians, activists, and politicians made appearances, performed, and gave speeches, including several sitting presidents and prime ministers of white settler nation states. Of particular note, is the United States' President Joe Biden, then a presidential candidate. In his speech, Biden assured viewers around the world that the United States of America would "once again become a beacon of hope for LGBTQ people" (2020, 00:53). This statement stands out for several reasons. It overlooks the long-established historical dissonance between aspirations of mainstream, often white, lesbian and gay politics and the lived realities of Black queer and trans folx in the US and elsewhere—realities which US imperialism has played a central role in shaping (Puar, 2017). Further, and relatedly, Biden's politics and policies are well-known among social justice advocates, both under his own administration and formerly under Barrack Obama's, for being pro-police, anti-Black, and for concealing these facts by tokenizing Black and other non-white people.

Global Pride's tying together of nationalist ideologies with notions of LGBTQ rights is fraught with danger for non-normative sexual subjects, including, if not especially QTBIPOC, whose full membership within a given polity is precluded by something that Jasbir Puar (2017) has referred to as homonationalism. Homonationalism, or national homonormativity, refers to the process through which sexual subjects are formed in relation to the state, which simultaneously uplifts those who conform to normative racial, gender, and socioeconomic ideals, while reinforcing the scaffolding of systems that discriminate against and exploit those deemed *Other*. As an analytic, homonationalism is used to understand and critique how mainstream LGBTQ politics, and movements like Pride, are implicated in furthering nation-states' disciplinary agendas, producing racialized understandings of respectability that are unconstrained by borders. Through this lens, we can see how, in the name of progress, Pride has become yet another global institution that enforces identity norms based on hegemonic whiteness, thereby putting it, not in line, but at odds, with the politics and practices of the BLM movement.

## Mobilization in context

As impressive as Pride's growth over the past half century may seem, the pace of the BLM movement's growth in 2020 is stunning in comparison. Following the viral murder of George Floyd on May 26, 2020, an estimated 26 million individuals participated in BLM demonstrations in the United States alone (Buchanan et al., 2020). Just between May and July of 2020, there were over 4,700 BLM demonstrations in the United States, and over 3,600 cities and towns around the world were host to such events (Buchanan et al., 2020; Bliss, 2020). Some have speculated that the public's increased engagement with political activism following the election of President Donald Trump in the United States has led more people to participate in protests related to injustice and inequalities of race, gender, immigration, etc. (Jordan & Clement, 2018). However, this does not fully account for the rapid proliferation of demonstrations outside of the US, nor does this account for the fact that much of the increased activism occurred in the immediate wake of COVID-19.

Given that increased engagement in public

protest cannot be explained simply by the appointment of a single politician in just one country, it may be useful to consider the rising interest in social justice in relation to the unusual circumstances of the 2020 pandemic. Dr. Daniel Q. Gillion, a political scientist and professor at the University of Pennsylvania, addressed this directly in a statement to the New York Times, stating that:

> With being home and not being able to do as much, that might be amplifying something that is already sort of critical, something that's already a powerful catalyst, and that is the video. If you aren't moved by the George Floyd video, you have nothing in you. And that catalyst can now be amplified by the fact that individuals probably have more time to engage in protest activity (quoted in Buchanan et al., 2020).

Similar sentiments have been expressed by others (Brand, 2020; Wood, 2020; Da Costa, 2021), some of whom have argued that COVID-19 specifically motivated white people to get involved with longstanding social issues, particularly those pertaining to racial violence. In this way, the pandemic and its disruptive effects on ordinary life can be understood as a magnifier for the affective capacity of the visual imagery of police violence in general and of the murder of George Floyd in particular. Coupled with this magnification was the widespread experiences of death, loss, and overall state failure to address COVID-19, which motivated privileged people to get involved with political movements. As observed by Dionne Brand (2020, para 1):

> What the COVID-19 pandemic has done is expose even further the endoskeleton of the world. I have felt tremendous irritation at the innocence of those people (mostly, but not only, white) finally up against their historic and present culpability in a set of dreadful politics and dreadful economics – ecocidal and genocidal.

Together, it appears that the above factors effectively mobilized people who, on the one hand, might have otherwise remained distracted by the quotidian practices of pre-pandemic life and, on the other, were previously unaffected by state violence, to begin advocating for BLM. While much of this support was performative and fleeting in nature (Ali & Anane-Bediakoh, 2020), the drastic response to Floyd's murder after COVID-19 versus, for instance, similar state-sanctioned murders of other Black men, like Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and Philando Castile before COVID-19, suggests that the pandemic had a significant impact on the public's interest in BLM.

For example, those who were roused to action by the plight of BLM in 2020, often assembled in violation of local health and safety protocols that were imposed to slow the progression of the growing coronavirus. At the time, racial violence was beginning to be understood as a pandemic in its own right, warranting immediate attention. Pride, however, did not inspire the same sense of urgency or enthusiasm. Even as many events and festivals were reformulated online, due to jurisdictional restrictions on in-person gatherings, attendance for Pride began to waver across the world. Perhaps this is why, in June of 2020, Los Angeles Pride rebranded itself as the 'All Black Lives Matter' march (Del Barco, 2020). The march was scheduled to run along the same route as the original parade, and its organizers arranged a police escort, a move which revealed their ignorance of BLM's demands for systemic police reform as well as their failure to collaborate with local Black leaders and activists. More than just a simple mistake, this confirms Pride organizations' consistent investment in white supremacy.

## Discussion

### *Solidarity for who?*

What does it mean that the momentum of Pride was impeded by a global health crisis while BLM grew and, during this same time, was deemed "the largest movement in U.S. History" (Buchanan et al., 2020, para 3)? Furthermore, does it matter that

support for BLM drew an extraordinary physical presence, while Pride merely aroused passive, virtual engagement? How should we interpret Pride, a shrinking, de-radicalized event, and its decision to embrace BLM at the height of the group's public popularity? Overall, one is left with a glaring question about Pride's choice to embrace BLM and its commitment to Black freedom and racial justice following COVID-19: was this cooptation or solidarity?

In tending to these sorts of questions, David Roediger (2016) prescribes a sober approach to understanding solidarity, something he calls "making solidarity uneasy" (p. 245). To develop his approach, Roediger (2016) reflects on labour movements in the nineteenth century, arguing that whether in the tradition of Durkheim's theoretical work or Marxist thought, "existing patterns of racial divisions and uneven development produced solidarities compromised by their creation within industrial capitalism and imperial expansion" (p. 231). By this rationale, solidarity is made precarious by the conditions under which it is produced. This means that the conditions under which solidarities are forged must be properly vetted to avoid easy solidarities that oppose oppression in one form, while overlooking or perpetuating it in another.

In examining the solidarity project between Global Pride and BLM, we must make solidarity uneasy. Beyond the possibilities of fruitful cooperation, we must also consider whether the goals of these two movements are compatible. Are they imagining of and working towards the same future? These questions are important because building solidarity often demands a unified activist itinerary, which, in the context of the whitestream and in the shadow of white supremacy, tends to result in a prioritization of oppressions that regards competing interests as counterproductive to mutual progress. So, if we are to understand who solidarity is serving and to what end, we must consider not only who has the ability to prioritize oppressions, but also, who is ignored or forgotten in the process. Boaventura de Sousa Santos' (2012) sociology of absences is useful in recognizing what such priorities mean and how they operate. Through the sociology of absences, non-existence is understood as something that is actively produced. Santos (2012) asserts, "Non-existence is produced whenever a certain entity is discredited and considered invisible, non-intelligible or discardable" (p. 52). In the context of solidarities, produced absences result in the naturalization of hierarchies of oppression, thereby reproducing some form of oppression for the sake of resolving another that purports to be more important.

The dearth of Black speakers at Global Pride 2020 is reflective of just this, revealing organizers' priorities as gatekeepers of a subtly oppressive racial regime. In discursive terms, such prioritization appears in Global Pride 2020's three-word tagline: "Exist. Persist. Resist". Not only does this tagline seem quite short-sighted relative to BLM's temporally expansive assertion that Black lives matter in a world ordered by anti-blackness, but that "exist[ence]" is first on the list suggests a passivity that diminishes action-oriented practices of resistance as generative forces of radical change – a staple of much Black activism. With this limited imagination, the ambition to exist can be seen as simply maintaining the status quo. The goal then becomes seeking inclusion in existing (local and global) social orders rather than toppling oppressive regimes, as BLM (and the historical legacies of Black activism that precede it) is ought to do. This discrepancy in ambition is indicative of the generally anemic politics of mainstream LGBTQ movements, which have been the subject of QTBIPOC critique for quite some time (Ferguson, 2004; Muñoz, 2009; Bassichis & Spade, 2014; Bain, 2016).

## *Unqueer future*

Queer of colour scholar José Esteban Muñoz (2009) has argued that gay pragmatic thought constrains possibility. Preoccupation with being ordinary is an anti-utopian desire that not only sacrifices idealistic notions of the future but also excludes from its pragmatic agenda individuals and communities with differential access to capital in its many forms. In short, this

practicality is a trap for revolutionary social movements. The present, in all its boundedness, is not enough. As Muñoz (2009) explains, "[the present] is impoverished and toxic for queers and other people who do not feel the privilege of majoritarian belonging, normative tastes, and 'rational' expectations" (p. 27). Similarly, by aiming simply for existence, Pride limits the horizon of possibility for the very people the organization is purportedly striving to liberate.

While it may seem contradictory that organizations established to defend some version of human rights could play an active role in perpetuating inequities, this is a common issue in a world composed of many worlds. By this, I mean to suggest that in contemporary world-systems, which do not necessarily encompass the entire globe, economies, empires, systems, communities, and *movements* can themselves compose disjointed and overlapping lifeworlds (Appadurai, 1996; Wallerstein, 2004; Manfred & Steger, 2019). In this multiplicity of worlds, cultural and economic processes of globalization do not simply occur within or without nation-states, but beyond them at various scales. It is perhaps because of this incoherence that, according to Eve Darian-Smith (2016), instrumental rationality is used to "justify the measuring of essentialized differences between the global north and global south—between the more 'civilized' and 'advanced' economies and what seems the inherently less sophisticated, less law-abiding, and less progressive emerging economies" (p. 81). These measurements continue to be recognized as legitimate benchmarks of "progress," despite their logics' histories in rationalizing human rights violations, ranging from slavery to genocide, based on race and nationality.

The coupling of economic expansion with human rights can make advancing LGBTQ inclusion quite seductive to both state and non-state actors. However, this seduction often conceals a politics that is folded into discourses of development and then monetized in the global system. As Puar (2017) explains, homonationalism serves as a "regulatory script not only of normative gayness, queerness, or homosexuality, but also of the racial and national norms that reinforce these sexual subjects" (p. 31). Here, policies of exclusion are adopted to control, manage, and normalize kaleidoscopic variations within municipal and national sexual landscapes, enforcing homonormative ideals and, by extension, the legacy of white supremacy undergirding these ideals. Homonormativity then travels across borders, marking those who fail or refuse to conform as backward, while simultaneously leveraging westernized understandings of progress and development to reinforce hierarchical arrangements of power between nations. As such, this genre of homosexuality is implicated in the western imperial commitment to what Puar (2017) has termed "the global dominant ascendancy of whiteness" (p. 31).

## Conclusion

Global pandemics of disease and racial violence have made clear the importance of reimagining existing systems, rendering radical change conceivable on a global scale. As a result, more people than ever are engaging in direct action for a variety of causes, roused by movements like Pride and Black Lives Matter (BLM). While recognizing the societal benefits of political and community action, it remains important to question the limits of solidarity between constituencies whose goals are substantively different and, at times, oppositional. This begs the question: why are Pride organizations using *this* moment, in which COVID-19 has disrupted and devastated large swathes of the globe, to summon support from the BLM movement? We must strive to understand LGBTQ organizations' cooptation of BLM in a way that extends beyond clichés of performative activism to consider instead how such solidarities can, paradoxically, legitimate logics of white supremacy and perpetuate anti-blackness. Only in doing so can we begin to explore the possibilities for inducing meaningful and transformative change.

Throughout this paper, I have argued that Pride and BLM are incompatible as movements,

as their visions of the future differ both in form and in content. Now, as I bring my analysis to a conclusion, I want to also consider whether solidarity between these movements is, in fact, dangerous. To do so, I return to the message on the sign hung outside of New York City's Stonewall Inn: "Pride is a riot! #BLM." This message, earnest though it may be, reveals a conceptual distinction between the people for whom Pride now exists (white, monied queers), and for whom it does not: Black people. By advocating for the value of Black lives via hashtag, Pride implicitly marks itself as non-Black—in solidarity, not community, with Black communities. In creating this distance, Black communities' access to Pride, as a rights-granting institution, is foreclosed upon. To this point, Bassichis and Spade (2014) extend Jared Sexton's 'People of Color Blindness' (2010) to argue that the tendency in LGBTQ rights advocacy to "analogize other struggles to anti-black racism […] and to speak generally about 'racism' without attention to the specificities of anti-blackness" is itself anti-Black (p. 194). In other words, by rhetorically posing Pride as non-Black, as outside blackness, Pride is aligned with whiteness and, by extension, anti-blackness.

This articulation of Pride as non-Black is evident in more places than just the facade of the Stonewall Inn. The "centering" of BLM in events like Global Pride (see Del Barco, 2020, for a similar example in Los Angeles) indicates a similar weeding out of blackness. By claiming solidarity with Black struggles, Pride asserts itself as a movement not already in community with Black folx, thereby bracketing itself against blackness. In turn, Pride events set in opposition Black and non-Black queer and trans people, reproducing blackness as a dangerous *Other*. Such othering makes more legible the image of white queer respectability, invoking homonationalist rhetoric and legitimizing their constituency's claim to the many rights that are bound up in whiteness. For these reasons, Prides' recent allyship with BLM does not indicate solidarity with Black struggles; rather, it belies a deep-seated investment in white supremacy.

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NS?

# Our Superior Complex Shadow is Under a Microscope

Fiona Edwards

## Abstract

From the institution of slavery to current waves of systemic oppression, Black people continue to be negatively impacted. This calls attention to the pervasiveness of racism, specifically the anti-Black racism that contorts and constrains Black peoples' lives. The magnitude of anti-Black racism punctuated human consciousness on a global scale after the public brutal killing of George Floyd, an African-American man in police custody. This poem is inspired by Floyd's death and the emotional trauma and pain it ignited in Black people around the world. It illustrates the vulnerability of the Black community in respect to ongoing systemic oppression, the inferiorization of Blackness, and the corresponding suffering Black people must endure.

## Keywords

racism, anti-Black racism, systemic oppression, Black Lives Matter, racial trauma

Racism led to our ancestors' bodies being chained
As animals that needed to be trained.
Purposely given a different name,
To prevent them from being reclaimed,
That's the beginning of the master's reign.
Superiority eventually attained
Inferiority severely constrained.

All these years of pain and suffering
Intensified by blatant violent policing.
In the wake of racial profiling
An outcry that has been lingering,
Leaving the Black community withering,
As it is constantly burying
Another soul stopped living.

The time has come for the Black community to be healed
But you are still stepping on our heels.
How can we reconcile your words?
When your actions cut like a sword
When we see another Black man gunned down
In front of his young Black sons
By the cops in his hometown

Black life matters and has always been
Yet we have to fight to be seen,
To get the systems to intervene.
With little help from within.
That calls attention to the scene
When a guilty verdict is hard to win,
Feeling like a blow to the chin.

Racism conceptualized as our 'superior complex shadow'[1]
Has reached a tipping point where it has to go.
Echoed by the voices of those who have come to know,
Demanded by those who can't take more
Of its hundred years of painful sores.
Striking Black lives to its core
Visible now more than ever before.

We are in the midst of a slippery slope
For the many lives that have been choked.
Our superior complex shadow is under a microscope
A moment in history fueled by hope

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[1] Edwards, F. (2020). Open the doors and let us out: Escaping the coloniality of racism. *Cultural Pedagogical Inquiry*, 12(1), 278–280.

That has now travelled from coast to coast,
Igniting a global community of hosts
Working to eradicate this uninvited ghost.

As we watched our superior complex shadow metamorphosize
From silence and ignorance to being heavily scrutinized.
For the tears that have been cried,
Eventually reaching every side.
Driven by actions to apologize
For the many lives that are dehumanized
Ostracized and put aside.

## Author Biography

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# Posthumanism

NS?

# Critical Subjectivity in Algorave's Post-Work Practices

## Camilo Andrés Hoyos Lozano

### Abstract

Algorave is a global community dedicated to expanding the boundaries of algorithms and coding in the context of live electronic music. Through algorithms, Algorave members have discovered the power of altering music's structure. In the face of a fully automated future, this article queries whether this power may be directed towards defying political, economic, ideological, or ethical systems. First, I present Algorave as an idiosyncratic environment of a post-work society. Second, I develop a critique of Kathi Weeks' handling of the concept of subjectivity to question a post-work imaginary that comprises the subject. Third, I explain the pertinence of a critical subjectivity praxis for Algorave to enrich their post-work stance, whereby I suggest using their analytical lens on algorithms to prevent subjectivity from passing on to the post-human terrain. From here, I conclude that the subject of automation is the automated subject, and that a post-work society is not possible without overthrowing subjectivity. I ultimately caution the advocates of automation when pursuing post-work, for if automation manages to make subjectivity a part of algorithms with governmental impact, we will be—now and for good—automatically condemned to living as subjects, significantly reinforcing the basis of neoliberal work.

### Keywords

Algorave, automation, subjectification, post-work, post-humanism, neoliberalism

## Introduction

Algorave is a global community dedicated to expanding the boundaries of algorithms and coding in the context of live electronic music. By "live", Algorave members imply not only live performance but also live made and improvised. As a movement, their core guidelines are: "exposing algorithmic processes, staying wary of institutions, collapsing hierarchies, respect for other communities, and diversity in line-ups and audiences" (Resident Advisor, 2019, n.p.). As observed by Alex McLean[1], the musician and researcher who coined the term 'Algorave', the people involved in the movement are developing and nourishing a new language. With this language at the centre, they advance an ideology that—overlooking the digital divide—defends inclusion and operates under open-source practices. The requirements to get familiarized with and learn about the platforms and tools that they use, as well as the coding knowledge required to take part in the development of the language (McLean, as qtd in Resident Advisor, 2019), are limited to electricity and a computer with internet connection.[2]

For instance, when discussing *TidalCycles*, a software that McLean crafted to make algorithmically generated music and visuals, he explains:

> TidalCycles is free. But free is not just about being able to download it but also having the freedom to share it with others…Code is about language, if you don't share language it doesn't have the same meaning, it doesn't change. [This is] a political act…The sort of extreme of sharing everything you're doing…You are kind of sharing almost every keypress with the world, and each keypress has the possibility of doing something new. So, it's kind of pushing capitalism to its limits and breaking those limits. (McLean, as qtd in Resident Advisor, 2019, n.p.)

**Figure 1**. Shelly Knotts (Algorave adherent) performing live (Mutek, n.d.).

During Algorave events, the codes generating and changing the music are exhibited through projectors. Beyond the distinctive aesthetical identity this produces, and in conjunction with Algorave's free knowledge and online open-source practices, the intention is that anyone would be able "to look at the contents of those algorithms and understand what is it that they're actually doing" (Bell, as qtd in Resident Advisor, 2019, n.p.). Hence, the idea is to comprehend how algorithms unfold and "the effects they are having on our society on a larger scale" (n.p.).

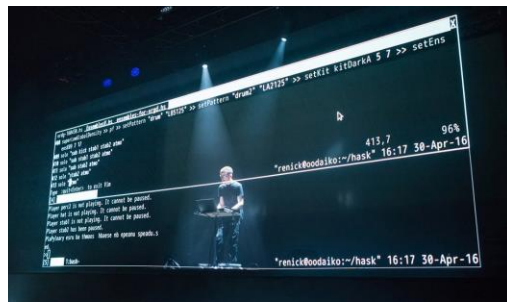


**Figure 2**. 'Atsushi Tadokoro x Renick Bell' Algorave event (Hayashi, 2016).

Algorave also employs live-coding systems to break down the "artificial barriers between the

[1] It is worth acknowledging Algorave's cofounders' positionality straight ahead: McLean and Collins are both men, white, European academics, and researchers. The first is a post-doc at the Deutsches Museum (McLean, Fanfani, & Harlizius-Klück, 2018), and the second is a professor at Durham University. That their subjectivities were socially shaped in certain privileged ways was crucial for them to develop and implement Algorave.

[2] There is a free, two-month online course available at https://club.tidalcycles.org/c/course/14?order=created&ascending=true taught my McLean himself, where apprentices will learn about coding and *TidalCycles* in full.

people creating the software algorithms and the people making the music" (Algorave, n.d., para 1). In so doing, they use the compositional power that they discovered in algorithms to change "the whole structure of the music" (Bell, as qtd in Resident Advisor, 2019, n.p.) and alter the societal structures in which electronic music takes part. Relatedly, by emphasizing composing at the moment with live-coding platforms, Algorave waives the recording and publishing steps, which, in other contexts, are quintessential to bridging the access gap between musicians and consumers. Indeed, Algorave contributes to the independence and autonomy of electronic music artists in an industry primordially driven by economic interests.

As the below pages will demonstrate, Algorave's political discourse speaks to the post-work debate, which includes anti-capitalist, autonomist, and feminist theories that focus on liberation *from* work as opposed to a humanist reading of Marx, such as Erich Fromm's (2014), which supports the liberation *of* work (Ferguson, Hennessy, & Nagel, 2019). The notion of post-work will be used in this article according to Srnicek & Williams's (2016) development of the term, as presented in the subsequent section. The following discussion explores whether the power within algorithms to alter music's structure can also be used by applying post-work and critical subjectivity practices to defy political, economic, ideological, and ethical structures, such as those of work and subjectivity. Hence, the ensuing arguments and reflections seek to find a voice in the academic conversation around Algorave politics, with the intent of supporting its members in finding pathways for using their political power in perhaps more efficient and poignant ways.

My analysis is divided into three parts. First, I present Algorave as a potentially idiosyncratic environment representative of a post-work society that has achieved full automation and thus contributes to diminishing the work ethic. This will serve as an attempt to respond to the following question posed by Srnicek and Williams (2016): What might the undertaking of a post-work world actually look like? (p. 107). By the end of this section, I consider a couple of Algorave's shortcomings when regarded as a post-work community, including a gender deficit that they face (Armitage, 2018), whereby I draw attention to, and problematize, coding as a gendered language. Subsequently, I will warn the ideological and political advocators of automation of Algorave's likeliness to propagate gender imbalances.

Second, I address the articulated history between work and subjectivity and the inconsistency in how Kathi Weeks—a professor and director of graduate studies in Gender, Sexuality and Feminist Studies at Duke University—deals with the concept of subjectivity in her book *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics and Postwork Imaginaries*. I do this by illustrating—in her terms—the production of the subject at work and how the labour-related demands she envisions—such as the Universal Basic Income (UBI)—irrevocably involve a demanding subject. This discrepancy turns even more prominent, I reveal, when the theorist presents the benefits of such demands in subjective terms, i.e., self-valorization, freedom, the fulfilment of pleasures, and desire expansion. In short, Weeks justifies post-work politics based on subjectivity, which I position as the backbone of neoliberal work.

Now, it is important to note that my understanding of subjectivity is influenced by Cartesian thought and its view that the subject relies on cognition and the human relation to truth (Chertkova, 2018). Since "any amount of doubt simply reiterates the truth that I, as a thinking thing, exist" (Atkins, 2005, p. 8), Descartes presents subjectivity as "the only guaranteed reality" (Chertkova, 2018, p. 43) and defines the subject as "a thinking thing…that doubts, that understands, that affirms, that denies, that wishes to do this and does not wish to do that, and also that imagines and perceives by the senses" (Descartes, 2008, p. 20). In this way, I take subjectivity as our own representation of ourselves, from which we relate to everything and

expressly, ourselves. As a contemporary examination of Nietzsche's (2002) ideas on the subject suggests, this internal relationship of subjectivity is organized through power in its distinction between "the one who commands *and* the one who obeys" (p. 19). As he also notes, "the synthetic concept of the 'I' [incites] the habit of ignoring and deceiving ourselves about the [former] duality" (p. 19). From this perspective, I engage subjectivity as a central mechanism of neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism is a "phase in the development of the capitalist mode of production" (Buchanan, 2010, p. 326), understood as "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (Harvey, 2005, p. 2). This political doctrine, which came to the surface in the mid-1970s, campaigns for "keeping interest rates…[and] inflation low" (Buchanan, 2010, p. 326), as well as "a modest welfare state" (Vallier, 2021, para 1). Neoliberalism entails many issues, and scholars across myriad fields of study have highlighted how free-market conditions under neoliberalism spark inequality and exclusion, particularly when it comes to goods and services that are essential to human life, such as potable water, food, or access to healthcare. For this reason, critical scholarship has proffered that it is vital to think of neoliberalism as a way of structuring society *and* a specific arrangement of power (Buchanan, 2010).

Under neoliberalism, the tacit power Nietzsche (2002) referred to in our relationship with ourselves becomes intermingled with the idea of freedom, and subjectivity is established as a critical governmental device. It is Bröckling (2015) who signals that the neoliberal political agenda included the production of a new (working) subject as one of its cornerstones. This is apparent from the final inform of the Bavarian and Sajonian commission for Future Matters of 1997, which declared that to manufacture productive people with an entrepreneurial nature, it is necessary to reinforce the population's will with science and media, on top of politics (Kommission für Zukunftsfragen Bayern – Sachsen, 1997, as cited in Bröckling, 2015, p. 20). Thus, in this setting, a subject is anyone whose representation of themselves is, to any extent, mediated or influenced by production/consumption processes under a neoliberal, capitalist framework. But, more than anything, the subject is subject to itself. And because the subject is a product of modern and capitalist relations, capitalism and the subject's ideology are always the same.

The intimate connection between work and subjectivity will make it possible to question a post-work imaginary that comprises the subject, particularly if subjectivity, and thus the current concept of work, seep through algorithmic codes, risking further perpetration and finding their way into the post-human sphere. In agreement with Reeve's (2016) idea that post-humanism "does not imply an end to being human, [but] a rejection of humanist principles, in particular that of the essentialist subject, and a recognition that human/nonhuman distinctions have become inoperative" (p. 161), I consider the promise of post-humanism to be transcendence of the subject and subjectivity, albeit in a soteriological and mystical sense. Such loosing-of-the-I, as I conceive it, entails fulfilment of a selfless perspective—probably via 'spiritual' technologies—which is materialized through decisions, actions, and relations. Thus, from this perspective, inviting the subject to join post-humanism would not only result in a paradox invigorating the state of affairs regarding work and human 'life,' but also in the most uncomfortable position to envision an embodied dissolution of the subject.

Accordingly, the third and last part of this article will tackle this post-work issue within the context of Algorave, highlighting the platform's expedient position to challenge subjectivity's centrality, and implement critical subjectivity practices that acknowledge "the conditions that structured that subjectivity in the first place and [recognize that] such conditions will also

dominate our forms of art" (Reeve, 2016, p. 159) unless the right strategies for overcoming them are found and employed.

## Algorave as a post-work community

Srnicek and Williams (2016) propose that a post-work society must be built "on the basis of fully automating the economy, reducing the working week, implementing a universal basic income, and achieving a cultural shift in the understanding of work" (p. 108). The factual power of these demands relies on their integrated and coordinated application, whereby any movement towards a post-work world would be, at least partially, activated by time and economic resources that would enable humanity to pursue a more creative, reflective, and equitable society.

Referring to a universal or unconditional basic income, van Parijs (2013) draws a link to the refusal of work, as he writes that it "is about the power to say yes to activities that are poorly paid or not paid at all, but are nonetheless attractive either in themselves or because of the training and the contacts they provide" (p. 174). Hence, he says, by refusing work and adopting a UBI, we could construe more just societies and methodically upgrade labour conditions, which, in turn, would upgrade the conditions of life. For instance, under capitalism, the arts have always been at a disadvantage when it comes to the labour market and sufficient remuneration. This has continued to be the case during the era of neoliberalism. In turn, countless people have been dismayed from pursuing more creative and imaginative careers, which harms, not only the individuals themselves, but the overall artistic outcome of our societies. Prioritizing creativity requires, as Costa and James (1973) declare, "having time, and 'to 'have time' means to work less" (as qtd in Weeks, 2011, p. 126). Hence, the UBI and refusing work is one way to mitigate the social disadvantage of the arts.

### *Refusing work and diminishing its ethos*

Weeks (2011) interestingly notes that one of the decisive repercussions of refusing domestic work is its invitation to scrutinize work's ethics and elementary configurations (p. 125). Refusing to be paid for something that people in a capitalist society typically would be, as Algorave's McLean does, bolsters the critiques concerning the structures and ethics around work. This is in line with Weeks' statement that "the refusal of work is not a rejection of productive activity *per se*, but rather a refusal of central elements of the wage relation and those discourses that encourage our consent to the modes of work that it imposes" (p. 124).

Weeks (2011) further brings attention to the 1970s feminist device of wages for housework, which saw its origins in the domestic labour debate at the time. Marxist and feminist theorists interested in formulating perspectives around "the political economy of women's household labour" (p. 118) extensively promoted the dialogue. According to Weeks, wages for housework is the least traditional outcome that emerged from the overall debate (p. 119). Her wish to revitalize its discussion is partially explained by her view that, when reconfigured, it can function as a present-day request for UBI since both strategies share the demands for more money and less work (p. 113-14).

If we conceptualized the wages for housework demand *as a perspective*, as Weeks (2011) does, and the practice of non-remunerated work as a political act, it is possible to understand how refusing money in exchange for work is prone to becoming a discourse. Emerging as the demand of wages for housework, such a discourse "could function as a force of demystification, an instrument of denaturalization, and a tool of cognitive mapping" (p. 129). The provocation of the free-work discourse, similar to the feminist demand, serves to evoke "subversive commitments, collective formations and political hopes" (p. 131). Indeed, the mobilization of wages for housework was not concerned with wages *per se* but rather with the power that could be achieved through demanding them (p. 133). It is here that we can identify a commonality with UBI, as what Weeks observes regarding the latter could easily apply to the former. This is

highlighted when she writes: "it is the ethics of the demand that often seem to generate more discomfort—specifically, over the way the demand is seen to denigrate the work ethic and challenge ideas of social reciprocity that have been so firmly attached to the ideal of the labor contract" (p. 146).

Regarding Algorave, refusing an income for a product that thousands of users operate (Resident Advisor, 2019) has a similar derogatory effect on work ethic. Further, consider how their platform speaks to how claiming latent kinds of power is helpful for subverting structures. However, contrary to the demands for housework wages and UBI, which stand for "more time and more money" (Weeks, 2011, p. 135), it appears that part of the underlying discourse of the open-source practice of Algorave is more time—to prioritize creativity—but less money. By acknowledging that open-source practices do not always assume an anti-capitalist or non-monetary agenda *per se*, we can start to consider how Algorave's members are building power from within as opposed to submitting to external capitalist standards.

## *Automation*

To continue with the analysis of Algorave as a post-work environment, I will now turn to the subject of automation. The automation movement believes that machines will eventually satisfy all demands for goods and services and thus free humanity of the obligation to do so (Srnicek & Williams 2016, p. 109). The tendency towards automation is gaining traction worldwide. Morris-Suzuki (1997) noted that "while the industrial sector employed 1,000 robots in 1970, today it uses over 1.6 million robots" (as qtd in Srnicek & Williams, 2016, p. 110). More significantly, however, the innovative form of automation founded upon algorithmic developments and improvements circumscribes all economy phases. Today, all mechanical and non-mechanical labour is susceptible to automation (p. 110-11).

In this direction, Berardi (2014) observes that, while robots are rapidly taking over 'human' tasks, such as language, memory, and imagination, human learning is increasingly relegated to mechanized enunciation. For example, think of the musician coding behind a laptop who does not know the exact effects and outcomes of modifying an algorithm during a live event and improvised performance. Not only does this exercise serves as an example of how automation translates intellectual processes into algorithmic operations (Berardi, 2014, p. 1), but it registers with Berardi's theory on semiocapital, which asserts that, by capturing and subsuming cognitive activity, semiocapital valorises and accumulates "signs (semia) as economic assets" (p. 1).

The notion of semiocapital opens up space to critique Algorave, and while I will explain this in more depth below, for now, I want to posit the question of creativity in the semiocapital setting. On the one hand, one could agree with Berardi, as well as Srnicek and Williams, that a fully automated future, in which art jobs are undertaken by machines and *the production of the new* is delegated to self-sustainable algorithms, would take away the 'burden' of creativity from humans and allow them to simply enjoy the art. On the other hand, however, it is imperative to think of creativity as an anthropological category. What would become of a world where *the production of the new* is automatized, improvised, and even randomized? "The cognitive mutation that we are talking about", Berardi affirms, "is going to dissolve the historical relation between consciousness, politics, and freedom" (p. 3). This means that those historical understandings of what has been regarded as voluntary choices will now be supplemented by arrays of algorithmic functions (p. 3). However, as I read it, Berardi's point is that such robotized logical successions will simultaneously automatize subjectivity within a system designed to make voluntary choices.

Consequently, "cognitive automation [can be viewed as] the technology for injecting determinism into the human sphere" (Berardi, 2014, p. 2), and specifically around the concept of subjectivity. If subjects perform

automation—and because eluding subjectivity seems preposterous today—algorithms will contain and reproduce subjectivity through their incessant decision-making. Such a possibility illustrates the danger associated with automation, as it may allow for the reproduction of constructs that stem from *historical* ideologies, economic formations, and governmental structures, as is the case with subjectivity for neo-liberalism. In the succeeding section, I will elaborate on said systems of subject formation.

To succinctly reflect on the linguistic issue of automation, I should cite MGI's assertion that approximately 110 to 140 million cognitive jobs will be eradicated globally before 2025 (McKinsey Global Institute, 2013, p. 40). Several leaders of the Algorave movement are aware of this prediction and ask themselves: "One question is what to do with all the software engineers, if their jobs were to disappear" (McLean, Fanfani, & Harzlizius-Klück, 2018, p. 25). Nowadays, human-based programming is giving way to algorithmic and data-based dictation (p. 24). Hence, an even more interesting question these changes pose is what will happen with all the programming languages (p. 25) once humans are removed from the process of creating and nourishing them? From the above queries, it is possible to consider that, despite finding Srnicek and Williams's (2016) call for full automation (p. 112) appealing, the proposal requires further consideration.

## *Universal basic income*

As mentioned before, Srnicek and Williams's (2016) proposal also entails the implementation of UBI, which van Parijs (1992) defines as "an income paid unconditionally to individuals regardless of their family or household relationships, regardless of other incomes, and regardless of their past, present, or future employment status" (p. 3). Different authors (Srnicek & Williams, 2016; Weeks, 2011) agree that income should be sufficient, unconditional, and continuous for UBI to be meaningful. Srnicek and Williams specify that UBI must not be regarded as a substitute to the welfare state but rather as complementary. Further, Weeks (2011) highlights that UBI must be large enough so that waged work remains an option but is no longer compulsory (p. 138). The above theorists underline the importance for UBI to acknowledge the economic function of social reproduction and non-monetary or non-quantifiable contributions to society which, as I have demonstrated, would be relevant for Algorave. Lastly, UBI is also helpful when thinking of remuneration in terms of need instead of the perceived "ability" to acquire and apply various skillsets considered relevant to succeed at work and within the capitalist labour market (Srnicek & Williams, 2016, p. 122).

To sum things up, the demand for UBI has a twofold function: as much as it serves to critique the current wealth distribution method in our societies, it also, and just as importantly, proposes a solution to decrease dependency on work (Weeks, 2011, p. 143). As I have mentioned, either refusing or reducing work should stimulate projects like Algorave. One could even argue that Algorave works as the very platform that Berardi (2014) envisions when he suggests that:

> we should focus on the creation of a platform (social, cultural, institutional, artistic, neuroengineering) for the self-organization of the general intellect and the recomposition of the networked activity of millions of cognitive workers worldwide, who must get reacquainted with their social, erotic, and poetic body. We must to walk this territory where technology meets epistemology, psychopathology meets poetry, and neurobiology meets cultural evolution (p. 8).

The proposal for UBI complements a post-work society as it is a rare privilege to choose not to work (Srnicek & Williams, 2016, p. 120). If UBI were implemented, this rare privilege would become democratized, resulting in some capital and political power being redistributed, thus benefiting the largest part of the population. In Algorave, much of the work involved is voluntary, which is not an uncommon practice

among the arts. Indeed, plenty of the underground art and music we currently enjoy comprises voluntary work and DIY (i.e., do it yourself) practices. This confirms that capitalism's coercion to work actively obtrudes and stagnates the arts' development. What progress could we have experienced by now if not constrained by neoliberalism? Which developments of the arts would we encounter in a post-work society? Acknowledging the UBI's "demand as not merely a policy proposal but a perspective and a provocation, [*may* result in] a pedagogical practice that entails a critical analysis of the present and an imagination of a different future" (Weeks, 2011, p. 147). I delineate that it 'may result in', because as Baker (2019) has cautioned, UBI has become a broad concept with diverse connotations and nuances used by both left-wing and right-wing adherents. Hence, to avoid "the dream of unalienated life [which] could cause some to endorse policies that will lead to new forms of alienation and exploitation" (p. 1), it is also necessary to consider the more comprehensive social arrangement that contextualizes specific UBI proposals.

### Summary and tension points

Considering the above observations, it is possible to argue that Algorave meticulously and directly tackles two of the touchstones considered in Srnicek and Williams's integral proposal of the refusal of work: automation and the diminishment of the work ethic. Simultaneously, the other two elements, the reduction of the working week and the implementation of a UBI, can easily be related and potentiate the movement's political perspective. As I have revealed, automation is a constitutive aspect of Algorave's artistic techniques, and some of its members are active contributors to the debate of work, automation, and its confronting junctures with language. To my knowledge, Algorave has not collectively addressed the aspects of reducing the working week and UBI. However, I made explicit some benefits that they could obtain if such politics came into effect (like an indirect, economic retribution for non-quantifiable contributions to society, such as the production and nourishing of a new language), in addition to illustrating the possible connections between reducing work mandates/implementing UBI and Algorave's free-work and open-source procedures. Finally, I also framed these practices as the discursive materialization of a perspective that supports the diminishment of neoliberalism's work ethic. This, I posit, is enough to think of Algorave as a post-work community while also revealing the potential to develop the platform accordingly—if their members were interested in furthering such possibility.

Until now, I have focused on Algorave's strengths concerning a post-work imaginary. Nonetheless, it is also essential to mention some shortcomings that require attention from within the community. I will start by referring to one that significantly intertwines with the possibility of an automated future and resonates with a larger phenomenon that Weeks (2011) calls the production of gender at work (p. 9), which can also be understood as the gendering of technology. As "Maureen McNeil has long argued, technology has always been bound up in and as a gender relationship" (Armitage, 2018, p. 33), and coding is no exception to this (p. 35). Men—notoriously white—have mostly developed programming languages, and "although women are using live coding languages to develop their musical practice, they are still finding themselves on the 'receiving end' of a technology" (p. 43). Armitage's critique that little effort has been put into backing up women to advance their own languages, or "access…the power to signify" (Haraway, 1991, p. 175), with the subsequent suggestion "that a language developed by women would act as the next significant cornerstone in further feminising the [A]lgorave scene" (Armitage, 2018, p. 43), incites the following realization: that because of the current state of gender imbalances in technological environments, it is likely that such imbalances will be coded and perpetuated into an automated future and, by extension, post-humanist landscapes. In this spirit, automation advocates should heed this warning, ensuring that

existing gender imbalances are not further conveyed and reproduced.

Donna Haraway's[3] persuasive *Cyborg Manifesto* (1991) offers a political guide for how women in Algorave could reclaim the digital language. According to the manifesto, the biologist would encourage them to employ coding or cyborg writing to seize "the tools to mark the world that marked them as other" (p. 175). Such tools "are often stories, retold stories, versions that reverse and displace the hierarchical dualisms of naturalized identities" (p. 175). And let us not forget that aside from coding being a linguistic praxis, there is also a narrative potential in music compositions and performances. Haraway would inculcate this potential given that "feminist cyborg stories have the task of recoding communication and intelligence to subvert command and control" (p. 175). Thus, this might be another avenue that Algorave can interfere with and, in so doing, alter society's established political and ideological structures.

An additional concern with the dynamics of Algorave relates to Berardi's (2014) point on semiocapital, which helps to conceptualize the financial contributions and valorisation that Algorave produces through the constant nourishment of their language. When juxtaposing this with the inextricable relationship between society and language, and with Negri's (1996) remark that "productive labor is…that which reproduces society" (p. 157), we arrive at the following interrogation: Who is deriving the economic benefits from the semiocapitalist labour of those involved in Algorave? This question is important given that their precarious working conditions could exemplify "the feminization of work" (Haraway, 1991, p. 168)—to borrow Haraway's terms—or a progressive form of unemployment involving unpaid work.

Finally, I wish to outline my central worry regarding the relationship between Algorave and a post-work imaginary and make this the focus of the rest of my article. When expounding on the ethical burden towards implementing UBI, Srnicek and Williams (2016) state that work is immensely entrenched with our own identities (p. 123). Further, Weeks (2011) explicates that the UBI demand "invites the expansion of our [subjective] needs and desires" (p. 146). While I wholeheartedly back up her intention of contemplating humanity beyond the bounds of work, a significant problem, and contradiction, arises when she presents UBI's gains in subjective terms. As various theorists have suggested (Bröckling, 2015; Dardot & Laval, 2014), subjectivity *is* work. Further, together with Restrepo, I have affirmed that, in the current landscape, work does not only *need* but *depends* on subjectivity (2018). Thus, it is puzzling to have this idea surfacing in Weeks' (2011) exposition as the "dependence on independence" (p. 56). My call here is to be more attentive when justifying labour-related demands, such as UBI, through subjectivity.

## A post-work imaginary for the subject?

Reflecting on subjectivity will provide an entirely different outlook on the issues already been discussed within this paper. Art, mediated by expression, is unavoidably subjective, and subjectivity is the perfect example of modern productive relations (Bröckling 2015). I believe it is in this direction that, for example, the Google Empire is "aiming at the systematic fabrication of automated subjectivity" (Berardi, 2014, p. 5). For these reasons, within the current neoliberal state, "overcoming the work ethic will require us overcoming ourselves" (Srnicek & Williams, 2016, p. 125). So, when concerning work—but not exclusively—we are the problem that we are trying to overcome (Hoyos Lozano & Muñoz Restrepo, 2018).

[3] As a matter of citational politics, I should mention that Haraway was recently called out by Katherine McKittirick for her anti-blackness in the following tweet: https://twitter.com/demonicground/status/1370462540036198402. Accordingly, I wish to clarify that this piece was developed beforehand and that it is not possible for me to accommodate the shortcomings of academia so immediately. If the piece had been written after the tweet, this section would have been revised, and Haraway altered out.

## *Work and subjectivity: An articulated history*

So far, I have only touched on a couple of nodes in the relationship between work and subjectivity. I wish to begin the second part of this article by elaborating on the abovementioned problem outlined by Williams and Srnicek (2016), i.e., that work is "deeply ingrained into our very identity" (p. 123). Or, in the words of Weeks (n.d.): "work has come to be driven into our identity, portrayed as the only means for true self-fulfilment" (as qtd in Srnicek & Williams, 2016, p. 124-25). In this expansion, I will concentrate on Weeks' thoughts on the matter to expose the inconsistency of designing a post-work society comprehending subjectivity.

Throughout the second half of the 20th century, philosophers like Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Michel Foucault had a massive impact on how psychology's power started to be thought of in different contexts. Because of this landmark, vital effects of the post-industrial work ethic became apparent. For instance, Rose (1999) noted the crucial role that psychology's knowledge production played in making workers governable subjects (p. 56). In a similar vein, Foucault (1996) analyses power practices, such as the control of time and the body, which are enacted within disciplinary institutions, and are pivotal to subjectification processes. Moulier-Boutang (2006) added that such power practices should not solely be considered in relation to wage earners and the indicated institutions, but rather, in relation to every subordinate worker and institution participating in its reproduction. This supplement to Foucault's well-known remarks insinuates that the capitalist subject is the subject *per se* (Hoyos Lozano & Muñoz Restrepo, 2018).

It seems clear that Weeks (2011) is also aware of the relationship between work and subjectivity. In this respect, her concern for the subject, judging by her extensive development, is one of the lead ideas throughout her book's introduction and first few chapters. Partly, she works through the overlaps between capitalism and subjectification by examining the repercussions of the Protestant work ethic. The author adduces, for example, that the work ethic "is an individualizing discourse" (p. 52), which gives "advice not just about how to behave but also about who to be" (p. 54). The prescription of this ethic:

> is not merely to induce a set of beliefs or instigate a series of acts but also to produce a self that strives continually toward those beliefs and acts. This involves the cultivation of habits, the internalization of routines, the incitement of desires, and the adjustment of hopes, all to guarantee a subject's adequacy to the lifetime demands of work. (p. 54)

Building on her discussions about the Protestant ethic, Weeks (2011) resolves that an established work ethic secures vital amounts of disposal, dedication, and subjective investment (p. 70), and with good reason, as production processes also produce a subject for its resulting commodities (p. 50). Hence, the subject's production is localized—halfway at least—in the industries, offices, and workplaces. Putting this idea into concrete form, Weeks declares that "work produces not just economic goods and services but also social and political subjects. In other words, the wage relation generates not just income and capital, but disciplined individuals, governable subjects, worthy citizens and responsible family members" (p. 8).

In a second moment of the articulated history of work and subjectivity, particularly relating to the new forms of digital work in Algorave, the subjectification of work develops into the work of subjectification (Bröckling, 2015, p. 63). From capitalism's inception, there has been an intention to fuse the management's agenda with the workers' abilities and resolve to pour them into working action (Viteles, 1932, as cited in Pulido, 2015). Dardot and Laval (2014) consider this process completed with the "practices for manufacturing and managing the new subject", who—in line with the previously cited inform from the Bavarian and Sajonian commission for

Future Matters of 1997—is expected to "work for enterprises as if they were working for themselves" (p. 260). This, they continue, subsequently "abolishes any sense of alienation and even any *distance* between the individuals and the enterprises employing them" (p. 260). As a result, workers do not only obey but find themselves wanting to do so (Pulido, 2011).

Observations of this kind led Dardot and Laval (2014) to conclude that our lives are increasingly regulated through the technology of subjectivity and a rivalrous fulfilment of the self, whereby work is the chief instrument through which this is accomplished (Dardot & Laval, 2014, p. 260). Also reflecting on the dynamics of post-Fordist work, Cox and Federici (1976) conclude that "*we* [emphasis added] have always belonged to capital every moment of our lives" (p. 12). Thus, the arranging of these ideas led to understanding "work as a path to individual self-expression, self-development and creativity" (Weeks, 2011, p. 46); and, conversely, subjectivity as the essential mechanism of work, since it is what bonds humans with the capitalist productive and ideological apparatus (Hoyos Lozano & Muñoz Restrepo, 2018).

Here, the interest shifts from the individual's productive behaviour to the entirety of its conduct (Bröckling, 2015, p. 21; Townley, 1989, p. 106). Therefore, every aspect of the subject is now perceived in productive terms and managed through capitalist frames. The psychological, as opposed to the physical, enters the economic terrain, thus giving the impression that 'loving one's job' is an implicit task of the work. In fact, striving to love one's job is one of the best ways to accomplish this mission (Hochschild, 1983, p. 6). What has been called the "panopticon introjection"[4] (Bröckling, 2015, p. 240) also contributed to making "work [a sort of] mechanism of *spiritual independence:* rather than relying upon religious institutions and authorities, 'the conscientious Puritan continually supervised his own state of grace" (Weber, 1958, p. 124). In this line, Weeks (2011) continues to explain:

> The crude subjectification of Taylor's Schmidt is guided now by a myriad of management theories and a major industry that aids in the manufacture of productive corporate cultures: the relatively simple industrial psychology of the Fordist era had been remade into the complex art of cultural fashioning and emotional engineering typical of many managerial regimes today. The problem for many employers is one of encouraging employee self-development. (p. 71)

Consequently, these new working subjects (Bröckling, 2015), echoing the Nietzschean duality of the self, are expected to play two conjoinedly ambivalent roles: that of the master and the mastered. The mantra 'be yourself' that has conquered almost every social discourse has, as Lazzarato states, "far from eliminat[ed], the antagonism between hierarchy and cooperation, between autonomy and command, actually repose[d] the question at a higher level" (1996, p. 135). Working subjects are no longer limited to producing commodities and providing services—indeed, they are no longer limited to producing themselves as working subjects. Instead, they now must produce *themselves* as consumers and neoliberal subjects, thereby revealing subjectivity as a foundation of contemporary work.

[4] This is a concept drawing from Jeremy Bentham's panopticon, a prison architecture and surveillance technique he developed in the 18th century (White & Epston, 1993, p. 80), and its Foucauldian (2019) analysis on *Discipline and Punish* (p. 341). As Bentham conceived it, a panopticon is a ring-shaped building of individualized cells with a surveillance tower at the center, in its inner courtyard (White & Epston, 1993, p. 80). It provides a structure for an asymmetrical application of power under the premise that "power should be visible and unverifiable" (Foucault, 2019, p. 344). When power is unverifiable and, thus, immaterial, it coerces people into self-surveillance, prompting them to assume an active role in their own subjugation (White & Epston, 1993, p. 83). Thus, the 'panopticon introjection' points to achieving self-subjugation without the mediation of a physical panopticon.

## The critique of Weeks

As Weeks (2011) defines it, the practice of demanding requires a "personal investment", a "passionate attachment", and "the presence of a desiring subject" (p. 134). From this and her statement that "it is 'we' or 'I' who makes a demand" (p. 134), it is clear that demands require a demanding subject, which exposes the inconsistency in her argumentation that I want to unveil. The ways out of the current problems of work that she envisions are not critical enough of subjectivity. Nor does she problematize them to the extent that is required to provide a sufficiently detailed picture of the problems of work that trouble her – and which she in turn troubles.

This issue is not only represented by Weeks' (2011) demanding subject, but also in how she presents the (visionary) advantages and positive effects of what is being demanded as *subjective* gains. The reader repetitiously encounters this idea. For instance, when examining the proposal of the refusal of work, she puts it as one that "is at once deconstructive and reconstructive—or, as the autonomists might describe it, *a practice of separation and process of self-valorization* [emphasis added]—an analysis that is committed at once to antiwork critique and post-work invention" (p. 32). Moreover, she poses that "the demand for shorter hours is conceived here as a demand for, among other benefits, more time to imagine, experiment with, and participate in the relationship of intimacy and sociality that we choose" (p. 34). The idea also reappears when Weeks refers to the shaping values of work. She writes:

> to call this traditional work values into question is not to claim that work is without value…It is, rather, to…suggest there might be a variety of ways to experience the pleasure that we may now find in work, as well as other pleasures that we may wish to discover, cultivate, and enjoy (p. 12).

To cite another example:

> We might demand a basic income not so that we can have, do, or be what we already want, do, or are, but *because it might allow us to consider and experiment with different kinds of lives, with wanting, doing, and being, otherwise* [emphasis added] (p. 145).

In the above two quotes, the advantage is measured in terms of pleasure, which is contradictory enough, as it alludes to a produced and self-produced subject who aims for personal (subjective) satisfaction. Nevertheless, the final quote is possibly the most problematic, for the author is defending subjective wills and desires and suggesting reterritorializing the wishful subject. Given that, in contemporary work relations, subjects are urged to discipline and produce themselves, and the limit between working and being a subject is diffused, I am convinced that 'being otherwise' does not change anything or make our current reality better. On the contrary, subjectivity or sheer *being,* is what capitalism needs to keep going (particularly in its current form of neoliberalism). In this sense, the question for inciting a post-work world and overthrowing subjectivity is *not* one that might consider alternative subjectivities.

The tension under scrutiny arises in the middle chapters of Weeks' (2011) book, when she exposes why the purposed changes are desirable. This is upsetting because, earlier, she seemed to be adequately aware of the complexities and paradoxes between subjectivity and post-Fordist work. The author even affirms that "the demand for basic income attempts to address—rather than continuing to ignore or deny—the realities of post-Fordist work, to offer a measure of security in an economy of precariousness" (p. 150). However, the role and limits of subjectivity, which is perhaps the instituting reality of post-Fordist work, are left unabated. Fittingly, her last claim is undermined by the necessity of the implicit—sometimes explicit—subject in demand and her acknowledgement that "understanding and confronting the contemporary work society requires attention to both its structures

and its subjectivities” (p. 40).

Because ‘the demand’ is the grounding aspect of not just Weeks’ but also Williams and Srnicek’s project, the critique I am trying to establish here could apply to both texts equally. That said, I am by no means suggesting that the above three authors must be dismissed. On the contrary, my efforts are evidence of my great appreciation for their intellectual developments, but the role of subjectivity in neoliberal formations is a complexity that requires deeper consideration in their works to make their valuable contributions and alternative life modalities sturdier. As I have observed above and elsewhere (Hoyos Lozano & Muñoz Restrepo, 2018), the problems that the world of work now poses are only solvable when considered in conjunction with those of subjectivity. This, to say the least, calls into question a post-work society intended for the subject.

## Raving in paradox

There is symmetry in how Weeks (2011) resists addressing the disclosed tension and how Algorave disregards subjectivity. Reeve (2016), who is a British live artist and philosopher, notes that regardless of the “habitual subjectivity surrounding the practice [of live coding] as a whole [it] remains unaffected by the creative work generated and experienced” (p. 159). Implying that Algorave is yet to develop a posture concerning subjectivity, she proposes that “the challenge from live art to live coding is to ask in what ways the latter practice negotiates critical subjectivity and how this might affect the scope of what can get done via it?” (p. 158). As far as I am aware, Algorave’s members’ participation in the artistic-political debate around automatization and work has not pondered subjectivity’s role. This is a missed opportunity given their “incredibly strong position to create new forms of cultural experience which might transform human self-understanding in relationship to the phenomenal world as well as inspire the technological imaginary” (p. 160). In this way, Algorave’s critical discourse’s inattention to the frictions involving subjectivity mirrors Weeks’ avoidance to recognize the contradiction between the alternatives she suggests and their aim to introduce the human possibility of ‘being otherwise’. In my opinion, these issues are more worrisome than their failure to resolve such contradiction or postulate a comprehensive resolution to the problem that subjectivity represents.

As with (any) other artistic or political avenues, Algorave remains trapped in the negotiation between what is being communicated, expressed, and defended (or demanded) and the unavoidability of doing so from a subjective stance. More troubling, however, is how the, otherwise radical, reduction of the working week or implementation of a UBI could bolster subjectivity via Weeks’ (2011) celebration of having more time to imagine and experiment (p. 34), discover, cultivate, and enjoy (p. 12); specifically, in a creative milieu like Algorave.

Following Reeve’s (2016) “insistence on an ethical-artistic justification for performing in public” (p. 158), and, to answer her question of “why should live code performances take place?” (p. 157), a rationale I propose is to continue to use Algorave’s political nature—which is made clear in their interest that people understand how algorithms operate—to diminish the impact of the difficulties examined in this article. Through the encouragement to culturally adapt an analytical lens on algorithms, it would be much easier to realize what is being injected into them and hence, be allowed to pass on to the post-human terrain.

Reeve (2016) outlines the heart of the problem when asserting that “the recognition that we have entered the posthuman realm does not mean that subjectivity has disappeared or become inoperative” (p. 158). However, based on my conception of post-humanism, this should indeed be the case. Anything that has been naturalized—like genderism, work, or subjectivity—risks being relocated into an automatized future and perpetuated, as coders will not necessarily be aware of the normative constructs being interwoven into their input. Algorave could

operate as a platform to denounce such risk, understanding that, due to their intimate relationship, a questioning or critique directed at the dynamics in which subjectivity participates will unavoidably imply a critique of work (and vice versa). Further, an *artistic statement* against subjectivity could be reinforced via meta-automation—standalone automations performed by previously programmed automations, which are not directly humanly generated and therefore not straightforwardly subjective—and an exacerbation of collaborative composition methods. Nonetheless, these artistic approaches to problematize subjectivity would still have a long way to make possible an unambiguous reference to its overthrowing, transcendence, or dissolution.

This then begs the question: is the problem of dissolving subjectivity a dead end? Being possibly one of today's most timely and relevant questions, it constitutes a paradox, for we can only approach the question through our own subjectivities. As Reeve (2016) claims: "to disavow subjectivity is still a quasi-act of subjectivity" (p. 158). That said, a complementary but still partial way to tackle this interrogation could be through the live artist's understanding of Deleuze and Guattari's body without organs (BwO), in which "the self does not disappear but loses its traditional modus operandi as an organizing principle and instead becomes an appendix, a residium, to a BwO" (p. 155). At least here, the self, and therefore subjectivity, can start to lose its centrality and some of its power. In the setting of Algorave, this alternative seems to be especially pertinent, at least according to Reeve's examination. Because of the vast role of automation and randomization, the artist's subjectivity participates as an ingredient rather than a supreme entity with all elements of the performance under control. Consequently, and in agreement with a (non-humanist) post-humanist standpoint, the subjectivities in the audience are not—and cannot be—conceived as supreme queens or judges who must be pleased, as not every element of the performance is envisioned for their enjoyment.

## Conclusion

My analysis has revealed how Algorave wholly engages two aspects of Srnicek and Williams's (2016) post-work society: automation and the diminishment of the work ethic. Although the remaining two aspects—the reduction of the working week and the implementation of a UBI—seem to have not been collectively addressed by Algorave, I explained how the collective could relate and benefit from them. Both policies could translate into treasured resources supporting the community's free work, open-source practices, and overall politic vision.

Regarding the critique of Weeks' treatment of the concept of subjectivity in relation to work, I forewarned that the act of 'demanding' operates through subjectivity, and similarly, problematized the author's justification of post-work proposals and devices based on *subjective* gains. Acknowledging the shared history of work and subjectivity, I argued that the developed contradictions assist the reterritorialization of the subject and must be overcome if we expect post-work to leave behind one of the major issues of neoliberal work. In sum, this was the route I followed to challenge a post-work society that is still indebted to the subject.

My suggested paths forward for Algorave are threefold. First, and perhaps the most important, is to deploy and bolster the community's scrutinizing optic on algorithms by deliberately emphasizing currently normalized and naturalized social constructs, which are already exceedingly problematic, such as gender, work, and subjectivity. This focus could be taken as an additional political power within, and from, Algorave to monitor the influence that current societies are potentially having on future societies via algorithmic technologies. The second recommendation, yet merely with the status of an artistic statement, is the intensification of meta-automation techniques and collaborative composition methods. Third, and closely linked to the previous suggestion, is to concede that, in live code performances, and because of the immense role of automation and randomization, (the artist's) subjectivity is prone to—*and*

*should*—lose its customary centrality and power. This is meaningful to consider how automation is effective to displace subjectivity's role in other social environments and societies at large.

Based on Algorave politics, I revealed how the community harnesses a power capable of defying and even altering political, economic, ideological, and ethical structures, like those of work and subjectivity. This power would probably upsurge if they recognized that some of their practices are in line with the construction of a post-work community and devoted to the opportunities of development that I have signaled here. Also, if, in responding to Reeve's (2016) call, they committed to a conscious critical subjectivity praxis, invigorating their confrontation to subjectivity, and therefore, the instituting reality of post-Fordist work, they could further their political power even more. In the same vein, the feminization of Algorave's coding language and musical narratives is also central when attending to the subversion of political, ideological, and ethical structures.

In response to the proposals to refuse and reduce work as it relates to post-work societies, I can conclude that less work must entail less subjectivity. While it is understandable that transitioning to a post-work society requires some degree of subjectivity, a consummate post-work society is, in my understanding, not possible without eventually overthrowing subjectivity altogether (whether in my terms or not). Rephrasing Judith Butler, Reeve (2016) "contends that critique as a practice is not something that can be voluntarily adopted, it results from 'subject positions' that are made 'unlivable' and thus start to expose the contingencies that made them possible in the first place" (p. 160). But—with the most minimum desire of waning the struggle of those who are greatly oppressed—is the unlivable subject position not that of the subject itself? In light of my analysis, I recognize that the subject of automation is the automated subject. Therefore, I ask the advocators of automation for caution because if automation manages to make subjectivity part of algorithms with governmental impact, we will be—now and for good—automatically condemned to living as subjects, significantly reinforcing the foundation of neoliberal work.

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# The ASMR Paradox: Scientific Discourse and the Enchanting Ephemeral Body of ASMR

M. F. Collao Quevedo

## Abstract

This paper explores tensions between scientific understandings of the internet phenomenon known as Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR) and accounts of the experience put forth by people who experience ASMR (also known as ASMRers). While current scientific research into the therapeutic affordances and the physiological, neurological, and psychological determinants of ASMR have failed to produce satisfactory accounts of the experience, ASMRers label and describe the phenomenon in scientific terms to give the experience scientific validity. So far, this strategy has worked, infusing a series of scientific inquiries into the strange uniqueness of the experience. That said, efforts to understand the ASMR experience through modern scientific, technological, and conceptual strategies is not only limiting, but futile. ASMR is incomprehensible from the standpoint of modern scientific discourse because of the unique, posthuman constitution of the ASMR body. This has led to what I call the ASMR Paradox: growing efforts to describe ASMR, a scientifically inaccessible experience, in purely scientific terms. In consideration of this paradox, the following reflection piece explores the tension between scientific discourses regarding ASMR and the seemingly diametrical experiences of ASMRers. I conclude that, while the former is indebted to western humanist thinking, the latter expresses a posthumanist configuration that is incompatible with the scientific rhetoric currently being used to describe it.

## Keywords

ASMR, body, science, phenomenology, posthumanism

## Introduction

In recent years, media-sharing platforms have seen the proliferation of content production meant to stimulate pleasant sensory and affective responses in their viewers. This internet phenomenon has been labeled Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR). ASMR content producers (also known as ASMRtists) create content in which they manipulate various forms of visual and audio stimuli to induce sensory responses in their viewers. Users (or ASMRers) tend to describe the experience as *braingasms*: feelings of intense relaxation accompanied by tingling and static-like sensations that begin at the scalp and move down the back of the neck, sometimes travelling down to the viewer's arms and legs.

ASMR media content varies in themes and production styles. While some ASMRtists try to induce the experience by whispering gently into microphones, others tap, scratch, cut, and crinkle various objects and materials. The videos are typically shot in a point of view manner and often "depict role play situations, in which the viewer is placed in a position of 'close proximity' to another person in order to be cared for in some manner" (Barratt & Davis, 2015, p. 2). In such cases, ASMRtists try to trigger more complex affective responses by accompanying visual and auditory stimuli with feelings of what Andersen (2015) describes as simulated, distant, or nonstandard intimacy (e.g., massage ASMR and ASMR porn).

Interestingly, ASMRers also tend to experience ASMR-like responses in everyday settings. For instance, when describing their experience during a hairdressing appointment, a participant in a study by Barratt and Davis (2015) explains:

> I was totally amazed, I can only describe what I started feeling as an extremely relaxed trance like state, that I didn't want to end, a little like how I have read perfect meditation should be but I never ever achieved (p. 6).

Accounts like this are not uncommon among ASMRers. As observed by Andersen (2015), those who experience ASMR regularly trace their first ASMR-like responses back to their early childhood (e.g., to the times they would watch the art show *The Joy of Painting* and listen to the soothing voice of the host, Bob Ross). Accordingly, it could be said that part of the ASMRtists' task is to induce these sensations of relaxation, emotional wellbeing, and contentment, but in a richer and more controlled environment. An effective ASMR experience can be said to be one that *moves* the listener, temporarily altering not only their moods and experience of sensory and affective stimuli but also their general relation to the immediately surrounding world.

Theoretically speaking, this means that the initial subjecthood of the listener is not the same as the one generated through the ASMR experience. As I show later in this reflection, ASMR appears to summon an altogether different worlding, meaning that ASMRtists' role is, in a way, to de-subjectify and reconfigure ASMRers' subjective configuration for the duration of the experience, disclosing to them new properties of the surrounding world. From then on, crinkles, scratches, cracks, jingles, etc., are no longer the trivial by-product of a particular action, but heavily charged with previously unacknowledged potentialities for attachments, sensation, affect, and noticing. One might go so far as to describe the ASMR experience as a form of *enchantment*: an encounter with "the extraordinary that lives amid the familiar and the everyday" and which *strikes* and *shakes* us in fascinating and ethically relevant ways (Bennett, 2001, p. 4).

## The Science of ASMR

Due to the novelty of the phenomenon, the current literature on ASMR is limited, with much of it focusing on the experience's therapeutic affordances (Del Campo & Kehle, 2016; Fredborg et al., 2018; Poerio et al., 2018). One of the earliest peer-reviewed articles on ASMR examines its affective triggers, suggesting a possible link between ASMR and neurological sensory conditions, like synesthesia and

misophonia (Barratt & Davis, 2015). The paper concludes that although it is not clear whether "ASMR and misophonia are two ends of the same spectrum of synaesthesia-like emotional responses" (p. 13), ASMR does seem to produce positive effects in its viewers, supporting "[the] suggestion that ASMR may be of use for providing temporary relief to individuals with depression, stress and chronic pain" (p. 1).

Similarly, Del Campo and Kehle (2016) argue that because ASMR triggers "positive emotions, relaxation, serenity and attenuation of symptoms of anxiety, stress, chronic pain, and depression" (p. 100), it promotes feelings commonly associated with happiness and wellbeing. Their article also draws a distinction between the ASMR experience and other comparable mental states, like mindfulness and *frisson* (a musically induced pleasurable sensory and emotional experience commonly resulting in chills, goose bumps, and tingling sensations). They conclude that although ASMR, mindfulness, and *frisson* share some similarities (e.g., attention requirements and feelings of contentment), ASMR has some discernible features. For one, *frisson* only lasts a few seconds, while ASMR can be sustained for several minutes. Meanwhile, mindfulness requires participants to focus on a particular stimulus and to focus inward on their body's responses, while ASMR can happen spontaneously in a wide range of external settings.

Other researchers have tried to identify the specific physiological, psychological, and neurological determinants of ASMR. For example, Fredborg et al. (2017) investigated "whether individuals with ASMR differed from matched control participants on five broad personality domains: Openness-to-Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism" (p. 2). Their results showed that the ASMR group scored higher than the control group on the domains of Openness-to-Experience and Neuroticism, but lower on Conscientiousness, Extraversion, and Agreeableness, pointing to reliable personality differences that may contribute to the phenomenon. These findings are further supported by a study done by McErlean and Banissy (2017), whose ASMRer participants scored higher than the control group on Openness to Experience, Fantasizing, and Empathic Concern. Similarly, a study by Fredborg et al. (2018) found that individuals with ASMR report higher levels of curiosity and mindful attention, suggesting "that ASMR may be a cognitively 'active' process rather than a more automatic response to stimuli" (p. 10).

Taking a different route, Smith et al. (2017) used functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to explore the neural architecture underlying ASMR. Despite some evidence of minor differences between the brains of the ASMR group and the non-ASMR group, Smith et al. (2017) found that their "group differences in DMN [default mode network] activity are statistical differences, [and] not necessarily biological ones" (p. 364). These findings point to larger difficulties that researchers have encountered when trying to identify the brain or neural conditions that make someone susceptible to ASMR. Although research into the neural and psychological determinants of ASMR seems to link the experience to specific forms of neural activity (e.g., increased connectivity between regions in the occipital, frontal, and temporal cortices) and personality traits (e.g., Openness-to-Experience), it has not been able to link specific biological (e.g., neuroanatomical) traits to ASMR susceptibility. Indeed, a later study by Smith et al. (2020) found that sensitivity to most ASMR triggers was negatively correlated with brain areas related to the perception of that type of stimulus and thus triggered unexpected forms of brain activity.

This research shows that the ASMR experience is neither a psychopathology nor a purely neurological condition (Smith et al., 2017). In fact, ASMR seems to trigger distinct and measurable responses, such as a significant decrease in the viewer's heart rate, increased skin conductance, and enhanced feelings of relaxation and social connectedness (Poerio et al., 2018). As such, the difficulty encountered by scientific

research has not been that of establishing a consensus regarding the validity or reality of ASMR's effect on the body, brain, or experiencing subject. Rather, the problem has been the identification of the experience's physiological, psychological, and neurological determinants. Deploying a wide range of methods (fMRI, questionnaires, physiological correlates) and cognitive and experiential models (*frisson*, misophonia, synaesthesia, mindfulness, flow state), this research has tried (unsuccessfully) to render the experience intelligible within established scientific models and parameters, while drawing a line between those who experience ASMR and those who do not. However, this is not to say that no reliable conclusions about ASMR have come out of this research. If there is anything that this work has consistently found evidence for, it is that:

1) ASMRers demonstrate unusual or unexpected forms of neurological and bodily activity when undergoing ASMR;
2) ASMRers are generally curious and subjectively open to new experiences;
3) ASMR has the potential to improve the lives of people facing various social, physiological, and psychological challenges.

Because of this, Poerio et al. (2018) suggest that more research ought to be done on the positive potentials of ASMR. As they put it, given the substantial negative effects of inadequate social connection on health and longevity, "research examining the potential benefit of ASMR videos for relieving loneliness would be a worthy line of enquiry" (p. 14).

## Limitations of Scientific Research

It is not surprising that current scientific efforts to isolate and unravel the ASMR experience have failed to produce satisfactory explanations of the phenomenon. A key limitation of scientific inquiry into ASMR is the inadequacy of the objects of study. Drawing on the postpositivist bend of the western intellectual tradition, research on ASMR has relied on a series of technological and conceptual strategies unfit for making sense of the experience. As I explain below, ASMR is ultimately characterized by an experiential subject whose corporeal structures, capacities, tendencies, and possibilities do not adhere to the abstractions of scientific discourse.

Relying on Cartesian dualist assumptions about the ontological status of mind and body, western scientific efforts to understand bodily experiences like ASMR have taken a modernist, scientifically described body as their point of departure: a passive and mechanically constituted "material object whose anatomical and functional properties can be characterized according to general scientific law" (Leder, 1990, p. 5). This conceptualization of subjecthood is organized around western humanist understandings of subjectivity, and a corresponding biological essentialism, that posits that the human body is fixed, coherent, calculable, predictable, and universal. Accordingly, much of the scientific research on ASMR has focused primarily on determining the experience's physiological and neurological determinants, playing close attention to ASMRers' triggers and underlying neural structure, but little, if any, to what the experience *feels* like – as if understanding the novelty and complexity of ASMR is simply a matter of identifying previously unacknowledged mechanics of corporeality and sense perception. Such an approach posits an almost ontological chasm between those who can and cannot experience ASMR, with biology acting as the determining factor of distinction (even if said factors have not yet been identified).

Studies of this paradigm also tend to link susceptibility to ASMR to ASMRers' personality or "active" attentive efforts to undergo the experience, with an intellectual mind or abstract subjectivity at the root of the experience. Ultimately, these subjectivity-centric models assume a disembodied subject that can, in a way, *will* the experience into being through various cognitive or psychological strategies. Yet, ASMRers' own account of the experience – in

particular, its spontaneity and unpredictability – tells us that efforts to root the experience in personality traits and other mental states are limiting, since ASMR seems quite impervious to these cognitive efforts and subjective dispositions. Not to mention that these studies do not say much, if anything, about the *bodily* experience of ASMR.

In all these different scientific approaches, we find an underappreciation of what it is that makes the ASMR experience radically different from western understandings of the body and sensory experiences: the unique capacities and constitution of the ASMR body. Instead of exploring these, most research on ASMR has taken a strictly scientific route, leaving out important questions regarding the uniqueness and socio-historical contingency of the ASMR body and experiencing subject. Importantly, part of the reason for this is ASMRers themselves, who named the experience *Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response* in an effort to make it sound more scientific. As observed by Andersen (2015), the name ASMR "dates back to 2009 when the founder of asmr-research.org coined the term as 'a more polite term for 'orgasm,''" and used scientific jargon to link "the ASMR community to a tradition of fringe science" (p. 686-687). In other words, ASMRers intentionally gave the ASMR experience a scientifically oriented name to distance it from sexually suggestive language and related negative societal connotations, while also giving the phenomenon scientific validity. Unfortunately, the strategy worked *too* well, and what has been lost in the process is ASMRers' key discovery: the enchanting and ephemeral body of ASMR

## The ASMR Paradox

Despite efforts to give the experience scientific validity, ASMR appears to be scientifically elusive.[1] Although some aspects of the experience have proven scientifically measurable, ASMR's physiological, psychological, and neurological determinants have been difficult to identify, while existing cognitive models, concepts, and practices have been unable to fully capture the experience (e.g., mindfulness, misophonia, synesthesia, *frisson*). These tensions between scientific efforts to understand the ASMR experience and ASMRers' own account of it make visible a conceptual tension that has haunted ASMR since the very beginning, one which I call *the ASMR paradox*: growing efforts to identify and describe ASMR, a scientifically inaccessible experience, in purely scientific terms.

This is not to suggest that ASMR could be better understood through a traditional phenomenological model of embodied experience, which arguably operates on the opposite end of scientific inquiry and theorization. Although the approaches of thinkers like Merleau-Ponty (1962) bypass some of the analytic limitations of scientific discourse by putting less weight on human agency, intentionality, and reason, they nonetheless fail to fully capture the ASMR experience as a multilayered reality. To understand ASMR, it is not enough to take as our starting point the lived body as the locus of experience, nor is it enough to take ASMR as evidence of the world coming into being through the body. ASMR is more than this.

The ASMR body is neither the object/thing-in-itself of scientific discourse nor limited to the sensimotor and intentional capacities of phenomenology's embodied subject. Instead, the ASMR body comes into being momentarily and from without, challenging the Cartesian and humanist logics of the fixed body of scientific discourse, as well as the experiential centrality of phenomenology's embodied subject. Thus, to

[1] A striking difference between scientific researchers and ASMRers is their attitude towards the general accessibility of the experience. While researchers tend to claim that ASMR is accessible to a group of uniquely constituted individuals (drawing a quasi-ontological divide between those who experience ASMR and those who do not), ASMRers claim that anyone can access the experience if exposed to the right triggers. In fact, some ASMR videos are explicitly made to help people 'discover' their triggers by featuring a wide range of different sounds, objects, and scenarios. This also points to an egalitarian dimension of ASMR that is absent in scientific research.

better understand the ASMR experience, we have to move away from these anthropocentric commitments and adopt a post-anthropocentric viewpoint that does not give special privilege to either the *human* individual or to *human* powers. Importantly, the work of queer of colour affect/phenomenology scholars, like Sara Ahmed (2008) and Mel Y. Chen (2012) has taken important steps in this direction. In their work, we encounter efforts to "queer the line that leads from one body to another" (Ahmed, 2014, para 22) in ways that highlight bodies' indebtedness to one another, while also unsettling the hierarchical and ontological boundaries dividing human and nonhuman, organic and inorganic, animate and inanimate. To borrow from the phrasing of cultural theorist Astrida Neimanis (2017), these works provide a theoretical lens that is particularly helpful for understanding the ASMR experience precisely because they "divest from the idea of bodies as only humans, as contained within our skins, as beginning and ending in the 'I'"(p. 41).

A good starting point for such a line of enquiry is the work of figures like Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. Their work provides a conceptual repertoire with which the affective and bodily capacities and constitution of embodied subjects can be differently articulated in ways that resonate with the complex affectual-sensory-bodily realities of ASMR. For one, Deleuze and Guattari's conception of bodies is incompatible with the static homogeneity that characterizes the biological essentialism of dominant scientific discourse. Contra to the modernist body of the western metaphysical tradition, these bodies have thresholds, flows, borders, boundaries, intensities, effectivities, and modalities; they are encounter-prone bodies entangled with and disturbed by materiality, characterized by what these materialities can do or have done to them.

Understanding ASMR requires precisely such an ontological point of departure. For instance, we could think of the ASMR body along the lines of Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) Body without Organs (BwO),[2] and argue that this body is "organ-ized" differently: it senses, reacts, and – more generally – *exists* in a manner that is incompatible with the bodies of phenomenological and scientific discourse. Like the BwO, the ASMR body comes into being when thrusted by sensory and affective stimuli out of fixed bodily relations, capacities, and structures, momentarily exposing the experiencing subject to new modes of embodiment and relational and experiential configurations. Accordingly, the ASMR body does not *hear with its ears* or *see with its eyes*, but rather, lets itself be *touched* (sometimes in its entirety) by sounds and images.

As already gestured to, such a perspective registers with the work of Mel. Y. Chen (2012), who rejects both the modernist body of western scientific discourse and the localized body of traditional phenomenology. Instead, Chen's (2012) work highlights the inseparability of bodies from other forms of matter, matter's irreverence to dominant ontological hierarchies, and the precarity and possibilities of embodiment, life, and existence that characterize our current socio-historical context. Their bodies are characterized by incalculable slippages and

[2] Although the argument could be made that the ASMR body is a type of BwO, the logics that inform the production of the ASMR body appear to be somewhat different from those of Deleuze and Guattari's BwO. While the BwO is a site of experimentation and its becoming tied to internal principles of organization, processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, and the actualization of previously unknown or only implicit connections and capacities among bodies in accordance with a line of flight, the ASMR body comes into being in a much more spontaneous and open-ended manner. More specifically, the ASMR body appears to be *summoned* by encounters with sensory stimuli in ways that do not quite fit with the BwO and its bursts out of the fixes relations that contain it. In fact, the ASMR body does not appear as interested in the subversive and destabilizing sense of embodiment that characterizes the BwO. Instead, the becoming of this body is less a matter of what a body can do than a spontaneous, a-subjective, and encounter-driven process of becoming triggered from the outside by nonhuman bodies and forces (e.g., sounds) in nonlinear, nonhierarchical and non-subject centered ways. This is why I think the vital materialist (Bennett, 2010) strand of posthumanist thought is particularly helpful for analyses of the ASMR body and experience.

contaminations, raising important questions about the affective capacities of matter, and the contingency, porosity, and material (i.e., nonhuman, inorganic, etc.) constitution of human bodies. As Zakiyyah Iman Jackson (2013) puts it, “Chen creates a conceptual archipelago where we can think anew about the quotidian commodities that make up our daily lives in the West” (p. 680). As such, Chen’s (2012) work provides an important theoretical framework through which the posthuman characteristics of the ASMR body and experience can be articulated.

To conclude, the ASMR body and the abstract body of modern science are radically different, featuring incompatible organs, sensations, structures, capacities, and temporalities. In Rancière’s (2009) terms, the former is a body that adheres “to a sensorium different to that of domination” (p. 30), while the latter is where domination occurs. Specifically, the ASMR body can be said to express a *posthuman* configuration, one brought into existence relationally, and only during the duration of the encounter that produced it. As such, ASMR opens the experiencing subject to new corporeal, subjective, and relational configurations, while also disclosing radically different worldings. Understood in this way, the ASMR experience can be said to be one of enchantment: an encounter that *hits* us, but that can also be *fostered* through us, via deliberate strategies that “resist the story of the disenchantment of modernity” (Bennett, 2001, p. 4) and affirm our embodied existence in a shared, planetary context. In other words, ASMR points in the direction of a post-anthropocentric corporeality that recognizes bodies’ indebted to other bodies, vibrant materialities, and endless future possibilities.

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M. F. Collao Quevedo is a Ph.D. candidate in Social & Political Thought at York University. He holds an MA in Social & Political Thought from York University and a BA in philosophy from the University of Calgary. He is interested in environmental politics, the history of social and political thought, and the 'posthuman turn' in critical theory. Through a genealogical-historical exploration of the concept of the Anthropocene, his research looks at what happens when humans become self-reflexive as an undifferentiated global force in a time of ecological crisis, trying to shed new light on understandings of the climate crisis while challenging hegemonic framings and responses to this concern.

# Book Reviews

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# The Labor of Care

**Sabine A. Fernandes**

**Abstract**
Valerie Francisco-Menchavez's *The Labor of Care* (2018) examines the experiences of Filipina domestic workers in New York City, the family members that they left (and leave) behind in the Philippines, and the multidirectional care labour performed by these transnational families. Francisco-Menchavez tactfully straddles an ethnography of the Filipino transnational family and diasporic kinship resiliencies without obscuring a cognizance of the violent transnational capitalist machinations that produce them. As a racialized care worker in the Canadian settler state myself, I am recommending this book to my care working comrades, accomplices, and kin.

**Keywords**
care work, Filipino transnational family, migrants

*The Labor of Care:*
*Filipina Migrants and Transnational Families in the Digital Age*
by Valerie Francisco-Menchavez, 2018, i+231 pp., $28.00 (paperback). ISBN: [9780252083341].

Valerie Francisco-Menchavez's The Labor of Care examines the experiences of Filipina domestic workers in New York City (NYC), the family members that they left (and leave) behind in the Philippines, and the multidirectional care labour performed by these transnational families. My own experiences of racialized migrant care work in the Canadian settler state informed my reading of this text and, I must say, it is a much-needed addition to the care work research canon. In what follows, I illustrate why this is the case, by briefly discussing the author's methodology, citational and narrative practices, and theoretical interventions.

In writing The Labor of Care, Francisco-Menchavez locates herself as an insider-outsider Sociologist in order to answer to "the audiences for which" she, "as an academic, writer, researcher, activist, kasama (comrade), and mother" is "accountable" (2018, p. 21). She explains:

> I…bring my insight as a member of a transnational family who experienced long-term separation from my father when my mother, siblings, and I immigrated and became undocumented in the United States…[but] I acknowledge that my current documented status and academic position at a university puts me in a very different position from the families in this book; therefore, I prioritize the voices and experiences of migrants and their families to tell a story about their decisions and lives (2018, p. 21).

Beyond providing a mere 'reflective' caveat, however, Francisco-Menchavez's commitment to a reflexive research praxis is then demonstrated in her dynamic multifaceted methodological interventions, from institutional ethnography[1] (IE) to participatory action research[2] (PAR).

Even the way that the book is written is reflexive, demonstrating a critical citational praxis that is largely uncommon within academia. Drawing from Queer and Feminist of Colour scholarship, Francisco-Menchavez pays citational dues to racialized academics who analyse the intersectional sites of diasporic care relations under white supremacy, transnational racial capitalism, and border imperialism, seamlessly engaging these frameworks to explore the Filipino migrant worker industrial complex. Some noteworthy invocations include Rodriguez's work on the labour brokerage state (2010); Collins' (1995) work on othermothers in Black communities; and Ferguson's (2004) work on Queer of Colour kinship.

Further, in each of the book's four chapters, Francisco-Menchavez offers a theoretical intervention using relatively plain language interlaced with vibrant conversational narratives, thereby rendering it a rather accessible academic read. Chapter one provides historical context for Filipino labour exportation to investigate the construction of transnational Filipino families in relation to the neoliberalization of the Philippine state. Here, Francisco-Menchavez de-centers the dominant narrative of migrant mothers as the only

[1] Francisco-Menchavez uses an institutional ethnography approach informed by Dorothy E. Smith (2005). Institutional ethnography is a form of Sociology and a methodology of inquiry which, "builds knowledges of how the relations of ruling operate from the standpoints of the people participating in them and creates maps whereby people can see the workings of institutions and their own locations within them" (Howard et al., 2005, p.xii).

[2] Francisco-Menchavez adopts a participatory action research approach, which involves actively engaging research participants in the design of the project, including "methods of observation, construction of the interview guides, research ventures, analysis and products of the research" (Francisco-Menchavez, 2018, p. 19).

care workers in transnational Filipino families by emphasizing the care work done by those left behind in the Philippines. In doing this, she radically theorizes the multi-directionality of care work in transnational Filipino families, as they are produced by state induced serial labour migration and neoliberal border imperialism.

Chapter two of the book discusses social media as pathways for multidirectional care work in transnational Filipino families. Here, Francisco-Menchavez insightfully reveals that technologies of communication have created more accessible remote care work across space and time. She shares that these eroded barriers also shape care relationships in which children and husbands left behind experience the watchful gaze of migrant mothers and wives. However, the author finds that despite discomfort with being watched, children and partners consent to this relinquishing of privacy as a form of care work for their migrant mothers and spouses. This critical intervention honours the essential and unacknowledged care labour by those left behind.

Chapter three then explores how multidirectional care also manifests among Filipina migrant workers residing within NYC. Specifically, Francisco-Menchavez theorizes the homosocial fictive kinships fostered in grassroots Filipino domestic worker organizations like Kabalikat[3] as a product of transnational family innovation and shared migrant precarity. Such a multidimensional analysis is a significant contribution to the care work canon as it recognizes the often-ignored paucity of discourse engaging intra care work among domestic workers.

Lastly, chapter four offers a valuable intervention of familial and parental love as the overemphasized foundation for care work, integrating the valorization of such love within a proliferating emotional economy that exceeds the limits of romanticized affects. Francisco-Menchavez thoughtfully discusses the complexity that the care labour transnational families featured in her book practice, especially regarding their fidelity around working through difficult feelings of "anger, guilt, and disappointment" (2018, p.120). The author reasons that overrepresenting love, warmth, and nurturance in affective care economies undermines and displaces other types of labour sustaining the transnational family, such as separated family members continuing to perform care for each other despite emotional strains.

In conclusion, Francisco-Menchavez has set a commendable precedent for reflexive care work scholarship by conducting her own research with care and nuance. The author tactfully straddles an ethnography of the Filipino transnational family and diasporic kinship resiliencies without obscuring a cognizance of the violent transnational capitalist machinations that produce them. As a racialized care worker within the diaspora myself, I resonate with Francisco-Menchavez's approach. For one, this work has helped me articulate and comprehend the multidirectional caring intimacies I share with my family left behind in India, giving me pause to acknowledge and affirm the care labour that those left behind do for me. It has also shifted my perspective from centering the remittances I send home and the loss of love I grieve, to valuing the ways my transnational family continues to care for each other under ongoing conditions of emotional distress and physical distance. Accordingly, I am recommending this book to my care working comrades, accomplices, and kin.

[3] Kabalikat (translated as shoulder-to-shoulder) Domestic Workers Support Network is a domestic worker organization in NYC. Francisco-Menchavez worked with Filipina migrants in this organization for her book.

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