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Every day of this journal's publication, and every day following its release, the work, collaboration, and community gathered to create it will have, and always has, been on the lands of the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam) community. The institution of The University of British Columbia maintains its status as a colonial force on these lands, and it is incredibly important to acknowledge the unjust atrocities committed, and that are continually happening in the Greater Vancouver area, leading up to our placement on this unceded territory today.

Colonialism is not a thing of the past, and must never be treated as such. It is existing all around us, in forms of land occupation of Turtle Island, the genocide in Palestine, exploitation in Sudan, and humanitarian disasters in Congo. We take this time to ask for your reflection on your role in this ongoing process, as occupiers of this land, efforts for change can always be made.

This journal continually works towards dismantling colonial powers and this process starts with the decolonization and decapitalization of knowledge.

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Dear reader,

Our 9th edition of the Ethnograph (2025) has been an incredible work of collaboration, collectivism, and unwavering perseverance. Our journal aims to showcase the incredible talents, perspectives, and voices of undergraduate students at UBC. It has done exactly that through this most recent publication, and it is important to acknowledge where this passion comes from, and what we aim to do with it. In this edition, we showcase the complex thought and innovation of various students, with topics such as decolonial cyberspace, the opioid crisis in Alberta, and so many more. It is through our platform that our team hopes to promote the importance of collectivism and unity in an increasingly divided world, and the realm of anthropology is an incredible discipline through which to exercise our voices and inspire others to do the same.

We would additionally like to express our unwavering gratitude for those who collaborated with us this year. While our journal is student based, without the support of our incredible anthropology department and faculty, this journal would not be possible, and we will continue to acknowledge this throughout every stage of the process. And just as important, we offer a genuine thanks to you, our devoted readers and audience. Without your interest in our voices, we would be without an audience for which to spread them.

Lastly, our team would like to encourage all readers to consider being a part of this community for our 10th edition. The Ethnograph is a project that relies heavily on community and is only as good as our contributors allow it to be. You can keep updated with possible positions and guidance for next year's submissions on our instagram @ubcethnograph as well as reach out to our email with any questions. We are always open and welcoming to new ideas, members, and perspectives that will hopefully grow this journal to great lengths.

From the River to the Sea, from Turtle Island to Palestine, we stand with our readers, and will always strive to illuminate the voices and stories that are otherwise muffled in the chaos.

“We can not fight for our rights and our history as well as future until we are armed with weapons of criticism and dedicated consciousness.” - Edward Said

Warm regards,
Maile Kilen (she/her)
Journal Coordinator

List of Contributors

Editor in Chief

Amy Ng

Journal Coordinator

Maile Kilen

Submissions Coordinator

Sean Herring

Head of Operations

Ellie Craig

Marketing Coordinator

Jovana Asprovski

Editors

Sofia Najera Gonzalez

Elizabeth Merinuk

Azquet Gomez Merlo

Juliette Pankow

Authors

Maëlle Blanchette

Anna Hulbert

Serena Kealy

Magdalen Munro

Aashton Prasad

Anika Schreiber

Caroline Stampliaka

Isobel Thurber

Special Thanks

Dr. Amirpouyan Shiva

UBC Anthropology Students' Association

UBC Department of Anthropology

Nicole Ma (Cover art and Design)

Dr. Patrick Moore

Dr. Helena Zeweri

Dr. Leslie Robertson

Dr. Heather Robertson

Dr. Alacia Aleksa

Artist statement:

Cover by: Nicole Ma

Name: *Homo Bouquet*

Artist statement:

To represent anthropology in this work, I chose to use a skull as the center focus. I found skulls to look somewhat intimidating, so I included some flowers and butterflies to "alleviate the scariness". The flowers and butterflies also represent how nature shares a connection with anthropology, since many humankind skulls and remains have been buried for extremely long periods of time; it feels as if they have become a part of earth itself.

Revolutionary Bars: Code-Switching in Quebecois Rap

Maëlle Blanchette

University of British Columbia

Abstract

Quebec's relationship with the "proper" use of the French language and its concerns regarding its preservation have been an ongoing talking point in the public sphere. The growing popularity of hip-hop culture, especially rap, has had a notable impact on Quebec linguistic identities. This paper focuses on how code-switching used in Quebecois rap has led to the construction of hybrid identities and challenged Quebec's strict norms and ideals surrounding the "proper" use of the French language. By drawing on the impacts of Bill 101, this paper demonstrates how the origins of the rigid language identities of Quebec came to be, showing the impacts it has had on the visibility of multiculturalism in Montreal. A linguistic analysis is also conducted, highlighting the use of code-switching in two songs by artist Sans Pression. Through rap, I argue, Quebec's strict and rigid language ideology is challenged and reshaped, creating a space where minorities can express their own meanings of what being Quebecois entails.

Introduction

Quebec's relationship with the "proper" use of the French language and its concerns regarding its preservation have been an ongoing talking point in the public sphere for decades. This particularly rigid language ideology has been challenged in different ways throughout Quebec's history, namely through code-switching and code-mixing within different musical traditions. The rise of Hip-Hop culture in the late nineties and early two thousands has brought a new form of artistic expression to Quebec, especially in the multicultural population of Montreal, which challenges these language norms. In this paper, I argue that the high frequency of code-switching in Quebecois rap shows the construction of hybrid identities, the growing multiethnicity of Quebec, and the unconscious ways this sociolinguistic phenomenon challenges the rigid views Quebec has on the use of French.

Roots of Quebec's Language Ideology

To begin, an extensive overview of the historical context is important to understand Quebecois language ideologies and how they affect the bills put in place that "preserve" both the frequency and usage of the French cultural language. Here, I use the term "language ideology" to describe beliefs about language within a specific social context. In other words, it is what people value in language (Errington, 2000). Both English and French are the official federal languages of Canada, but in the province of Quebec, only French is recognized as an official language. As

the government of Quebec puts it, “French is not only the sole official language of Quebec but is also the common language of the Quebec nation” (Quebec Government, 2024).

Before 1977, people were free to send their kids to either English or French-speaking elementary and secondary schools. Because speaking English was more advantageous for upward social mobility, many French-Canadian families sent their kids to anglophone schools or found other ways to assimilate to anglophone culture (Heller, 2012). When Camille Laurin introduced Bill 101 in 1977, things changed quite drastically. This bill made “French the official language of the government of Quebec and Quebec society” (Behiels & Hudon, 2013). It also made French the mandatory language of instruction for immigrants, francophones, and anglophones, although some exceptions applied. The law had an important impact on the Quebecois sense of national pride and identity, which had always been centred around French as the national language. It also succeeded in giving more social power to francophones, rather than the economic power being almost exclusively in the hands of the English-speaking minority, as it had been pre-bill. Furthermore, the bill was set in place “to affirm and support French as the official and dominant language of the province” (Heller, 2012, p.158). The goal of this was to turn the tables: French was now the privileged language instead of English (Bourhis, 2019).

Post implementation of this bill, the use of French in Quebec was solidified, and it gradually increased basic proficiency of French in the province (Bourhis, 2019, p. 211). This led to allophones, people who don’t have French or English as their mother tongue, along with anglophones, to take classes in French, creating a generation post Bill 101 that was mostly French speaking. Furthermore, francophone parents were stripped of the opportunity to send their kids to an anglophone school. Although this led to an increase in the French-speaking population, it did not erase the multitudes of language communities established in Montreal and the rest of Quebec. As a result of this law, French was spoken in higher frequencies in the public sphere and the percentage of allophones who spoke French as a second language increased. This bill also cemented Quebecois pride in their language and French became an important symbol of Quebec culture.

Origins of Hip-Hop

Hip Hop culture originated in South Bronx, a New York neighbourhood mainly populated by underprivileged African Americans and other cultural minorities. The African American influence on rap music created AAVE (African American Vernacular English) heavy lyricism, and especially, a tradition of code-switching from standard American English to AAVE and Spanish (Sarka & Winer, 2006). Here, I use code-switching as defined by Valenti: “code-switching (CS) is a linguistic phenomenon in which a bilingual speaker switches freely between their languages (codes) within a single utterance, conversational turn, or conversation” (2014, p. 279). From its inception, playing with language as an artistic device was key to rap music. In other words, the nature of Hip-Hop is to challenge the dominant culture, and one way it

achieves this is by challenging language rules in rap music. As Low et al. states: “U.S. rappers explicitly challenge concepts and practices of language standardization, acceptability, and correctness, and thus construct a culture and identities in opposition to dominant culture” (2009, p. 61).

Bill 101 came into effect at around the same time that rap music and hip-hop culture was growing in popularity in Quebec. As explored above, the generation that grew up with the repercussions of the passage of this bill encountered a strict view of language and language correctness. This new wave of music proposed an outlet for young folks to express identities that are outside the average French-speaking Quebecois experience. It thus follows that this generation would use rap music as a vehicle to challenge strict language rules and to form a distinct linguistic community, especially within Montreal’s multi-linguistic environment (Low et al., 2009).

Descriptive Linguistic Analysis of Code-Switching

Before I dive into the effects rap music has had on Quebec and its linguistic identity, I will conduct a descriptive analysis of code-switching in Sans Pression’s lyrics. The rapper is credited for being a leading figure in Quebecois rap during its rise in popularity in the late ’90s (Spotify, n.d.). For this descriptive analysis of language data, I am basing my research on Sarka and Winer’s article “Multilingual Codeswitching in Quebec Rap: Poetry, Pragmatics and Performativity.” In this analysis, the researchers define code switching as a broad category including intro-line / sentential codeswitching, switching from one line to the next, as well as switching in the same sentence. To give a concrete example of how code switching can show both the hybrid identities constructed in Quebec and the growing diversity within the province, I will be reviewing these two examples:

1. Sans Pression. “De phase en phase.” Track 1 on 514-50 Dans mon réseau. Les Disques Montreal Inc. 1999.

Original : “Trop de beef dans le game (Qui ça ?) I still maintain ma mentalité remains the same! Au jour le jour, espérant de voir demain, le mal, on le fait bien pis on fait de notre mieux pour pas fuck le chien.”

Translation : “Too much bitching in the game. (Who’s that?) I still maintain my mentality remains the same! From day to day, hoping to see tomorrow, evil, we do it well and we do our best not to waste our time.” From (Sarka & Winer, 2006, pp. 186-187).

2. Sans Pression. “Ti mouns.” Track 8 on République aux offusqués. Les Disques Montreal Inc. 2003.

Original : Les ti mouns veulent represent / Les garçons autant que les filles car guess qui est enceinte / That's right ta petite princesse / Celle qui s'habillait comme une skett mais vous vous en foutiez de ça.

Translation : The kids wanna represent / The boys as well as the girls 'cause guess who's pregnant / That's right, your little princess / The one who dressed like a slut but you didn't give a shit. From (Sarka & Winer, 2006, pp.186-187).

Example 1 shows how code-switching in rap can demonstrate the rappers' ethnolinguistic background, thus voicing the growing ethnic diversity of Quebec. Sans Pression was born in New York and then moved to Quebec with his family. His background made him fluent in AAVE, Standard American English, Standard Quebec French, and nonstandard Quebec French (Sarka & Winer). In this verse, all these identities are present. Standard Quebec French serves as the base of the lyrics. The sentence structures are grammatically correct and up to par with the "proper" way of speaking French. Nonstandard French is seen with the code switch to "fuck le chien," a Quebecois idiom meaning to waste time. Furthermore, Standard North American English is seen with switches to "I still maintain" and "remains the same". Finally, AAVE is seen with the switch to "beef", as it is a culturally specific term, slang for conflict, often used in hip-hop contexts. This expert switch between multiple languages shows the rapper's mastery of French; by placing the code switches strategically through the sentence, it stays grammatically correct and becomes accessible to a wide range of listeners. Moreover, the rapper's francophone identity is shown here through French being used as a base language, all the while demonstrating his anglophone background with frequent code-switching to English.

Although code-switching shows this rapper's multiethnic origin, Sarka and Weiner (2006) argue that it would be wrong to simplify code-switching to a demonstration of personal identity, since rappers also borrow from languages they do not speak fluently and have no personal links to. In Quebec Hip-Hop culture, there is pride in the "ability to seamlessly weave into their French base switches into AAVE or standard English, to which all rappers have access (from recordings, concerts, television, community and family sources), and other languages which they may or may not themselves claim to actually speak" (p. 186). This is shown in example 2. We can observe words from other languages and cultures being borrowed by the musician. Sans Pression is not Haitian or Jamaican, but he still codes switches by using these languages within his lyrics. He borrows from Haitian Creole with a code switch to *ti mouns*, and from Jamaican Creole with *Skett* (abbreviated from *Sketelle*). This use of borrowed languages can show belonging between and within groups, and further, the proximity of different cultures within Quebec. Within a homogenous culture, this amount of cultural exchange would not be possible. Thus, this borrowing also shows links between the local culture—French Canadian—and the global culture—the varied immigrant populations. In sum, through these various code switches, Sans Pression shows the hybridity of his linguistic identity, which illustrates his mixed cultural identity.

Threats to the French language?

As seen in the examples above, Quebec rap utilizes an impressive amount of code switches from French to English in its lyrics. It also utilizes something called *Franglais*, which is a mix of French and English within a word. A good example of this code-mixing would be the word “watcher,” — pronounced as [watʃe] rather than the English [watʃə]. This is a combination of the English verb “to watch” and the French conjugation ending “-er.”

Because Quebec sees itself as a fragile minority in English-speaking Canada, the use of *Franglais* has often been seen as a threat to the “purity” of the French language. As I argued above, Quebec’s national identity is deeply installed in its language, especially in the “proper” usage of French. Thus, code-mixing in Montreal rap is sometimes seen as a threat to the language ideology of governmental entities that preach the use of a “pure” French. As Low et al. explains, some English words have been so frequently used in everyday French conversations that they have become part of the lexicon. Many have become apprehensive of this integration of English in the language (2009). These rigid views of what French should be has inspired Quebecois rappers to challenge the status quo with their lyrics. As mentioned previously, it is in the nature of rap music to challenge the dominant culture. This point can be illustrated through the controversy that followed Dead Obies’, a rap group, frequent use of *Franglais* in their album *Montreal \$ud*. The release of the record triggered public debate about the deep-seated fear regarding the survival of a “good” French, and the fear of its overall decrease in use. The group was criticized heavily for “massacring” the French language. This use of French started public discussions, which in a way shows how rap challenges and creates discourse around what should be considered the “proper” use of French.

Because of the historical English domination over French in Quebec’s history, “some Quebecois perceive Anglicisms as vestiges of past and current English-language influence that has seeped into Quebecois French” (Dawley, 2022, p. 36). Thus, rap music that is unapologetically multilingual can be seen as threatening to Quebecois purists. In other words, it may evoke the fear of accepting the “them” (English) in “us” (French). However, for the rappers, this way of speaking French explores the meaning of being Quebecois: accepting a diverse and evolving language (White, 2019).

Moreover, it is critical to consider the nature of language in this discussion. Essentially, languages, “like everything else, gradually transforms itself over the centuries” (Aitchison, 2001, p. 4). Thus, trying to dictate what is “right” and “wrong” in language, is contextual and inevitably changes over time. Limiting the boundaries of what French can and should be to a strict idea of what is correct and what isn’t, may limit the growth and progress the language can accomplish.

Demonstrating Quebec's Growing Diversity

Quebec's focus on language purity has often made multicultural and diverse communities excluded from being considered Quebecois. Further, these communities have not always been rendered visible in popular media. In the early 2000s, Quebec's media representation of visible minorities and immigrant communities was not extensive. In 2019, a study commissioned by Radio Canada confirmed that although diversity increased since the beginning of the millennium, it is still not representative of Quebec's cultural diversity (Boisvert, 2024). Therefore, the intensive use of code-switching in rap shows and gives a voice to the diverse people of Quebec. By using French as their base language, they are asserting themselves as Quebecois. Additionally, through code-switching, they display their own cultural background along with the cultures they are surrounded with. To tie this back to my main argument: drawing from both personal backgrounds and borrowed backgrounds to code-switch, shows the construction of hybrid identities in Quebec. It also asserts their place and their presence in the province, something traditional media often fails to do. Moreover, rap's rising popularity in Quebec is evident in large festivals hosting rap artists, rappers being covered in popular Quebec news outlets, and its presence in show like *La fin des faibles* diffused Télé Québec. This growing popularity makes the heavy code-switching in rap lyricism a powerful way to render visible the voices of minorities normally ignored by the Quebec masses (Renaud, 2022). Lastly, the importance of the Hip-Hop scene in the province enlarges the category of what it means to be Quebecois. No longer restricted to white francophone music, the popularity of rap within Quebec forces the public to recognize the rappers' identities not only as immigrants, but as Quebecois individuals that are contributing to the growth of the culture, and by extension, the French cultural language.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I began this paper by discussing the rich history of French in Quebec and how it has shaped the rigid language ideology of the province through Bill 101 which institutionalized language ideologies in Quebec. I then explored how the origins of rap are rooted in code-switching and in the challenging of language norms. Through a linguistic analysis of Sans Pression's lyrics, I showed how code switching reflects Quebec's growing ethnic diversity and the emergence of hybrid identities through strategic code-switching and language mixing. Lastly, I examined how this linguistic phenomenon challenges the province's view of what constitutes "proper" use and frequency of French, exemplified through a discussion of the backlash received by rap groups like Dead Obies. Lastly, I argued that code-switching in Quebecois rap highlights and affirms the identities of marginalized communities, expanding the description of what it means to be Quebecois. In the future, I hope the conversations sparked by rap music will contribute to a more inclusive and open understanding of what it means to be Quebecois and speak French.

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The Rights of Nature: Conservation and Colonialism in BC's Provincial Parks

Anna Hulbert

University of British Columbia

Abstract

This paper explores the concept of the rights of nature, examining how environmental rights are defined, restricted, and applied within the context of British Columbia (BC). While BC does not formally recognize the legal personhood of nature, it has established a framework of environmental protection—particularly through provincial parks—that reflects a limited, anthropocentric form of rights. Using Strathcona Provincial Park as a case study, I analyze how these protections are both enabled and constrained by colonial values that privilege aesthetics and utility. I argue that the BC Parks system, though often celebrated for its conservation efforts, reinforces settler colonial logics by framing nature as ‘empty’ and valuable primarily for recreation and tourism. This framework marginalized Indigenous relationships to land and limits broader recognition of nature’s intrinsic rights. By unpacking the colonial dynamics embedded in environmental governance, this paper calls for a reimagining of nature’s rights that centers Indigenous knowledge and challenges the anthropocentric assumptions within existing legal and conservation systems.

Introduction

Nature as a being deserving of rights is a contemporary perspective utilized to protect and preserve natural ecosystems. If applied on a larger-scale, it has the potential to combat climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental degradation. In this essay, I contribute to the conversation on the rights of nature, exploring the concept of environmental rights, the aspects of nature we allocate rights to, and the mechanisms by which these rights are defined and restricted in the context of BC. In BC, nature does have certain rights and protections, particularly within the bounds of provincial parks, but they are limited and mainly defined anthropocentrically. The areas that are granted rights are determined by colonial perspectives, such as the idea that nature is and should remain ‘empty’. I will unpack the benefits and limitations of this understanding of nature and consider possible alternatives. To illustrate these points, I use Strathcona Provincial Park located on Vancouver Island as a case study.

Defining Nature’s Rights

Many Western legal systems, including Canada’s, have historically elevated humans hierarchically above other living beings and ecosystems, based on a perceived inherent superiority over the environments that surround us (Garrett & Scott, 2020, p. 1). Granting rights

to nature challenges this narrative by rejecting the view that the environment is made up of resources solely for exploitation and human benefit. The concept of nature having rights was first brought into academic discourse by Christopher Stone in his 1972 book “Should Trees Have Standing?” (Boyd, 2018, p. 13). Stone’s work quickly gained traction, not only in academia but also within the legal system—the argument for recognizing nature’s legal rights was first presented just months after publication (Boyd, 2018, p. 13). In court it was acknowledged that the legal system already grants corporations legal standing as ‘persons’, so why not rivers, old-growth trees, or endangered species? (Garrett & Scott, 2020, p. 2). Courts already allow representation for many things that cannot represent themselves, such as infants, government agencies, and estates, so, by similar logic, nature should also have legal standing (Boyd, 2018, p. 13).

Today, laws protecting parts of the environment have been enacted in numerous countries to oppose dangerous industrial activities (Boyd, 2018, p. 13). However, the extent and form of this legal recognition vary. Ecuador and Bolivia, for instance, have amended their constitutions to affirm the rights of ecosystems—including individual species—to exist, regenerate, and evolve freely. Other countries have adopted a different approach, recognizing only certain aspects of nature as legal entities, such as the Whanganui River in Aotearoa (New Zealand) (Boyd, 2018, pp. 14-16). Contrastingly, Canada, and more specifically BC, makes it clear in much of its legislation that nature is the exclusive property of humans, with no inherent right to exist on its own (Garrett & Wood, 2020, p. 5). However, this does not mean the province has entirely ignored the intrinsic value of specific areas. Since the creation of Strathcona Provincial Park in 1911, the first of its kind in BC, the province has established over 1,000 protected areas, covering more than 14 million hectares, or 14.7%, of the province’s land (BC Parks, 2024). These protections have significantly increased the freedom of nature in these designated areas. It is therefore evident that, while BC’s law may not formally recognize the rights of nature, the creation of large amounts of protected areas suggests that the province has been making progress toward acknowledging nature’s inherent value for over a century.

Recognition of Nature’s Rights in BC’s Provincial Parks

While BC lacks explicit laws that recognize nature’s rights, provincial parks have been created—at least partially—for the purpose of allowing nature to “exist, flourish, and be restored” (Boyd, 2018, p. 13). Similarly to the countries that have legally encoded the rights of nature, such as Bolivia, Ecuador, and New Zealand, BC’s approach intends to protect natural ecosystems from external threats. BC currently has 1,050 protected areas, with 645 of those classified as provincial parks (BC Parks, 2024). Within those 645 provincial parks there are three different classifications; Class A, B, and C (BC Parks, 2024). The majority of provincial parks in BC are Class A, the most protected type of provincial park (Park Act, 1996). In these parks, industrial activities such as logging, mining, and hydroelectric development are prohibited (Park Act, 2024). Hunting is banned here; vehicle entry, fishing, and camping require permits; and

visitors are also required to follow strict “pack in, pack out” rules to protect the wildlife in the park. Development in these areas is also restricted, with facilities such as visitor centers and trails typically being the only allowed infrastructure. Class B parks have a slightly lower level of protection, with a broader range of activities allowed, but the ban on industrial and commercial activities that could harm the environment still persists. Class C parks have fewer restrictions with some industrial and commercial use allowed, more flexible rules surrounding development, and more extensive recreational activities permitted (Parks Act, 2024). In all parks, fire restrictions are put in place during dry periods. These restrictions, particularly in the 630 parks that are classified as Class A, are designed to limit external influences with the goal of preserving the environment, allowing it to exist without human exploitation. This proves that the nature within provincial parks has been given rights, and that activities within these areas are monitored to ensure their rights are upheld. While this may not equate to full legal status for BC’s nature, it represents an effort to acknowledge its intrinsic value, aligning with the broader concept of the rights of nature.

The Rights of Nature & Colonialism

While BC’s effort to protect natural ecosystems through provincial parks is commendable, it must be acknowledged that these natural landscapes have been shaped by colonialism. The typical BC imaginary consists of long coastlines, snowy mountains, abundant wildlife, clean lakes, and expansive forests, but the province has partially been engineered this way. Since the arrival of settlers in the late 1700s, BC has been defined by colonialism through the propagation of the idea that some parts of nature are ‘empty’, ‘beautiful’, and ‘worthy’ of protection, while others are destined to be exploited. Therefore, we “privilege some parts of nature at the expense of others”, fencing up and conserving the areas we deem as desirable, labelling them as “conservation areas”—or provincial parks—while the other areas are free game for industry use (Cronon, 1995, p. 16). It is as though colonial Canada values the illusion that nature can be free from human’s touch, despite now having impacted all the world’s ecosystems and their functions including climate regulation, water purification, and nutrient cycling (Cronon, 1995, p. 9). Because Eurocentric ideals romanticize ‘pristine’, ‘empty’ wilderness, free from human alteration or presence, provincial parks are deeply intertwined in colonial dynamics that favour aesthetics, tourism, and recreational interests (Cronon, 1995, p. 12). This has allowed for some landscapes to be given rights, while others who may not fit this idealized image are neglected despite the fact that they are crucial for biodiversity and ecological health. Since 1911, provincial parks have been established in locations that offer opportunities for hiking, swimming, and wildlife viewing, reinforcing the idea that nature’s worth is measured by what it can do for us. This selective protection is why we protect the old-growth trees in Strathcona Provincial Park, but not the dandelions that invade our every sidewalk. Prior to colonialism in BC, Indigenous peoples viewed nature as deserving of respect, regardless of the resources (or other benefits) they received from it (Garrett & Wood, 2020, p. 11). Indigenous peoples lived sustainably through a reciprocity-based relationship between them and the earth, with respect

and nurture occurring on both sides (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 29). Today, every aspect of BC's nature is thought of in relation to what it can do for us—from tourism and leisure, to extraction and production.

This colonial, nature-as-a-resource perspective and the creation of provincial parks has had direct negative implications for Indigenous peoples. During the beginning stages of provincial park creation, park administrators and Indian Agents “regularly used the trespassing, squatting, and poaching regulations encoded in park legislation to keep Indigenous peoples out” (Vranich, 2023, p. 5). This cut Indigenous people off from traditional hunting and harvesting areas that were vital to their communities, thus playing a role in the larger project of “confin[ing] western Indigenous peoples to their reserves, erod[ing] their traditional land-based way of life, and assimilat[ing] them into settler society” (Vranich, 2023, p. 6). Provincial parks therefore reflect a broader debate about the rights of nature. On one hand, conservation efforts protect the environment and reduce extractive practices, keeping the worthy trees, lakes, rivers, and animals contained, but, on the other, they serve to privatize land and limit local access, threatening Indigenous livelihoods (Meriläinen Lehtinen, 2022, p. 90). Within the BC Parks Act (1965), it is made very clear that provincial parks are “Crown land and managed to high standards” (BC Parks, 2024). This restrictive language highlights the continued colonial control over these lands, where the rights of nature are recognized only insofar as they align with the interests of the Crown and the settler state, leaving little room for Indigenous sovereignty or alternative ways of relating to the land.

BC is not the only place where these dynamics are in play. In 2014, New Zealand's Te Urewera National Park was transformed into a legal entity, granting it rights within the courtroom (Boyd, 2018, p. 16). This move, while groundbreaking, underscores the fact that most efforts to grant rights to nature have been channeled through academic and legal systems—spaces rooted in colonialism. These systems replicate the same colonial logics that view land and resources as entities to be managed, controlled, and used, continuing the marginalization of Indigenous ways of knowing and relating to the land. Therefore, the rights of nature, no matter where they are located, align with state values that perpetuate a hierarchical ranking of ecosystems, determining which areas are deemed worthy of protection. By placing nature within a legal framework that emphasizes ownership, rights, and regulation, Indigenous peoples continue to be excluded from decision-making processes that involve their traditional territories. It is therefore evident that colonial dynamics continue to shape our contemporary understanding and management of protected parks, both in BC and around the world.

Strathcona Provincial Park Case Study

Strathcona Provincial Park was the first provincial park in BC, established in 1911 (BC Parks, n.d.). Strathcona Park provides an example of how the rights of nature have changed over time and have been, and continue to be, shaped by colonial values. Strathcona Park is a Class B

park, covering about 250,000 hectares of land in the middle of Vancouver Island. Today, the park is a popular recreational area for “mountaineers, hikers, campers, fishers, and paddlers” (Gilbert, 2021, p. 9). As a provincial park, Strathcona has certain rights that protect it from human destruction. This includes an industry ban, regulated camping sites, minimal facilities, few access points, and a consistent fire ban during the summer (BC Parks, 2024).

Historically, the rights of Strathcona Park were defined differently, affected by what was considered valuable at the time of its creation, with protections altering as public values have changed through the years. The initial design of Strathcona Park in 1911 was based on its scenic beauty and potential for tourism, rather than its ecological significance. It was originally envisioned as having “grand hotels”, non-native plant species to “beautify” the Park, and “golf courses” (Gilbert, 2021, p. 11). While the original Strathcona Park Act (1911) banned mining and many forms of development, this was clearly derived from a desire to create a picturesque, recreational space that aligned with colonial ideals of nature as a resource for human enjoyment.

This colonial perspective not only shaped the park’s early development, but also had broader implications for who was considered welcome on the land and who was excluded. The region that comprises Strathcona Provincial Park is considered to be Crown land, but it was created without any consultation from local First Nations, the Salish Peoples, regarding their traditional use of the area (Gilbert, 2021, p. 21). This exclusionary decision-making process therefore contributed to the dispossession of Indigenous people in favour of a colonial vision of wilderness. Because Strathcona was not created for the purpose of protecting its ecological entities, shifts in public values meant shifts for the park’s rights. Amendments to the Strathcona Park Act in 1918 and 1927 introduced allowances for mineral exploration, hydro-electric power development, and—eventually—logging, reflecting a period where the park’s resources were increasingly seen as more valuable for industrial use (Gilbert, 2021, pp. 11-12). It was not until 1993 that long-term policies were implemented to give this nature the rights we know it to have today: without industry, and without golf courses (Gilbert, 2021, p. 16). The protections afforded to Strathcona Park remain limited to its boundaries, while the surrounding areas are subject to commercial and private usage. This suggests a continued colonial influence on how we value and give rights to nature, privileging certain landscapes while leaving others vulnerable to exploitation.

Alternative Rights for Nature in BC

BC currently defines the rights of nature through a limited, anthropocentric lens, protecting select natural areas based on their aesthetic, tourism, and recreational value. This neglects the broader ecological and Indigenous considerations, as demonstrated in the Strathcona Park case study. To move beyond the view that nature is only valuable when it provides for human needs, BC should consider alternative perspectives on defining and guaranteeing nature’s rights. One way of doing this could be through the biodiversity approach, which emphasizes the

protection and sustainable management of ecosystems and species based on their intrinsic value and the critical role they play in maintaining ecological balance (Meriläinen Lehtinen, 2022, p. 90). Currently, “BC has more biodiversity than any other Canadian province or territory, and this biodiversity is comparatively good, but vulnerable to deterioration unless substantial changes are made to human-nature relationships” (Garrett & Wood, 2020, p. 6). Furthermore, “BC has more species at risk than any other Canadian province or territory” (Garrett & Wood, 2020, p. 6). Adopting a biodiversity-based approach could combat this, better ensuring the rights of nature by shifting the focus from human utility to ecological integrity.

In BC, moving from a “rights to nature” perspective, which centers on human access and use of natural resources, to a “rights for nature” perspective, which recognizes the inherent rights of nature, is crucial (Meriläinen Lehtinen, 2022, p. 90). A “rights for nature” approach challenges the anthropocentric worldview, advocating for the recognition of natural entities as subjects with rights to exist, thrive, and regenerate—a perspective that also represents the biodiversity-based approach (Meriläinen Lehtinen, 2022, p. 90). Municipal governments could play a pivotal role in this transition as they have a more direct relationship with the public and tend to be more open to radical proposals than provincial governments (Garrett & Wood, 2020, p. 6). One way municipalities could be involved is through the implementation of the Nature Legacy initiative. In 2018, Canada launched the \$1.35 billion Nature Legacy project, to “help meet commitments under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity” (Cox, 2019). This is the largest government investment in nature conservation in Canada’s history and it has resulted in an increase in protected areas (Cox, 2019). The long-term impact of this investment remains unknown.

However, if Indigenous communities are involved in supervising these protected areas, positive outcomes are likely as it has been found that there is “more biodiversity on lands managed or co-managed by Indigenous communities than in parks or wildlife reserves, highlighting the important role of Indigenous communities in protecting species” (Cox, 2019). This further suggests that Indigenous law could provide a valuable blueprint for redefining the rights of nature in BC. For example, in Gitxsan and Wet’suwet’en culture, the notion of property is viewed as a “series of relationships with the territory, rather than one of simple ownership as understood by Western property rights” (Garrett & Wood, 2020, p. 5). Therefore, instead of removing and arresting First Nations who attempt to protect the rights of nature within their unceded territory (as is seen in the conflict between Wet’suwet’en and Coastal GasLink), Indigenous peoples who continue to act as “defenders of land, water, air and non-human relations” should be consulted in ecological decision-making (Bracken, 2020; Garrett & Wood, 2020, p. 7). An even more transformative approach would involve the restitution of lands within Strathcona Park and other protected areas to the First Nations who have historically stewarded these territories. This would be a significant step towards decolonizing conservation practices.

The idea that nature and its components are all a community of living beings with rights and responsibilities to one another “has deep roots in many cultures”, existing centuries prior to Christopher Stone’s 1972 book “Do Trees Have Standing?” (Garrett & Wood, 2020, p. 11). By embracing a biodiversity based approach, incorporating Indigenous knowledge, and recognizing intrinsic rights of nature in its laws, BC could move towards a more sustainable and just relationship with the environment. Overall, these alternatives offer a holistic path forward, where human and ecological well-being in BC are interconnected and mutually supportive.

Future Shifts

While provincial parks in BC serve as an important mechanism for granting nature certain rights, protected areas cannot be used as a way of “preserving ecological integrity in isolation” (Morgan et al., 1997, p. 6). The very concept of provincial parks is embedded in colonial and anthropocentric frameworks that prioritize certain landscapes for protection while marginalizing others, reinforcing colonial boundaries and restricting Indigeneity. To genuinely guarantee the rights of nature, we must move beyond these state-centered, hierarchical approaches and embrace more inclusive, decolonial perspectives. This includes acknowledging the rights of the peoples who have long stewarded these lands and reframing the environment as a living entity with intrinsic rights, rather than a blank slate that can be claimed or as a resource to be managed. In this way, a posthumanist perspective can help to challenge the privileging of the human in rights of nature discourses and emphasize the relationality and interconnectedness of all life forms. From this view, nature possesses its own agency, rights, and capacity for flourishing and humans are a part of, rather than above, the natural world. This worldview aligns with Indigenous approaches to land stewardship, such as those embodied in Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs), which offer a promising avenue for advancing rights of nature based conservation (Conservation through Reconciliation Partnerships, n.d.). Initiatives such as the Tla-o-qui-aht Tribal Parks on Vancouver Island demonstrate the importance of “cultural practices in reciprocity with our non-human relations” (Tla-o-qui-aht Tribal Parks, n.d.) The Tla-o-qui-aht Tribal Parks Guardians believe in the innate value of the land and recognize that human beings are a part of, not separate to, the environment’s that support us (Tla-o-qui-aht Tribal Parks website, 2024). Further supporting and expanding IPCAs would move beyond symbolic recognition to actual power-sharing and ecological protection rooted in reciprocal care-giving relationships with the land.

BC could also adopt a biodiversity-centered legal framework, where the health and resilience of ecosystems become central to land-use planning, rather than secondary to economic development (Garrett & Wood, 2020, p. 5). Embracing such an approach means integrating Indigenous law and knowledge into ecological decision-making (Garrett & Wood, 2020, p. 5). This shift would compel us to recognize that the earth is a community of living and nonliving things that all belong. By committing to this more holistic and just approach, we could address local environmental challenges with a potential to extend to the larger scale environmental crisis

of climate change. The success of such a transition could reshape our collective future, fostering a sustainable and equitable coexistence between humanity and the ecosystems we depend on.

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Threads of Transcendence

Serena Kealy

University of British Columbia

Abstract

This paper will examine the revolutionary contributions of Phoebe Anna Traquair to the Arts and Crafts movement in late 19th-century Europe, highlighting her transformative influence on the perception of textile arts, which are traditionally female-dominated and undervalued due to associations with domesticity. Through a socio-cultural anthropological lens, this paper analyzes Traquair's most iconic works—her monumental embroidery series *The Progress of a Soul*, jewelry, and commissioned murals—as part of a broader cultural narrative surrounding art, gender, and social hierarchy. This paper discusses Traquair's work as a challenge to the gendered designation of textile arts as 'craft,' helping to redefine the legitimacy and status of women's decorative and textile arts. By challenging the era's male-dominated artistic norms and helping to enhance recognition of textile art, Traquair's legacy endures as a testament to the feminist potential within the Arts and Crafts movement.

Introduction

Phoebe Anna Traquair was a revolutionary embroiderer, illustrator, and painter who made notable contributions to the Arts and Crafts movement circa 1876, including enamelwork and murals. Her most recognizable textile artwork was embroidery, as she created the well-known four silk embroidered panels, *The Progress of a Soul*, displayed in the World's Fair in St. Louis in 1904. Traquair's embroidery, jewelry, and textiles—traditionally female dominated media—along with painted pieces and murals garnered attention due to their technical excellence and evocative imagery. Phoebe Anna Traquair's contributions to the Arts and Crafts movement through her embroidery and jewelry, as well as her notable paintings, in Scotland positively influenced the perception of traditionally female dominated art industries such as fiber and textile art throughout the late 19th century in Europe, specifically through her affiliation with Catholicism.



Phoebe Anna Traquair, *Phoebe Anna Traquair (1852–1936), Artist, Self Portrait*, 1911. Oil on panel, 29.9cm x 34.1 cm. Edinburgh, National Galleries of Scotland.

As a truly interdisciplinary artist of the late 19th century and the European Arts and Crafts movement, Traquair contributed to changing the misogynistic perceptions surrounding female labour and decorative artwork, as “[d]espite the marginalities that were compounded by gender inequalities when early twentieth-century women artists utilized ornament, the decorative arts presented women with certain opportunities that were not available elsewhere” (Helland, 2019, p.4). Her excellence in embroidery was remarkable both for its technical sophistication and the ambitious nature of the images portrayed. For context, “In eighteenth- and early nineteenth century Britain all girls learned plain sewing: basic stitches that would allow them to make and repair textiles. Beyond this, the complexity and variation of stitches learned was dependent on the student’s social and economic status: girls of lower classes were expected to possess a basic knowledge of sewing for housewifery and even paid work, while those from middling and upper-class backgrounds also learned a variety of ornamental stitches, known as fancy work” (Gowrley, 2020, p.139). Situated in this background of the traditional learning of girls and women, Traquair’s creativity was inherently feminist.

What we now consider textile art, including embroidery, was female dominated work and thus devalued in its association with domesticity and private spaces. Most of what was recognized as art until the late 19th century and celebrated in museums and forums such as the Louvre and the Salon, was largely painting and sculpture - work that was created mostly by men. Portrayal of textile work in print, paint, and written media contributed to the definitions of respectable femininity, as such reinforcing female socialization in marital and maternal relationships. Contextually, “The lack of critical attention given to such images [historiography

around textile crafts] is perhaps indicative of a broader discomfort surrounding the prescriptive and potentially duplicitous model of femininity advocated within the conduct of literature of the period” (Gowrley, 2020, p.142). The neglect to view and label textile arts as a legitimate art form furthered the notion that, primarily, female creators of textile art were of lesser skill or artistic instinct than the artists being celebrated around them, because the labourious elements of their practises were an accomplishment of femininity rather than an artistic innovation. “A woman's place was in the home, her societal status achieved through her husband's caste, accomplishments, and income. Most trades were strictly forbidden to women, the crumbs of creative opportunity dispensed to them via the domicile and undertakings appropriate to domestic bliss-but only as a hobby. For example, they were encouraged to do needlework or engage in miniature painting” (Wolf, 1989, p.28). Rather than conforming to the constraints of the dominant narrative, Traquair’s excellence and ambition allowed her to transcend them.

William Morris’s Arts and Crafts Movement originated in England during a time of peak industrialization, around 1876. Morris, “believed that industrialization alienated labor and created a dehumanizing distance between the designer and manufacturer. Morris strove to unite all the arts within the decoration of the home, emphasizing nature and simplicity of form” (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, n.d.). Morris’s Arts and Crafts welcomed decorative and practical art to be celebrated and cherished by the public. However, his concept of making a sustainable salary and simultaneously gaining pleasure through craft was an inherently class specific and gendered perspective that many women of the time could only dream of.

The term ‘craft’ has separated fiber and textile arts - such as weaving, knitting, sewing, and beading - from what was considered “art” throughout the 19th century in Europe - such as painting, sculpture, and photography. As Lees-Maffei and Sandino (2004) argue, “To appreciate the significance of liaisons between design, craft and art it is necessary to interrogate the mutually informative relationship between practice and discourse. The principles that define the differences and relations between design, craft and art are subject to historical change and vary regionally and culturally” (p.207). Fiber arts have been considered craft for centuries, with this distinction being shaped by historical and cultural biases. These biases often relate to gender, including textiles’ traditional association with women’s work, in parallel with a longstanding oppression of women.

Traquair’s work encompassed a range of mediums and forms, and was in relatively high demand compared with other female artists of her time. For example, she designed the earliest enamel armorial panels over the knights’ seat in the prominent Thistle Chapel of St. Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh. Traquair also illuminated manuscripts, as shown in a piece held by the National Library of Scotland titled *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, and created illustrations, murals, and paintings. However, she is perhaps best known for her ambitious embroidery pieces.



Phoebe Anna Traquair, *The Progress of a Soul*, 1893-1902. Silk and gold thread embroidered on linen, 180.67cm x 71.20 cm. Edinburgh, National Galleries of Scotland.

Traquair's most well-known artwork was her four-part embroidery series, *The Progress of a Soul* (1893-1902), composed of: *The Entrance*, *The Stress*, *Despair*, and *The Victory*. The embroidered pieces were fully covered in tiny stitches using gold and richly coloured silk threads on linen, measuring almost 2 meters tall and over 70 centimeters wide. The works each depict a young man clothed in leopard skin, representing the human soul. Loosely based off the character 'Denys of Auxerre' from 'Imaginary Portraits' by the English writer Walter Pater (National Galleries Scotland, n.d., 1:05), these works reference Christian symbolism within a broader focus on pagan scenes throughout the series. One example of this is her reference to Christ's crown of thorns at the crucifixion, which appears alongside mythological and nature-based imagery, highlighting the spiritual synthesis at the heart of her work. In the last panel, *The Victory*, Denys is supposedly reborn into an eternal life, a theme of transcendence of the material world through belief or identification with Christ. The kiss of a red haired, red winged angel supposedly awakens Denys, and thus he enters the realm of heaven. The public debut of Traquair's embroidered *The Progress of a Soul* took place at the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society in 1903 in London, gaining critical respect and admiration. Her scenic representations of the Holy in her embroidery were reminiscent of the kinds of scenes portrayed by male painters that had been celebrated over the ages.

Traquair's interdisciplinary skills were also showcased in her jewelry making. Interestingly, although jewelry was embraced by the Arts and Crafts movement, and despite having "feminine" associations, its creation was still governed largely by men. "Most shops were closed to women apprentices, which in the nineteenth century was the only means of learning a trade. Furniture making, architecture, glassblowing, metalworking, and jewelry were among the

trades which discouraged women” (Wolf, 1989, p.28). The few women who were allowed to participate in jewelry making were merely permitted to polish and buff within the practice, earning less of a noble artistic label than their male counterparts. Nevertheless, Traquair persisted and eventually produced hundreds of pieces of jewelry through an independent practice. As her enamel work practices were inspired by spiritual and mythical subjects, her jewelry work similarly was heavily influenced by medieval and Renaissance examples, based on previous historical pieces.



Phoebe Anna Traquair, *Untitled Necklace*, approximately 1901. Enameled plaques set in gold, connected by gold chains, 19.1cm x 13.5cm. London, V&A South Kensington Museum.

Traquair had a unique relationship between her religion and artwork, especially her murals, as a member of the Catholic Apostolic Church, with much of her professional work being commissioned by religious institutions. She was commissioned by her friend Patrick Geddes to create decorative murals for the mortuary chapel of the Royal Hospital for Sick Children in Lauriston Lane, Edinburgh, in 1885. The influence of Pre-Raphaelite artists such as Rossetti can be seen in such work. As the Pre-Raphaelites sought to emulate Italian art prior to Raphael, specifically regarding realism, colour, detail, and composition, this inspiration is evident in the striking primary colours that Traquair’s mural features. Her second commission was for St. Mary’s Cathedral Song School between 1888-1892. After this, she created works for Mansfield Place Church in Edinburgh from 1893-1901. She designed large apocalyptic images for the great chancel arch and the Second Coming of Christ within the church, and included scenes from the Old and New Testament, illustrating the journey of the spirit (interpreted as the Parable of the Ten Virgins). Through striking colour choices and brush techniques, she filled the space with biblical figures, humans, animals, and biblical instruments within decorative borders. The great impact that Catholicism had on her creations lasted through her life and legacy. She died in Edinburgh on August 4th, 1936, at the age of 84. According to the National Galleries

Scotland (n.d.), Traquair designed her own gravestone prior to her death, which was subsequently carved by the British sculptor Pilkington Jackson.



Phoebe Anna Traquair, *Three Studies for the Decoration of the First Mortuary Chapel, the Royal Hospital for Sick Children, Edinburgh, 1885*. Oil on canvas, 24.8cm x 20 cm. Edinburgh, National Galleries of Scotland.

Conclusion

Phoebe Anna Traquair was influential in the emergence of the Arts and Crafts movement, through her notable painting, mural making, jewelry building, and embroidery arts. Traquair's recognized excellence in her craft helped to further the validity of female-associated art forms, by being living proof to her society that a woman could be an artistic trailblazer, especially in the realm of textile and other crafts. Her commissioned work was powerful, not only within the Catholic church but across the rest of society and across Europe, leaving a historical legacy for both the Arts and Crafts movement and for the textile and decorative arts. Through her exquisite embroidery and enamelwork, featuring ambitious and evocative portrayals, Phoebe Anna Traquair challenged gendered hierarchies in art, proving that women's decorative labour could embody both spiritual depth and artistic mastery.

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The Fly of the Soul: An Expository Essay on the Integration of Folklore with Mortuary Archaeoentomology in Relation to Moche Funerary Practices

Magdalen Munro

University of British Columbia

Abstract

When researching cultural beliefs and practices surrounding death, it is integral that archaeological practices draw upon oral histories and folkloric accounts. While this is now a generally understood notion amongst anthropologists and archaeologists, there are still subfields that are lacking in terms of their inclusion of oral histories. This paper considers the bioarchaeological study of entomology in relation to mortuary practices, and underscores the importance of incorporating oral traditions and cultural narratives into archaeological research. Using the Moche site of Huaca de la Luna in modern day Peru, scientific study of insect puparia is united with living history to better understand the mortuary practices of this particular culture, such as delayed burials. The work at hand presents potential opportunities for future studies in archaeology, and advocates for a more interdisciplinary approach to funerary archaeoentomology.

Introduction

“Oral history is both the oldest type of historical inquiry, predating the written word, and the most modern” (Oral History: Defined, 2021, as cited in Sharp et al. 2024, 14). Folklore and oral histories are very rich ways of knowledge and collective identity, and provide insight into the values, traditions and politics of a community. Generally speaking, folklore and oral histories are a feature of almost every society, past and present, regardless of time and place (Houlbrook 2018).

Despite this, the relationship between folklore and archaeology is a complex and contested one. Traditional processual views disregarded notions of oral history and folklore, as it was deemed to be too ‘unscientific’ for the new and empirical archaeology that emerged in the 1960’s (Paphitis 2013; Gazin-Schwartz and Holtorf 1999). Quantitative and tangible data was prioritized, and the spoken word and stories belonging to ancient societies were largely rejected from the field.

However, with post-processual archaeology, researchers and scholars began to consider the importance of interdisciplinary interpretations and community involvement. New subfields of archaeology, such as Folklore Archaeology, that consider both the folklore surrounding an archaeological site and integrate oral history into an analysis of artifacts, monuments and

landscapes (Houlbrook 2018), have become more ‘normalized’ in the discipline and are valued and appreciated by scholars and the public alike. An interdisciplinary approach to archaeology where folklore is respected “can inform archaeological interpretation or prompt questions for archaeological research [as well as] expand the database of archaeological research by identifying sites and materials that might not otherwise manifest archaeological ‘evidence’” (Gazin-Schwartz 2012, 367).

Within funerary archaeology, elements of folklore and oral history have been used to better understand contexts surrounding burial sites, mortuary monuments, and cultural conceptions around death. Death is a universal experience, but how different communities and individuals engage with it is what makes mortuary archaeology interesting and complex. Interpretations surrounding features and elements of funerary archaeology can benefit greatly when brought into conversation with stories and beliefs about dying and life after death. An example of this being put into practice comes from a medieval cemetery in Drawsko, Poland, where the nature of deviant burials was only able to be fully realized when researchers considered the community folklore in relation to fear of the supernatural (Polcyn and Gajda 2015).

The debate of whether folklore and oral histories contribute to the field of archaeology, however complicated and contested, is not a new one, as evidenced by traditional discourse between processual and postprocessual archaeology. But it is one that can be further developed.

Folklore and funerary archaeology have become increasingly interconnected, but there is little to no work done that considers the interesting associations between oral history, mortuary traditions and funerary archaeoentomology. Through an analysis of the significance of flies in Moche culture and their presence within graves at Huaca de la Luna, this study argues for the application of folklore archaeology to sites where insect remains are found in relation to burials and dead bodies, and aims to underscore the importance folklore and oral history has to the broader discipline of archaeological research.

Archaeoentomology

Insects belong to the taxonomic class of arthropods (Vanin and Huchet 2017), and are among the most “abundant terrestrial life form[s]” (Morris 2004, 1) on the planet. Insects are virtually everywhere and anywhere, and their contribution to archaeology is one of great value.

Archaeoentomology is the study of insect remains and insect-related material culture found within the archaeological record (Smith 2018). A main component of the insect cuticle, chitin, is an amino-polysaccharide that is incredibly resistant to decay and is chemically stable (Vanin and Huchet 2017). As a result of their preservation qualities, when found in ancient contexts and sites, bugs provide an insightful perspective into past environmental climates, agricultural conditions, food and medicinal factors, and human health and hygiene (Smith 2018).

While bugs are associated with almost every element of nature and life on earth, insects play an unequivocally important role in the decomposition of organic material. In scenarios of forensic science and archaeology, insects engage with and manipulate the human body in a number of ways during the phases of putrefaction. Funerary archaeoentomology considers the presence of insects within burial and mortuary contexts in order to better understand ancient civilizations in regard to burial practices, offerings, thanatology and overall way of life (Giordani et al. 2019).

The relationships insects have to the deceased body has generated a multitude of legends, traditions, and stories in antiquity (Vanin and Huchet 2017). However, entomological studies within archaeology do not often consider the rich cultural and social notions folklore and oral history can offer in relation to the presence of bugs in the archaeological record, especially in regards to human burials. Generally, ancient insects are regarded in a very surface level way, and it is normal for researchers to classify insects in relation to the deceased body as solely natural and scientific, and as an assumed element of any situation where a human body is deposited.

The ancient Andean Moche culture, however, is evidence of a society where insects and bugs that present themselves in and around funerary contexts are regarded as very symbolically substantial and culturally significant.

Moche Funerary Practices - Huaca de la Luna

Dating to the Intermediate period in Andean history, the Moche culture is one of the most well-known and recognizable pre-Columbian civilizations in Peru (Huchet and Greenberg 2010). Historians and archaeologists alike flock to this specific culture due to distinctive art and ceramic forms, highly stratified socio-political structure, impressive monumental architecture and involved sacrificial rituals and ceremonies.

For the Moche, death was a central part of the religious system, and a necessary event for the continuation of society (Chicoine 2011). Typically, Moche interments were positioned lying supine with heads facing south and arms extended along the side of the body (Chicoine 2011; Huchet and Greenberg 2010). Furthermore, burials and graves always included assemblages that could be made up of material belongings, personal artifacts or the bones of sacrificed animals (Goepfert 2008, as cited in Huchet and Greenberg 2010). Their intricate funerary practices, such as delayed burials, secondary offerings of human remains, and grave reopenings (Huchet and Greenberg 2010), reflect the cultural perspective of decay and the dead body among Moche civilization.

At the Huacas de Moche site located on the northern coast of Peru, an “important ceremonial center which included a funerary platform as well as a huge sacrificial area” (Huchet and Greenberg 2010, 2847) was uncovered, and named Huaca de la Luna (Temple of the Moon).

There, archaeological excavations revealed a variety of tombs and pit graves with well-preserved insect remains (Huchet and Greenberg 2010).

Although it is not necessarily unique for bugs to be present in mortuary contexts, the insects at the site of Huaca de la Luna offer interesting pathways for interpretation when one considers the folklore and oral history Moche people had surrounding flies and maggots in relation to the dead body and the human spirit.

Insects in Moche Culture and Burials

Insects act as transformative agents in the decomposition process and are responsible for the removal of different parts of the body such as skin, bones and hair (Vanin and Huchet 2017). Insects are able to detect where a body is located very shortly after an individual has died, and will quickly colonize the remains of organic matter. Upon death, flies will alight on a corpse and lay eggs or living larvae upon the skin and within different openings of the body (Bourget 2001) and begin to feed on the flesh of the deceased. Different species of insects are attracted to the corpse depending on a variety of factors, such as water content within the bodily tissue, the accessibility of the body, the season, the clothes, other fabrics the body is wrapped in, and the temperature (Vanin and Huchet 2017). The muscoid fly is among the most common of arthropods in mortuary contexts, but other insects such as beetles and wasps will annex the body as well (Bourget 2001; Millaire 2004; Vanin and Huchet 2017). During metamorphosis of the maggot, called pupariation, an adult fly begins to form within a sclerotized puparium (Huchet and Greenberg 2010). The puparium that is left when the fly emerges can, in some cases, become fossilized and remain within the archaeological record for thousands of years.

In many Moche burials at Huaca de la Luna, fossilized puparia are found alongside bodies. The presence of insect remains are particularly important here because it allows for researchers to determine how long the body was left out before being buried. Delayed burials were a very common practice in ancient Andean civilizations, with the Moche being one of many societies to practice this unique funerary rite (Bourget 2001). However, the reasoning behind it varies across cultures, and to interpret exactly *why* the Moche left the body out before putting it in a more regulated and normative location (such as a tomb) requires the integration of folklore into funerary archaeoentomological studies.

Based on colonial documentation and generational stories of Moche cultural practices, the Moche would deliberately leave out the dead body for five days before returning to it (Bourget 2001). During this time, various insects would manifest in and around the corpse. When the sun rose on *Yaru Tini* (the fifth day), a person would go to the body and identify two or three big flies and sit and wait for the maggots to leave the body (Huchet and Greenberg 2010), a lengthy process but a very significant and symbolic one.

The spirit or soul of the deceased individual, *anima*, was thought to reveal itself in the form of an insect, where it would then leave the material body and rejoin ancestors in the spiritual realm (Bourget 2001). Many Moche ceramics and effigies found within tombs and burials depict spiritual landscapes where skeletonized individuals dance in celebration of the arrival of a fly, flies patiently wait to lay their eggs on the bodies of sacrificial victims and the ill, and insect-related designs are painted on faces (Bourget 2001).

Additionally, body modifications, such as the removal of the jaw, are iconographically represented in connection with insect imagery in a lot of the material culture found in Moche funerary sites (Bourget 2001; Trever 2019). Bourget (2001) proposes that this procedure was sometimes done to accelerate the transformation of the soul into a fly, and consequently for the spirit to return to the afterlife.

A highly ritualized affair, the Moche perspective of insects in relation to the deceased body alludes to how different cultures and societies create unique stories and lore to better understand and engage with the world around them. The natural processes of decomposition are very intricate and physically, mentally, and emotionally pervasive, and how people engage with it is something that archaeology and folklore can help to better understand when used cooperatively.

Funerary Archaeoentomology and Folklore

In many societies, arthropods provide meaningful associations to human thought and culture (Huchet and Greenberg 2010) that is evidenced through oral, written, and material records. The Bible offers a total of 120 insects that represent various symbolic meanings and connotations, arthropods are carved into hillsides and caves in parts of Central America, and the scarab is a well-known and important identifier of some Egyptian cultures (Huchet and Greenberg 2010). It can be argued that entomological studies in relation to ancient communities *have* considered folkloric elements of the region in its archaeological research, mostly with regards to iconographic and artistic motifs. However, there are few examples of oral history and folklore being applied to the archaeological study of necrophagous species within funerary contexts.

As modeled by the analysis of Moche beliefs surrounding insects in relation to decay and death of the human body, the practice of engaging folkloristic stories and explanations offers several benefits to the broader discipline of mortuary archaeology. By researching the types of insects or insect-related material in burials through folklore, a greater understanding of social context and ontological thought can be more confidently inferred.

Cultural attitudes towards death are sometimes able to be determined from the archaeological remains at mortuary sites, but a more nuanced conclusion is obtainable with the inclusion of folklore and archaeoentomology. For the Moche, the presence of speciated fossilized

puparia allows archaeologists to determine whether burials were immediate or more drawn out, and folklore fills in the gaps of why these particular practices were common and performed amongst ancient communities.

Furthermore, perspectives towards certain arthropods in the mortuary context and their functions as necrophagous agents differ across cultures. As outlined by Huchet and Greenberg (2010), the Moche intentionally left out bodies so that the transformation of the spirit into a fly would be more accessible and attainable. However, for the ancient Egyptians, folklore and oral history document the importance placed upon the preservation of the body, and as a result, they “did everything in their power to prevent flies from destroying the corpse” (Huchet and Greenberg 2010, 2852). Different cultures have different beliefs in what happens to the soul after death, and this is reflected in various funerary practices and rites, and, by extension, in the presence or absence of archaeoentomological remains.

Folklore and oral history prove to be necessary components of archaeological interpretations, and their value is compounded with respect to funerary archaeoentomology. Arthropods are of vital importance to practically almost every aspect of life and death, so it is interesting that the cultural study of insects in relation to archaeology and mortuary practices is not more widespread within the academic field.

Conclusion

Archaeology, as a discipline that has traditionally prioritized material and tangible evidence, often fails to understand how elements of life were *experienced* by people in the past (Paphitis 2019). However, with the emergence of post-processualism, researchers began to advocate for the inclusion of folklore and oral histories into academic fields, highlighting the importance of cultural relativism and multidisciplinary approaches. The debate of whether folklore and oral histories hold any accuracy in comparison to archaeological evidence has been an ongoing conversation since the 1980s and 1990s, but elements of the controversy still exist within more modern contexts. Studies of the relationships between folklore, entomology and mortuary archaeology have all been explored separately, but few works have been published that consider how these different fields can work interdependently.

This paper offers a contemporary perspective to an old issue within funerary archaeology, and looks specifically at the bioarchaeological study of entomology in relation to cultural conceptions surrounding death. By enlisting a case study from an ancient Andean Moche site, Huaca de la Luna, the study at hand marries mortuary archaeoentomology with cultural beliefs and folklore to encourage an interpretation that recognizes the rich symbolic and sacred associations past civilizations had to both natural phases of decomposition and the arthropods that enacted them.

In hopes of this perspective gaining more traction, some suggestions for future research include studies that consider the topic at hand in relation to identity and social stratification within a culture. Depending on how an individual or a community perceives themselves, both folklore and funerary archaeology present potential opportunity for reflecting social organization, and how this then impacts archaeoentomology is an interesting consideration.

Within mortuary archaeology, folklore has become an enduring and appreciated component of interpretation, and its value in funerary archaeoentomology is undeniable.

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Obstetric (Racism) Violence: Settler Colonialism and Reproductive Injustice Against Indigenous Women in Canada

Aashton Prasad

University of British Columbia

Abstract

Indigenous women in Canada experience unparalleled violence in reproductive healthcare. This stark reality is deeply enmeshed in overlapping systems of oppression rooted in sexism, racism, and settler colonialism. The most prominent manifestations of this in relation to Indigenous maternal health include forced and coerced sterilizations, verbal abuse, mandated evacuations for childbirth, and the relatively recent—but now discontinued—practice of birth alerts. In the women's global health arena, medical anthropologists and scholars in similar disciplines recognize these harms through the framework of obstetric violence. This paper draws on relevant literature to confront the racialized obstetric violence impacting Indigenous Canadian women, which remains largely under examined in anthropology and other related fields.

Introduction

The intersection of race and gender renders women of colour especially vulnerable to systemic inequities in healthcare. Gendered racism—a form of oppression that merges racial and gendered discrimination—shapes their experiences at both institutional and interpersonal levels, often resulting in provider bias that compromises the quality of care they receive (Pirtle and Wright 2021). Indigenous women are critically exposed to such discrimination within the Canadian healthcare system (Boyer 2017). Boyer (2017) argues that this system is designed to ignore the colonial and racist history that affects Indigenous patients' health (e.g., through intergenerational trauma) and their current experiences in care (e.g., provider biases) (1408). One sinister manifestation of this is obstetric violence. This term is used globally in reproductive health to describe gender-based medical violence inflicted on women and birthing people during pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum, disproportionately affecting racialized women (Davis 2019; van der Waal et al. 2021; Williamson 2021). Notably, this injustice has attracted growing attention from medical anthropologists, who examine its cultural and systemic dimensions across diverse transnational settings (Castro and Savage 2019; Dixon 2015; van der Waal et al. 2022; Williamson 2021). They, and other scholars in cognate fields, have highlighted that such mistreatment can take various forms ranging from discrimination and coercion to physical, emotional, or verbal abuse (Bohren et al. 2015; Davis 2019; Shaheen-Hussain et al. 2023). Building on these insights, my paper will provide an exploration and analysis of the racialized obstetric violence that Indigenous women face in Canada, and unravel how settler colonialism continues to shape reproductive health policies and practices, frequently ending in violence. This

is an important issue because Indigenous women's experiences of obstetric violence are distinct from those of other racialized groups within Canada (e.g., Black and Asian women), as well as from Indigenous and minority women in other countries, due to Canada's unique socio-political context and history. These experiences, therefore, warrant focused attention.

Although obstetric violence encompasses numerous forms of mistreatment, Indigenous women face it most significantly through forced and coerced sterilizations, verbal abuse, forced evacuations for childbirth, and birth alerts (Dawson and Suntjens 2022; Lawford et al. 2018; Leason 2021; Shaheen-Hussain et al. 2023). It is prudent to mention that birth alerts were officially discontinued across most of Canada by 2021, with Québec being the last province to end the practice in 2023 (Hwang 2023; Malone 2022). Nevertheless, they must be brought into discussion, as the practice of birth alerts was only phased out relatively recently. The lasting effects on Indigenous maternal and infant health remain viscerally felt, with some women reporting ongoing trauma decades after being subjected to this form of violence (Hwang 2022). As such, birth alerts still provide a salient example of obstetric violence and the persistent impacts of settler colonialism.

Social Context and Systemic Racism

According to Leason (2021), forced and coerced sterilization “refers to the practice of sterilizing Indigenous women without free and informed consent” and is rooted in “eugenics beliefs and policies” (525). Obstetric staff, including doctors, nurses, and social workers, each play a role in perpetuating this racialized violence (Boyer 2017, 1408). One method involves misleading women into believing that tubal ligation is a reversible form of birth control (Boyer 2017, 1408). This claim is false, as the procedure sterilizes them resulting in permanent infertility. Explicit Sexual Sterilization Acts were in effect in Alberta (1928–1972) and British Columbia (BC) (1933–1973), disproportionately targeting Indigenous teenage girls and young women (Leason 2021, 525). Shaheen-Hussain et al. (2023) report that similar practices were widespread across the country during that period, occurring in many jurisdictions without formal legislation, and persist to this day (1763). Indeed, the United Nations Committee Against Torture (2018) has expressed concern about Canada's extensive history of forced and coerced sterilization of Indigenous women and girls, dating back to the 1970s and continuing into the present, as new cases of such violence continue to emerge (12). The social landscape of forced and coerced sterilizations in Canada is a longstanding problem, substantial enough to draw the attention of the United Nations (UN). This involvement by the UN further speaks to its severity and enduring harm.

Meanwhile, verbal abuse is represented by racial slurs and taunts from healthcare professionals, anchored in degrading stereotypes about Indigenous women (Shaheen-Hussain et al. 2023, 1763). A recent report on the BC healthcare system revealed extensive racial profiling and stereotyping of Indigenous patients, who were regularly described in dehumanizing terms

such as being less capable, less deserving, drug-seekers, alcoholics, non-compliant, and bad parents (Native Women's Association of Canada 2021, 2). Despite the report centering on BC, disparaging anti-Indigenous and racist ideologies are not limited by provincial boundaries; they underpin healthcare systems across Canada (Boyer 2017). These disturbing biases, materialize not only as verbal abuse but also as aforementioned forms of obstetric violence (e.g., coerced sterilizations) that Indigenous women routinely face in reproductive healthcare.

Another form of violence is forced evacuated births. Since the 1960s, and continuing today, Indigenous women in rural and remote Canadian communities are evacuated at 36 to 38 weeks of pregnancy—or earlier in high-risk cases—to give birth in a hospital (Dawson and Suintjens 2022, 233). While the policy was intended to reduce maternal and infant mortality rates among Indigenous populations, it has resulted in obstetric mistreatment vis-à-vis tremendous isolation and lack of support (Dawson and Suintjens 2022, 233). As previously illustrated, the racialized identity of Indigenous women makes them targets of acute discrimination. In turn, forced evacuated births that are inherently violent due to their coercive nature, also extend harm by isolating them from their families and support systems. This takes place because these women “are not allowed to bring anybody with them” to the hospital (Lawford et al. 2018, 484). I view this isolation as increasing their vulnerability to more discrimination and oppression at the hands of obstetric providers. Without the presence of their mothers, sisters, grandmothers, or partners during labour, childbirth, and after—support that others in Canada typically have—the healthcare system places Indigenous women and their babies at heightened risk of experiencing additional obstetric violence.

Examining birth alerts is also essential to this inquiry. As outlined by Dawson and Suintjens (2022), birth alerts occurred when medical staff would notify child welfare workers if a parent was labelled “high-risk,” or if they suspected the birth parent of neglect or using alcohol or drugs (229). Birth alerts usually resulted in the apprehension of infants days after being born and disproportionately impacted Indigenous mothers (Migdal 2019). It resulted in newborns being separated from their parent(s)—sometimes for days, other times for months or even years (Hwang 2023). Undoubtedly, this constitutes obstetric violence, maintained by settler colonial narratives and reflected in the broader patterns of anti-Indigenous racism in Canada. Specifically, the forced separation of infants from their mothers—sometimes for extended periods—is a profound act of institutional and colonial violence. This act echoes, in many ways, the historical separation of Indigenous children from their parents during the era of residential schools. Birth alerts were a horrific continuation of racist state-sanctioned theft of Indigenous children, distinguished by the striking fact that these apprehensions transpired in infancy—just days after the babies left their mothers' wombs (Dawson and Suintjens 2022, 232). Depending on the length of separation, it could also severely undermine Indigenous mothers' (and birthing persons') ability to parent and raise their children in a secure and healthy environment, particularly when the child is in state care.

Thus, obstetric violence against Indigenous women in Canada prevails partly due to institutionalized gendered racism, perpetuated by the state through the healthcare system. While I have detailed a few examples, these do not encompass the full scope of reproductive violence Indigenous women have historically and continue to endure—much of which I would argue remains undocumented or yet to be acknowledged. However, these examples provide an alarming glimpse into how such violence has manifested in Canadian obstetric care over the past several decades to the present.

Obstetric Colonialism

Euro-American public health discourses on health differences and racial disparities too often attribute health inequities to the bodies of racialized people by ignoring systemic and institutional racism (Bowleg 2023, 4). This logic was evident in practices such as birth alerts, where Indigenous mothers were labelled as high-risk, not explicitly because of their Indigeneity but routinely based on stereotypical assumptions of suspected neglect or alcohol or drug use. Such assumptions fail to acknowledge the structural factors that contribute to these issues, including intergenerational trauma inflicted by the state (e.g., residential schools), which has led to higher rates of substance use among Indigenous populations (Cuttler 2021). A second angle to understanding the persistence of obstetric violence against Indigenous women lies in the systemic entrenchment of medical colonialism with obstetric violence—what I refer to as "obstetric colonialism"—within the genealogy of North American biomedicine. This violent legacy continues to permeate institutional structures (Leason 2021), giving rise to a detrimental bias against Indigenous reproduction in Canadian obstetrics.

Shaheen-Hussain et al. (2023) assert that Canadian medical culture is grounded in patriarchal, white supremacist, and settler colonial ideologies, which have profoundly shaped clinical practices across North America for over two centuries (1763). This assertion informs how systems of oppression have historically infiltrated and shaped the biomedical field, perpetuating a framework where marginalized groups—particularly Indigenous and Black women—were dehumanized and exploited for medical advancements (Shaheen-Hussain et al. 2023, 1763). Physicians who upheld and benefited from these systems of power, that is white and male, played a significant role in moulding medical and gynecological curricula (Shaheen-Hussain et al. 2023, 1763). Their practices usually reflected and reproduced racism, misogyny, and colonial domination, often with devastating consequences for those subjected to their care (Shaheen-Hussain et al. 2023, 1763-1764).

Historical figures represent these oppressive legacies. Notably, J. Marion Sims, the so-called "father of American gynecology," conducted non-consensual and brutal experiments on enslaved Black women without anesthesia (Davis 2019, 567; Shaheen-Hussain et al. 2023, 1763). These acts, framed as "scientific advancements" at the time, are now widely recognized as emblematic of systemic medical abuse and the disregard for the autonomy and dignity of Black

and other racialized women (Davis, 2019; Shaheen-Hussain et al. 2023). In the same vein, the purported Canadian “father of modern medicine,” espoused white supremacist beliefs and worked to discredit and demean Indigenous birthing practices (Shaheen-Hussain et al. 2023, 1763-1764). He envisioned Canada as a “white man’s country,” a vision that extended into his medical writings, which included derogatory portrayals of Indigenous women and their reproduction (Shaheen-Hussain et al. 2023, 1763-1764). These examples highlight how prominent medical figures not only upheld but actively contributed to a colonial and racialized medical discourse.

The ramifications of these histories extend beyond their immediate historical contexts. Figures such as Sims and their Canadian counterparts helped form a colonial imagination within biomedicine. This racialization constructed Indigenous and Black women as biologically different, precisely through the unfounded belief that they possessed a higher pain tolerance than white women (Pirtle and Wright 2021, 174; Shaheen-Hussain et al. 2023, 1763). That harmful assumption has historically justified inhumane treatment and systemic neglect, enabling medical practitioners to dismiss the pain and suffering of women of colour—a pattern that persists today (Davis 2019, 561; Pirtle and Wright 2021, 174; Williamson 2021, 176).

Hence, the systemic anti-Indigenous racism in Canadian obstetrics is deeply ingrained in the colonial and paternalistic policies that have historically targeted Indigenous maternal bodies (Shaheen-Hussain et al. 2023, 1764). Dawson and Suntjens (2022) stress the everlasting impact of these practices, stating:

Indigenous peoples in Canada have endured a centuries-long history of colonization and continue to experience ongoing settler colonialism. Forced assimilation policies aimed at “civilizing” Indigenous peoples and ending a perceived “Indian problem” sought to remove Indigenous peoples from their lands, sever the transmission of cultural knowledge and ways of knowing, and end Indigenous identities—practices now referred to as cultural genocide. More often, colonial policies and practices—such as the Indian Act, which stripped Indigenous women of their status and identity, and the residential school system, which removed children from families and communities—targeted Indigenous women and children. (228)

These colonial policies have not only pushed genocide (culturally and literally) but also laid the groundwork for the systemic anti-Indigenous racism observed in contemporary Canadian healthcare. Certainly, discriminatory and eugenic practices, such as forced and coerced sterilizations and other forms of obstetric violence, are a direct continuation of these historical injustices (Shaheen-Hussain et al. 2023, 1763-1764). As van der Waal et al. (2022) highlight, the measurable disparities in health outcomes, such as substantially higher mortality rates among Indigenous women and their infants, further delineate the ongoing connection of settler colonialism in Canadian healthcare (15).

While I believe that most contemporary Canadian obstetric providers do not view themselves as inherently racist or supportive of colonial violence, the foundations of their institution tell a different story. These foundations, built on histories of reproductive experimentation, denigration, and the oppression of Indigenous ways of knowing and being (Dawson and Suntjens 2022), mark Indigenous women for heightened abuse and mistreatment. I see this violence as stemming from their very embodiment as the "Other"—the original inhabitants of this land, whom the state systematically sought to destroy and sever from their roots. Examples of this destruction include residential schools, land dispossession, and, relevant to my exploration, obstetric violence—all aimed at severing Indigenous ties to the land to allow the settler colonial nation to emerge (Boyer 2017; Dawson and Suntjens 2022; Shaheen-Hussain et al. 2023), facilitating white Europeans' exploitation of the country's riches and resources.

From this perspective, it becomes clear how Indigenous women and their reproduction are framed as threats to the settler colonial imaginary. Obstetric colonialism, therefore, offers another lens through which to understand why Indigenous women persistently face disproportionately high rates of maternal and infant morbidity and mortality. Obstetric violence, as a tool of the state, perpetuates this colonial project of domination over the land and its Indigenous people, communities, and, specifically, women. Women are central to this project because, without them and their children, the continuity of Indigenous family-making and futures would cease to exist.

Indigenous Reproductive Justice

Reproductive Justice (RJ) serves as both a theoretical framework and a transformative praxis developed by Black, Indigenous, and other women of colour activists to address the compounded oppressions that racialized women and birthing people confront (Ross 2017). These oppressions are deeply embedded in intersecting identities tied to gender, race, class, ability, nationality, and sexuality, within the sphere of reproductive politics (Ross 2017). At its core, RJ asserts the fundamental right of all people to self-determine their reproductive lives. This incorporates "the right to have a child, to not have a child, and to parent the children... [they do] have in safe and healthy environments" (Ross 2017, 62). By situating reproductive autonomy in broader structural inequalities, RJ draws attention to addressing systemic barriers rather than isolating reproductive decisions from social, political, and economic contexts. Although RJ originated in the United States (US) and has been spearheaded by American social justice organizations (SisterSong 2023), its principles have transcended borders. In doing so, RJ holds great relevance in other nations such as Canada. However, its adoption and application in the Canadian milieu remain less widespread compared to the US.

Nonetheless, this framework provides an invaluable method to addressing the specific reproductive injustices experienced by Indigenous women and birthing people. Lasting systemic inequities in Canada due to settler colonialism have severely impacted Indigenous reproductive

health. This is evidenced by the pervasive issue of obstetric violence and the subsequent medicalization of birth (e.g., evacuated births) that erode Indigenous sovereignty. In response, Dawson and Suntjens (2022) articulate how RJ offers a pathway for Indigenous communities to reclaim reproductive autonomy and associated cultural freedom (236-237). For Indigenous women in Canada, RJ involves not only advocating for reproductive rights but also addressing the broader colonial structures that disrupt community knowledge systems and birthing traditions. Specifically, they explain that “for Indigenous women in Canada, colonization is oppression, and [RJ] involves returning birth to community and ceremony and reclaiming women’s central position and knowledge around pregnancy, birth, and mothering” (Dawson and Suntjens 2022, 237). This vision underlines the need to move beyond Euro-American medical frameworks and to center Indigenous voices, practices, and traditions in reproductive health.

I would posit the application of RJ in Canada can thus be mobilized by activists, healthcare providers, and policymakers to challenge systemic obstetric inequalities. If there were integration of RJ into gynecological care practices, it would work to tackle obstetric violence by orienting cultural safety, informed consent (at all times), and Indigenous-centred birthing practices. Similarly, RJ presents a critical framework for addressing forced and coerced sterilizations and other obstetric violence, advocating for restitution, and ensuring accountability for systemic violations over Indigenous reproductive freedom.

Conclusion

The systemic obstetric violence encountered by Indigenous women in Canada is what I consider an expression of enduring gendered racism driven by settler colonialism. As outlined, this violence is composed of, but not limited to, forced and coerced sterilizations, verbal abuse, forced evacuated births, and the discontinued practice of birth alerts. This reflects both the historical and ongoing attempt at annihilating Indigenous sovereignty and bodily autonomy. No doubt, these acts of reproductive injustice are not isolated events, but part of a broader colonial project aimed at undermining Indigenous futures and family-making. Deeply entrenched biases in the Canadian healthcare system continue to perpetuate harm, reinforcing patterns of racialized and gendered violence. In order to address these injustices, the praxis of RJ provides one radical approach by placing the rights of Indigenous women around reproductive autonomy, cultural safety, and self-determination. Through the reclamation of Indigenous birthing and the dismantling of colonial medical structures, RJ sets forth a path toward more equitable and culturally affirming obstetric care. Such an applied framework challenges the systemic inequalities embedded in Canadian reproductive health. This allows the envisioning of a future where Indigenous women and their communities can thrive without obstetric violence and settler colonial oppression. Integrating RJ principles into medical policies and practices would allow Canada an opportunity to combat its colonial legacy and create space for a more just and inclusive reproductive healthcare system—one imagined to be free from obstetric violence against Indigenous women and other marginalized birthing people.

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Policy from Above, Solutions from Below: Unpacking the Paradoxes of Food Security Interventions in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, BC

Caroline Stampliaka

University of British Columbia

Abstract

Following decades of neoliberal governance since the 1970s and 1980s, the food security interventions offered by the nonprofit industrial complex (NPIC) have become paradoxical. Based on five weeks of ethnographic fieldwork at the Pacific Community Hub (PCH), a grassroots nonprofit organization in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES), this paper reveals their efforts and struggles with combating food insecurity while facing various systemic obstacles. A closer look at the limitations of charitable and tokenistic interventions to food security, situated within a broader historical and socio-economic context, shows how the responsibility is continuously shifted away from the government. Hence, contrasting top-down policies with bottom-up initiatives can provide critical insights into equitable solutions to food insecurity for vulnerable populations in the DTES. I argue that grassroots and asset-based community development approaches to equitable food security are more effective than neoliberal policies that systematically fail to address structural root causes.

We stood in a small, cluttered office. With a furrowed brow and a weary smile, the Executive Director of Pacific Community Hub (PCH), shared her daily challenges to keep the secular, non-profit, grassroots organization afloat. Elizabeth performs a superhuman feat as she shifts from leadership to management; juggles budgets, finances and fundraising efforts; writes grant proposals; and networks within the community, manages operations, supports frontline workers during meal programs and services, and even picks up donations such as diapers to hand to vulnerable families, making the breadth of her duties staggering. I was struck by her honesty as it made apparent how understaffed the nonprofit organization is and, revealed the pressure on staff and volunteers. This ethnographic account explores the contradictions and paradoxes between top-down policy implementation and on-the-ground realities faced by PCH, which serves vulnerable populations in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES). I argue that while top-down approaches aim to address food insecurity, they often fail to do so effectively, creating new issues by offering superficial, tokenistic solutions that shift responsibility away from the state instead of addressing root causes.

First, I will clarify the methodology I employed and my positionality vis-a-vis the DTES. Second, I will briefly analyze the historical context of the rise of charity-oriented food banks in

Canada to contextualize, compare and contrast my observations and research findings. Third, I will describe the philosophy, purpose and challenges of PCH. Finally, I will offer potential policy recommendations based on my research findings. While providing extensive answers and solutions to food insecurity is beyond the scope of this work, I aim to deliver ethnographic insights into the daily challenges and attempts of grassroots organizations to mitigate unequal power relations based on the case example of the PCH. The PCH is an organization that strives to stay true to its principles of equitable food security and asset-based community development (ABCD), which also aligns with the principles of what Tuck (2009) defines as a “desire-based framework” (416). These frameworks are based on the belief that communities should exercise their power and strengths, moving the focus away from historically, damage-centred research approaches and towards an “epistemological shift” that acknowledges “complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives” in disenfranchised communities (Tuck 2009: 412, 419, 416).

Methodologically, this ethnographic work is based on five weeks of immersive fieldwork experiences and participant observation during my involvement in several meal programming and community engagement sessions. I also did a semi-structured interview with the ED, Elizabeth. This opportunity opened a window into the operational and emotional complexities of her position, revealing the stress and determination that drive the organization and their commitment to advocacy and community engagement. As a student, researcher who is also a volunteer, my multiple roles allowed me to collect data from various points of view, both academic and personal, leading to a nuanced understanding of the context and the unfiltered reality of grassroots work on the ground. I did not have previous volunteer experience in the Canadian nonprofit sector, which allowed me to approach the fieldwork with fresh eyes as I was forced to leave my comfort zone and reflect more intensely on my biases. Overall, my research approach has been based on a collaborative ethos, focusing on “mutually beneficial” relationships, aligned with the PCH’s strategies and philosophies; however, the intersection of these diverse processes is also situated within “a complex matrix of power relations” that need to be interrogated (Tuck 2019: 424; Lassiter 2021: 68). I chose to protect the anonymity and privacy of everyone involved, especially in the interest of vulnerable populations such as immigrants and refugees who are the primary demographic accessing programs and services. I removed identifiable information, calling the organization Pacific Community Hub (PCH) and use culturally appropriate pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

Reflecting on my upbringing and positionality, I am privileged to call myself a university student who grew up in a Greek-Canadian, immigrant, working-class family engaged in the restaurant industry in stark contrast to the challenges faced in the nonprofit sphere. As I witnessed social inequalities in the DTES, I realized that the lived consequences of experiencing misfortunes without adequate support systems are more unforgiving in Canada compared to Europe. The cost of living is higher and the social welfare system is unreliable. I also grew up in Germany, a country with a secure social safety net. Thus, I became increasingly disillusioned by

the contrast between Vancouver's glamorous image and the realities of the DTES. Being able to draw cross-cultural comparisons increased my desire to make sense of how a city as wealthy and celebrated as Vancouver, BC, could allow vulnerable populations to endure such precarious living conditions and why top-down approaches have remained ineffective. I will first discuss the historical context and controversial beginnings of the charity-oriented system in Canada as this will enrich my analysis of the challenging realities that grassroots organizations face.

In 1996, during the World Food Summit, a utopic incentive for global food security was articulated, envisioning a world "when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (Riches 2003: 649.) However, since the 1980s, scholars warned that the Canadian welfare state was disintegrating: as food banks were institutionalized, their widespread emergence reflected a broader trend towards commodifying welfare and social assistance, a stark contrast to the era when social safety nets provided a robust support system (Hobbs et al. 1993: 94-95; Riches 2003: 648, 650, 658). Unfortunately, these reforms in welfare discredited "the idea of universality and collective social rights" (Riches 2003: 659). Consequently, people's eligibility for income support, and by extension, their food security, became linked to their capacity to sell their labour, fundamentally shifting the responsibility for food security away from the state and making nonprofit organizations the frontline responders (Riches 2003: 659).

Today in Vancouver, over 1600 nonprofits operate within a highly competitive environment known as the nonprofit industrial complex (NPIC), blurring the lines between charitable organizations and businesses as they seek to expand their influence, often at the expense of the communities they serve (Kelsall et al. 2023: 2). The rapid growth of nonprofits, which coincided with the rise of neoliberal governance in the 1970s and 1980s, continues to be a prominent trend in Vancouver (Kelsall et al. 2023: 4). Understanding this historical background highlights why grassroots organizations like PCH struggle to meet growing needs as government policies still inadequately address poverty and food insecurity, and charity remains controversial and associated with stigma (Hobbs et al. 1993: 94; Riches 2003: 650). More strikingly, in light of Canada's escalating housing and affordability crisis and the steepest inflation rates in four decades, food bank usage and overall food insecurity have reached unprecedented levels, revealing the inadequacy of top-down approaches (D'Andrea 2023). Without immediate and appropriate government intervention, these issues will worsen; hence, this type of ethnographic research is time-sensitive (D'Andrea 2023).

Canada's nonprofit organizations differ in their objectives, goals, size, reach, roles and operations (Riches 2003: 650). PCH stands out as one of the few organizations focusing on providing equitable food security. Elizabeth repeatedly emphasized how, unlike typical charity-oriented organizations, they do "not duplicate services but fill the gaps." When asked what equitable food security looks like to her during our interview, Elizabeth responded with:

As an organization, we don't align ourselves with the charity model. So we're not there to save people. We have space for dignity and mutual giving and receiving... Thinking about how we incorporate feedback and work with the community through community strength-based assets and evaluating people's ability to choose what they want to put in their bodies instead of just like, "Here, be thankful for what you get," was a big mind shift for me. I mean, people get to do that in a restaurant; they get to choose what they want, but in an area like the DTES, there's not as much choice, so being able to promote that choice and finding ways that make it dignified for people. In the simplest things, instead of giving a grocery hamper that is the same for everyone, identifying and recognizing that people have different needs and allowing them to make those choices is a huge part of what the right to food means.

Here, the asset-based community development approach comes into focus as it uses a holistic lens that focuses on capacity-building and strengthening existing assets, rather than diminishing the community's sense of competence (Towle and Leahy 2016: 70-74). From my observations, although the PCH continually faces challenges, it embodies these principles by treating participants with respect and dignity. This philosophy also aligns with the Canadian Association of Food Banks' Code of Ethics, emphasizing everyone's right to food security and personal dignity (Riches 2003: 657). Staff and volunteers come from various socio-economic backgrounds, too; several are highly educated with degrees, while others have suffered systemic injustices in the past, motivating them to help others get through similar situations. While I volunteered, I observed how participants looked relaxed and content. The children played harmoniously with each other, and the childcare volunteers created paper planes and necklaces with them. Other volunteers like Abiola, who is in charge of the kitchen, provided access to fresh fruit and snacks, offering an equitable share of more free meals and produce. Thus, staff and volunteers actively contribute to an equitable environment. The following section focuses on the pandemic's impact on the PCH, which resulted in changes to funding and different demographics. The pandemic evidenced the organization's resilience and its dynamic adaptability while staying true to its principles.

While COVID-19 was undoubtedly challenging, it allowed the PCH to grow thanks to increased funding. During this brief period, the PCH hired more staff and did more frontline work despite restrictions such as social distancing. As a small and independently operating nonprofit organization in the DTES area, Elizabeth proudly contrasted how "Larger nonprofits and charities closed during COVID, while we stayed open. Top-down approaches are just slower." However, the funding was eventually cut, forcing the organization to size down again and become more conservative with its resources. This lack of funding is also reflected in the

PCH's physical space, which has been neglected and almost resulted in the organization's eviction for seismic upgrades in the past. I was present when they hosted a community engagement session to receive participant's feedback on future developments. A volunteer, named Ahmad, raised questions: "How can we honour the community?" "What does the space need?" These reflected his care and engagement. While the PCH contemplated joining a prominent umbrella organization for more administrative support and funding sources, as the ED acknowledges, "trying to stay grassroots remains the priority. Otherwise, the PCH would be unable to run things as they like, which shows the value of their independence and resilience.

The post-pandemic period brought significant demographic changes to the participants accessing programs and services at the PCH, as there was an influx of refugees and immigrants, particularly from the Middle East. These vulnerable families face significant challenges in establishing themselves in Vancouver's high-cost environment. Hence, PCH's low-barrier and free access to essential meal programs that do not require formal registration is crucial for these families, who seek practical assistance, opportunities to forge new social connections and access to equitable food only available at inclusive Canadian "community food centers" such as the PCH (Muffat 2022: 7). Unlike charity-oriented food banks that provide generic, processed foods, further marginalizing vulnerable populations by limiting their choices, PCH responds directly to community needs, offering cultural and traditional foods (Sernick et al. 2021: 5-7). For instance, they immediately included halal options based on popular demand. This approach aligns with "Canada's Action Plan for Food Security," which identified access to "culturally acceptable" food as a critical element of food security (Riches 2003: 649). As Canada prides itself on being "a nation of immigrants," it is essential to support the well-being and health of immigrants and refugees by helping them navigate an unfamiliar "food system" and addressing not only hunger but also the sociocultural dimensions of food to support their successful integration (Moffat 2022: 6-7, 9).

To respond even more effectively to the community members' individual and collective needs, the ED plans to implement an Advisory Council that involves peers as leaders and is intended to remove even more barriers to dialogue while uprooting established power hierarchies. Elizabeth explained as follows:

The idea around the Advisory Council is to have more Advisory committees for more structured feedback. Then, peers will be able to work more directly with senior leadership. So right now, it will be the manager of operations and ED and then be able to engage with the board more regarding community engagement and feedback, which happens more at the moment on a program and relational level. We'll put out a suggestion box and that kind of thing once in a while, but the feedback comes between participants, our staff, our volunteers, and our students. We know that this space is our neighbour's space; it's an extension of their home, and we want them to feel like equal partners as

much as possible. There are still some of those power dynamics, and we try to mitigate them as much as possible.

This quote by Elizabeth reflects the organization's grassroots commitment to acknowledge the assets of community members and empower them to become autonomous agents. When asked about how outside influences like policy changes and socio-economic shifts impact the organization's operations, she elaborated on the work she is doing as part of the Community Coordinator Response Network, which hosts weekly meetings:

It can be challenging working with governments and policymakers, but when they get that community service providers and residents have a lot of valuable knowledge to share, and they're willing to work with us, we can collaboratively make the most change. The work that I do, or we do with the Community Coordinator Response Network, is very much tied to that, a group of us in leadership with the power to reach out to people in power and make policies that (acknowledge) there's already peer-lived knowledge and experience, and it's valuable. Grassroots on-the-ground things are already happening, so if you just listen to and work with us... We already have a lot of solutions that you say are problems. We want to work with governments to make positive changes for the neighbourhood, and continue to advocate for that can be exhausting, but is really important work. That's a highlight, for one of the things I get to do in my role is higher-level advocacy work.

Thus, local grassroots organizations try to acquire more power by creating nexuses of relations with other organizations to demand more effective cooperation with the government. Even though the nonprofit organizations themselves may differ in their philosophical approaches and continued advocacy without sufficient change is draining, they come together to exert more influence, by consolidating the minimal power they have. However, as the ED criticizes, community development based on "peer-lived knowledge and experience" is still disregarded by policymakers and government authorities as they only see the problems and not the solutions the community already has (Lotz 2010: 12). Hence, even with best efforts, the PCH remains subject to the issues of the NPIC due to its embeddedness, creating contradictions that show the complexity of resisting a neoliberal, capitalist system that imposes its plans and decisions while allocating funds that fail to respond to community's needs (Lotz 2010: 12).

These observations are not isolated, as there is an emerging pattern, and people facing food insecurity are not at fault, as it is more about the socio-cultural and economic context in which they are embedded. In the context of neoliberalism, the goal of institutional power structures is not social welfare but the expansion of capital since there was a "shift in federal and provincial social policy towards market-driven, neoliberal concepts of social welfare" (Riches 2003: 658) For instance, despite efforts to enhance food resources through initiatives like the "Vancouver Food Strategy" launched by the City of Vancouver (n.d.) in 2011, the push to reform

food policies remains underfunded even over a decade later, forcing nonprofit organizations to fend for themselves, scrambling to secure funding and donations from various sources (Vancouver Neighbourhood Food Networks 2023). This pattern is repetitive and stagnates meaningful systemic change, as the ED went on to explain:

If you talk to anyone in the neighbourhood, or maybe anyone in Vancouver, they just say there's insufficient funding. Many more groups are doing great work, especially in food security. But the funding levels have remained the same, which makes it hard for organizations to continue the work they need to do. Most funding only funds projects but not staffing, not rent, not utilities, not for operations, so there's also advocacy around changing policies around grants and core funding for five to 10 years. This is very much needed so we can do the work that the government should be doing. If all the service providers shut down, the government would be screwed. If they don't want to do the work, they need to invest more in the community partners that are doing it and can do that frontline work. So it's really slow. You aim high and then expect half or less. Also, there are a lot of things about policy. It's hard when governments switch every four years. We were advocating for certain policies just to be like they have in some other countries, policies on housing, that are not tied to the government's electoral cycles. They're just there, and every government has to adopt it. So that's like a much bigger thing that I think we're just starting to talk about and wanting to try to see change around so that we're not doing the same dance every four years with someone new and trying to push through certain things and then not knowing if they will remain with the next people in power. And when it's huge, systemic things like that, how do you even have the system to allow that kind of change?

Here, Elizabeth acknowledges how nonprofit organizations working on the frontlines do the government's work, only without the proper investment and resources, revealing how food insecurity is a complex, systemic and multifactorial issue requiring robust government policies and increased, stable funding (Best and Johnson 2016: 160). While there is not one straightforward solution, the fact is that without organizations like the PCH on the frontline, the government would face immense struggles. On top of all the challenges, even if government policies are changed by effective advocacy, they risk being discarded every four years, as there is no stability or guarantee. Hence, a key conclusion to the question of governmental power Elizabeth made is as follows: "Identifying that all three levels of government need to work together and not be siloed, saying, 'This is a provincial problem, or this is a federal or municipal problem.' We need everyone working on it together and not just passing the buck." This quote reveals how government stakeholders and institutions in power deflect blame, resulting in a diffusion of responsibility. Here, a critical, neoliberal theme emerges which is the emphasis on "choice and autonomy" as the mechanisms through which responsibility is manifested (Trnka and Trundle 2014: 3). Society views "the poor" as an issue that necessitates welfare programs aimed at responsabilizing individuals to take charge of their own lives, instead of upending

“commonly held assumptions of responsibility, cohesiveness, ignorance and paralysis” within vulnerable communities (Trnka and Trundle 2014: 2-3; Tuck 2019: 417). Despite the hard work and dedication of staff and volunteers at the PCH, who strive to resist these notions and create a sense of community by focusing on local assets, they cannot rectify the systemic issues driving food insecurity and social inequities. While addressing the same problems, top-down and bottom-up approaches do not possess equal power and resources. Hence, it is essential to acknowledge the inherent complexities and power imbalances that grassroots non-profit organizations navigate as they operate within networks of relationships shaped by late-stage capitalism and neoliberalism.

Ultimately, food banks, regular or grassroots, do not solve the problems of food insecurity and poverty in Canada; however, they can play a role in “advancing political response” (Riches 2003: 659-660). The legislative framework surrounding nonprofits is the *Societies Act*, which sets forth rules and regulations, should also be carefully assessed for “negative impacts and opportunity costs” and any limitations that hinder nonprofits from improving “material and social conditions for the communities they claim to serve” (Kelsall et al. 2023: 4-5). Given that the nonprofit sector contributes approximately CAD 6.4 billion to British Columbia’s “gross domestic product” and the City of Vancouver recognizes nonprofits as crucial community assets, there is a compelling case for increased transparency (5). According to Riches (2003), organizations that authentically care about food security should also focus primarily on their role in “public education and policy advocacy” rather than solely providing food (650). Hence, the PCH is effective as it offers a space for community members to access or be referred to appropriate resources by staff and volunteers, enjoy commensality, make new connections and learn about food literacy. Additionally, the ED advocates for policy changes, showing the organization's commitment to demanding systemic change from those in power. Repeatedly, it becomes evident that if policymakers intend to solve food insecurity, the community should be able to address their needs independently. Hence, the practical implication is that in the long term, communities should receive resources, but only with the condition that they can identify problems and solutions on their own accord. Other efficient long-term solutions to be considered include investment in job training, minimum wage and welfare rate increases, control of rent or appropriate rent subsidies, and the creation of low-barrier jobs and more investment for organizations supporting equitable access to food and social housing (Hobbs et al. 1993: 101-12).

In conclusion, through the case example of the PCH, this ethnographic account illuminates the resilience and dynamic adaptability of grassroots organizations in confronting food insecurity. Elizabeth and her team exemplify a commitment to dignity and community empowerment, providing meals and spaces for social connection and mutual support. Despite their resilience and innovative approaches, PCH and similar organizations grapple with insufficient funding, systemic policy barriers, and limitations of top-down approaches. The experiences of the ED and the community members served by PCH reveal a stark reality: while

grassroots efforts provide critical support to vulnerable populations, they cannot single-handedly mitigate the structural inequalities perpetuated by neoliberal policies. Therefore, meaningful and sustainable solutions to food insecurity demand robust governmental policies prioritizing community empowerment, stable funding mechanisms, and a holistic approach to social welfare that transcends electoral cycles. Only through concentrated efforts can Vancouver begin to bridge the gap between tokenism and tackling the root causes of poverty and social inequality in the DTES to move towards sustainable and equitable long-term solutions that consider the realities on the ground and can work bottom-up in the community's best interest.

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Cyclical Restriction: The Opioid Crisis in Alberta

Izzy Thurber

University of British Columbia

Abstract

The opioid crisis is incredibly prevalent in the province of Alberta. In this article, I examine the links between public opinion of the opioid crisis and legislation, the legislation itself, and the effects on the opioid crisis in Alberta. I ground this analysis in comparisons to different legislative contexts, and anecdotes gathered from individuals directly affected. Through this analysis, I argue that a negative feedback loop has been created. By understanding how this cycle has developed and its ongoing effects, I hope to clarify steps forward to more effective harm reduction in the province of Alberta. I would also like to note that, throughout this paper, drug overdose deaths will be referred to as “drug poisonings” to bring attention to the fact that these deaths were not intentional on the part of the drug user.

Introduction

Canada has been affected by the opioid crisis since it began in the 1990s, a beginning that has been widely attributed to Purdue Pharma (an American company whose name has since changed) and the marketing of their novel drug OxyContin (Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health 2022). Not a single place in this country has gone unaffected, including the province of Alberta (Greene, Maier, and Urbanik 2023, 1). Being from the smallest of Alberta’s three urban centers, Lethbridge, I have grown up around opioid use, which makes it a deeply personal issue. I have witnessed overdoses and drug poisonings, and watched as those working in harm reduction have fought for the government to fund the resources that save the lives of substance users. Although technically present, this funding and its accompanying resources have become restricted with time (Greene, Maier, and Urbanik 2023, 2). The restriction of harm reduction efforts in Alberta has reduced their efficacy, leading to a worsening of the opioid crisis (Scace 2023). The public opinion of harm reduction efforts and people who use drugs has worsened in tandem, with the general public as well as governmental bodies tending to attribute this increase in overdoses and drug poisonings to the assumed inefficacy of harm reduction in the first place (Knecht et al. 2020, 34; Scace 2023). I argue that these linked events and changes in public opinion have created a negative feedback loop: a process in which one event leads to a negative outcome, and the outcome then contributes to the recurrence of the negative event. In this case, the loop leads to further restrictions on harm reduction in the province. Throughout this article, I demonstrate exactly how this feedback loop was created, the effects it is currently having, and thus what I believe the best next steps would be to improve the efficacy of harm reduction efforts in Alberta.

Legislation

In order to understand the opioid crisis in Alberta and the “start” of this feedback loop, it is important to understand some of the legislation affecting overdose prevention in the province. Like the rest of Canada, Alberta abides by the Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act (Government of Canada and Health Canada 2021). This law is intended to encourage people to contact emergency services in the event of an overdose by offering protection against charges for possession of controlled substances or violations of bail, parole, or probation orders (Government of Canada and Health Canada 2021). This applies to the person making the call and the person experiencing the overdose (Government of Canada and Health Canada 2021). The act also states that charges cannot be laid if evidence for the charge was found as a result of the person(s) having sought assistance or remaining at the scene of the overdose, and this applies both to the people contacting emergency services and the person receiving care (Government of Canada 2017). Compared to other legislation in Alberta, this act is less restrictive and often actively encourages people to seek emergency services when needed, as it reduces the fear of criminal convictions, contributing to saving lives.

More specific to Alberta is the Mental Health Services Protection Act, which is considerably more restrictive than the Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act. When I originally wrote this paper, the act was unavailable to be read by the public directly from the Government of Alberta website without payment of a \$6 fee, causing an interesting instance of restriction. Thus, information from this act for this article is mainly retrieved from a third-party copy, and supplemented by a now accessible PDF from the Government of Alberta directly (Government of Alberta, 2018).

The act creates rules and regulations for “addiction treatment services” in Alberta for the stated goal of “[providing] a foundation to ensure safe, quality addiction and mental health care” (Government of Alberta 2017). It mainly regulates licensing for addiction treatment providers, including how licenses are to be obtained and revoked (Government of Alberta and Canadian Legal Information Institute 2018). For service providers who require licenses to operate, the licenses are issued by “directors” designated by the act’s Minister (Government of Alberta 2017, 5). Though these directors must be government employees, the act does not stipulate that they must have any background in mental health or addiction services (Government of Alberta 2017, 16). Further, the act combines the roles of “director” and “inspector” in the overseeing of addiction treatment services, allowing individuals with no official legal background to investigate and revoke licenses, as the requirements for the role are the same: any Government of Alberta employee appointed by the Minister of this act (Government of Alberta and Canadian Legal Information Institute 2018, 22(3)). Since the granting and revoking of licenses do not operate independently of one another, it may create conflicts of interest that could have detrimental effects on who can provide addiction services in Alberta, and the services they can provide.

The act also outlines penalties for breaching licensing terms, which include fines of up to \$100,000 (Government of Alberta and Canadian Legal Institute 2018, 21(1)). This fine, combined with the fact that violating the terms of a license and having it revoked makes the licensee ineligible for licensing for two years (Government of Alberta 2018, 6), likely creates intense fear of financial repercussions. Amid a cost-of-living crisis, the threat of a fine this big or losing out on work may cause practitioners to feel pressured to provide more limited services. Another concerning, and potentially dangerous, aspect of this act is the ability of directors to publish information about service providers, including names and addresses, “with no limitation” (Government of Alberta and Canadian Legal Information Institute 2018, 4(2)). This creates a substantial risk for service providers. Given the lack of support in Alberta for harm reduction services, service providers may face personal backlash and potential risks to their safety if their names and addresses are made publicly available.

Another key piece of legislation where restriction is readily apparent is a rule that came into effect in 2022 requiring users of supervised consumption sites (SCSs) to provide a valid Alberta Health Number (AHN) (Germano 2022). Harm reduction advocates appealed this rule, and their appeal was denied. These advocates have made the case that this requirement will only increase barriers to accessing treatment, thus increasing overdoses and drug poisonings (Germano 2022). This effectively closes off SCS services to unhoused clients in Alberta, as a permanent address is required to apply for an AHN. Additionally, previously housed clients may have once had an AHN, but Alberta still uses paper health cards that tend to disintegrate with time. I had to replace mine by the time I was 15 because it had fallen apart. Without proof of address, replacement becomes very difficult. Further, this creates a paper trail of who is accessing the services provided by SCSs, which can lead to more access barriers related to shame and stigma around drug use. Once again, a comparison can be drawn between the effectiveness of services like Insite in Vancouver that do not require a BC Care Card for access and the SCSs in Alberta. Insite does not pose these risks to its clients, and thus creates fewer barriers to access.

Public Opinion and Legislation

Alberta’s restrictive legislation around the opioid crisis leads to increased overdoses and drug poisonings, as well as barriers to accessing harm reduction and addiction-related services. To complete the feedback loop, it is then important to understand how public opinion is affected by the increase in overdoses and drug poisonings, and how this then affects legislation. To investigate this, I will reference several studies from the United States. As previously mentioned, the opioid crisis is widely attributed to have originated with the American pharmaceutical company Purdue Pharma, meaning that the US has the longest ongoing body of research into the effects of this crisis. As our next-door neighbours, their research is highly relevant to harm reduction in Canada.

One study states that much of public opinion on safe consumption sites (SCSs) and similar efforts such as Overdose Prevention Sites (OPSs) is based on “Not In My Backyard” (NIMBY) concerns, leading to support at a national level but opposition at a local level (Socia et al. 2021, 729). The study referenced by Socia et al. takes place in the United States, where OPSs and SCSs have little functional difference (2021, 744). However, in Canada, OPSs are “legally distinguishable” from SCSs and have significantly fewer resources and services available (Greene, Maier, and Urbanik 2023, 2). This can lead to challenges when attempting to implement treatment efforts. In addition to the restriction on services, Socia et al. (2021) found that the label of these facilities drastically affects public opinion, as individuals are more likely to support facilities labelled as OPSs because the label is less likely to invoke stigma against people who use drugs (Socia et al. 2021, 744). The harm reduction services available in Alberta currently are a direct example of the effect of public perception, as the SCS in Lethbridge was closed in favour of an OPS, and the SCS in Red Deer is on its way out as well, leaving only five SCSs in the province (Bellefontaine 2025). This study also found that when participants perceived the opioid crisis as a national problem as opposed to a local one (i.e., occurring in *their* community), they were less likely to be in favour of local solutions (Socia et al. 2021, 744). Many Canadians follow the ethos: “It isn’t a problem in *my* backyard, so the solution should be elsewhere.”

Additionally, a case study in Philadelphia demonstrates a scenario where recognition of a local problem leads to support for local solutions (Roth et al. 2019). Further, this study found that support was significantly higher amongst minority individuals, including those with unstable housing, those who currently use drugs, Black individuals, Hispanic/Latinx individuals, and Asian American and Pacific Islander individuals (Roth et al. 2019, 341). This demonstrates that racial identity and experience with the opioid crisis have an impact on support for SCSs. Thus, White Canadians or those living in areas with little *visible* impact are less likely to be supportive of harm reduction efforts. This directly relates to public support of harm reduction efforts in Alberta, as the province has much lower numbers of “visible minorities” compared to British Columbia and Ontario (Government of Canada and Statistics Canada 2018).

Legislation, Public Opinion, and Efficacy

Scenarios similar to those presented in public opinion studies have already had consequences in Alberta. In 2019, after the election of Alberta’s United Conservative Party government, harm reduction efforts were reduced and the province shifted to a more “moral-emphasis” model based on drug abstinence and treatment, reminiscent of neoliberal ideologies (Greene, Maier, and Urbanik 2023, 2). This may be related to the province’s politics, described as a “bastion of conservatism in Canada” (Austen 2023), which explains the sharp divergence of harm reduction policy in Alberta compared to a more liberal province like British Columbia, where many safe consumption sites have operated safely and successfully since the founding of Insite in 2003 (PHS Community Services Society n.d.).

Members of the City of Lethbridge, in particular, were victims of this. The city closed its SCS, which was then Alberta's busiest, in favour of opening an OPS in August of 2020 (Greene, Maier, and Urbanik 2023, 2). Since then, drug users in Lethbridge have reported reduced use of the overdose prevention services due to the location and lack of community space and activities at the new, smaller site (Greene, Maier, and Urbanik 2023, 1). Further, the SCS served as "...a place to meet and socialize, [and] also fulfilled a safety function as participants explained they would go there to 'find people' for reassurance they were well and alive" (6). It is no coincidence that public overdoses and drug poisonings have been increasing since this change (Scace 2023). The new location requires individuals accessing the site to be in public areas where they are frequently subjected to public ridicule and even assault by community members (Greene, Maier, and Urbanik 2023, 5-6).

Before the closing of Lethbridge's SCS, the Government of Alberta conducted an expert review into SCSs in the province to assess "socio-economic impacts" of SCSs on the communities in which they were located (Knecht et al. 2020, 1). This report has recently come under fire by academics for being "pseudoscience" and directly linked to the reduction in funding to and closing of the SCS in Lethbridge (Weber 2023). Of course, the Government denies that the report affected funding despite its results heavily emphasizing the "predominantly negative" socio-economic impact of the sites on their communities (Knecht et al. 2020, iii). The academics penning the critique, which was published in the Canadian Journal of Public Health in November of 2023, have highlighted the government's failure to include studies that contradicted its findings, anecdotes that do not support the government's ideological position, and failure to put the report through peer review (Weber 2023). This negative view of harm reduction will only create policy and funding decisions that will further worsen the opioid crisis in Alberta.

This brings us to the important realization that public opinion does affect the legislation on harm reduction, as proven by much of the data included in the Knecht et al. report being based on public perception and not peer-reviewed studies (Weber 2023). Strings are being pulled at higher levels of government without proper consultation of the public or individuals outside of "the government's ideological position" (Weber 2023). This may indicate that governmental decisions without public consultation are the *starting* point of the feedback loop. However, now that the loop has been created, both public opinion and legislation affect the harm reduction services available in the province. 2023 marked the deadliest year for opioid-related deaths in Alberta, and without substantial change soon, the numbers will only continue to climb (Sherif 2024).

Conclusion

Thankfully, change may be on the horizon. In 2024, a new \$1.13 billion budget was allocated to improve mental health and addiction services in Alberta, including the founding of Recovery Alberta, a new organization dedicated to this mission (Sherif 2024). However, with the

government still moving away from an integrative model combining harm reduction practices that have been proven to be effective with mental health supports, it is hard to tell how positive the effects will be (Bellefontaine 2025; Greene, Maier, and Urbanik 2023, 6). Unless the negative feedback loop, which has been created between public views of harm reduction, policy and funding decisions, and the worsening of drug poisonings, is broken by implementing research-backed harm reduction practices, the number of opioid-related deaths in Alberta will only continue to climb.

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Taking Back (Cyber)Space: Envisioning Decolonial Futurisms in Indigenous Video Games and Digital Media*

Anika Schreiber

University of British Columbia

The worlding of decolonial futures often revolves around the subject of space. Through Western imperialism and ongoing systems of colonialism, space (and time) on Turtle Island has been greatly distorted; the bordering, parceling, privatization, and exploitation of unceded Indigenous land not only has catastrophic implications for Indigenous survivance and ways of being, but likewise shapes how all inhabitants of postcolonial society perceive the space that we occupy, and who is allowed to exercise agency over or within it. In the 21st century, a new frontier – one subject to forms of colonization and liberation comparable to those exercised over Indigenous territories – has come into existence: cyberspace. This online, digital “cityscape” has become one of the many urban environments that Indigenous peoples populate, and according to Métis scholar Mike Patterson, is a place “where the forest meets the highway, where land-based people [...] meet the landless world of e-commerce, dot-com, and global changes.”¹

Digital media, and the landless city of cyberspace, offer (theoretically) boundless, borderless digital spaces that can be both liberated and gentrified, indigenized and colonized. The video game industry is but one locality where the tension between colonizer agendas and Indigenous resistances are played out, and where conflicting narratives of Indigenous history – and aspirational manifestations of Indigenous futures – are being actively (re)imagined and reified. Within the scope of this paper, I will argue for the generative possibilities that video games present as a way of taking up and taking back space, disseminating Indigenous art, stories, and historical knowledge, and realizing Indigenous futurities. However, I will temper this argument by discussing the limitations of video games as a medium of aesthetic and cultural decolonization, with careful attention to the problematic history of harmful Indigenous representations in video game culture and digital media landscapes.

Settler-colonialism, and the imposition of ongoing structures of violent oppression at all levels of postcolonial Western society, pose a grave threat to the preservation and survivance of traditional Indigenous knowledge. The usurpation of Indigenous systems of education, governance, law, and healthcare has disrupted the handing down of ancestral histories and knowledge, resulting in multigenerational “informational poverty.”² Because accurate, culturally-specific information regarding Indigenous culture and history has been systemically

¹ David Gaertner, “Indigenous in Cyberspace: Cyberpowwow, God’s Lake Narrows, and the Contours of Online Indigenous Territory,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 39, no. 4 (December 1, 2015): 55–78, 56.

² Gabrielle Hughes and Christopher Gosden, “Tradigital Knowledge?: Indigenous Video Games, Intellectual Property Law and the Protection of Traditional Knowledge,” (dissertation), 2020, 56.

suppressed by colonial infrastructure, accessible representations of indigeneity have long been dictated by non-Indigenous agents that routinely (mis)appropriate Indigenous peoples and culture. These (mis)representations also affirm perceived dichotomies within the Western imaginary – the old versus the new, the civilized versus the uncivilized, the agentive versus the static – that serve to dehumanize Indigenous peoples, and relegate Indigenous cultures to a purportedly inferior, pre-colonial, pre-modern past.³ Many of the most widely recognized, culturally influential, and globally accessible characterizations of Indigenous peoples and cultures can be found in digital media spaces, like video games. Although some game developers are taking steps toward creating more appropriate representations of indigeneity, many continue to frame these depictions within structures of colonialism and Western ways of being.

Two popular strategic video game series, *Europa Universalis* and *Civilization*, exemplify how even well-intentioned attempts at representing indigeneity often fall short when produced by non-Indigenous developers. The newest installations of these game series have begun incorporating Indigenous nations as playable polities, marking a departure from earlier iterations of both franchises, which allowed the player to exclusively control nation-states or ancient empires.⁴ By putting Indigenous nations on the same playing field as European and Asian nations, whose sovereignty is affirmed and indisputable under international law, and by allowing the player to maneuver as an Indigenous polity, these games encourage players to think of Indigenous nations as agentive, dynamic, and sovereign in their own right.

However, even the newest iterations of both game franchises unfortunately adhere to Western ideals of progress and the mechanics of settler colonialism. While they depict Indigenous nations as dynamic and future-oriented, this portrayal is mediated by Eurocentric metrics of progress and conceptions of nationhood. The core gameplay mechanics of both series remain rooted in settler colonialism, and in the envisioning of a vacant world, a *Terra Nullius*, waiting to be conquered and civilized. Although some Indigenous polities have now been included among these “civilizations”, both game series reinscribe the dominance of imperial, expansionist nation-states, and relegate non-state actors, including Indigenous peoples, to either invisibility or the role of a threatening Other.⁵ The only form of power that these games recognize, let alone allow Indigenous nations to exercise, is therefore the same power that has oppressed Indigenous peoples since first contact: one rooted in colonial dominance and violent conquest. Further, the legitimacy of the digital polities portrayed in these games is also defined by their strict, impermeable borders. Centering the mechanics of these games on the expansion and consolidation of imperial borders affirms a Westphalian understanding of sovereignty –

³ Hughes and Gosden, “Tradigital Knowledge?: Indigenous Video Games, Intellectual Property Law and the Protection of Traditional Knowledge,” 2020, 56.

⁴ Carpenter, “Replaying Colonialism: Indigenous National Sovereignty and Its Limits in Strategic Videogames,” *American Indian Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (2021): 34.

⁵ Carpenter, “Replaying Colonialism: Indigenous National Sovereignty and Its Limits in Strategic Videogames,” 2021, 34.

wherein a nation is made legitimate through the rigid segregation and policing of land – while failing to recognize the pre-colonial realities of many Indigenous nations and communities whose habitation of their sovereign territories could be mobile, porous, and overlapping. As the examples of *Civilization* and *Europa Universalis* demonstrate, the majority of content produced by the hegemonically non-Indigenous gaming industry continues to center colonial stereotypes and power structures, even when an earnest attempt at respectfully representing Indigenous characters is made.

However, Indigenous creatives are exploring the medium of game development for themselves, taking up digital spaces, and using new media as tools of Indigenous storytelling, community care, education, and activism. One such example is *When Rivers Were Trails* (2019), a 2D point-and-click adventure game made by Anishinaabe game designer, researcher, and activist Elizabeth LaPensée. *WRWT* was originally produced to center Indigenous worldviews and counteract harmful and misguided representations of Indigenous peoples in the American education system. Many educational digital games used in classrooms on Turtle Island directly adapt and glorify colonial westward expansion in their gameplay. For instance, the classic educational games *The Oregon Trail* (1971/1993) and *The Oregon Trail II* (1995) position Indigenous peoples only in relation to the non-Indigenous player-character, and instruct the player to avoid "misunderstandings" with Indigenous peoples which would otherwise amount to the player being violently attacked.⁶ This dehumanizing misrepresentation of Indigenous peoples is mirrored in the way that interconnected land systems, including rocks, plants, waters, and animals, are treated as passive resources to be attained, consumed, and disposed of as the player sees fit. The Indian Land Tenure Foundation recognized the harmful nature of these educational games, and initiated dialogue with middle-school and high-school teachers in both public and tribally-owned schools across the United States, who collectively decided to create an educational video game aimed at sharing a specifically Indigenous perspective of colonial history.⁷

This mission culminated in *When Rivers Were Trails*, which follows an Anishinaabeg in the 1890s who is displaced from their traditional territory in Minnesota and decides to head west to California due to the impact of land allotment acts on their community.⁸ Along their journey, the player faces Indian Agents, meets people from different nations (including Anishinaabe, Oceti Sakowin, Chinuk, and Tongva, among many others), and hunts, fishes, and canoes as they work to restore balance in the world around them while centering their own wellbeing. Over thirty Indigenous writers contributed to shaping the game, and each was responsible for portraying their own community, with several writers involving elders and fluent language

⁶ E. LaPensée and N. Emmons, "Indigenizing Education with the Game 'When Rivers Were Trails,'" *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 64, no. 1 (2019): 75–93, 75.

⁷ E. LaPensée and N. Emmons, "Indigenizing Education with the Game 'When Rivers Were Trails,'" *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 64, no. 1 (2019): 75–93, 75.

⁸ Elizabeth LaPensée, "When Rivers Were Trails: Cultural Expression in an Indigenous Video Game," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 27, no. 3 (March 29, 2020): 281–95, 282.

speakers in the game's production.⁹ Indigenous languages are woven throughout *WRWT*'s gameplay, and an Anishinaabe worldview is conveyed in the game's mechanics – for instance, the player character is able to offer asemaa, or tobacco – as well as through the game's aesthetic choices, such as the way that animals are depicted in Woodland art styles.¹⁰ By framing the game's historical narrative, as well as the game mechanics themselves, through an Indigenous worldview, *WRWT* serves as a striking example of the ways in which meaningful, interactive Indigenous storytelling is flourishing through the cooperation and care of Indigenous game-makers.



Figure 1: A screenshot from *When Rivers Were Trails*, in which the player-character encounters a hunter.

Further, some Indigenous game developers are working to make political and environmental change through their storytelling, and are engaging in critical anticolonial discourse in ways that have galvanized fellow activists – and garnered the ire of colonial statespersons. One example of this is *Thunderbird Strike* (2017), a two-dimensional side-scroller in which the player embodies a thunderbird flying over the Alberta tar sands towards the Great Lakes. As the thunderbird, the player progresses by sabotaging fossil fuel infrastructure, harnessing lightning from the clouds to strike down factories and equipment, all while (re)animating various people and animals – the victims of environmental exploitation – along the

⁹ LaPensée, "When Rivers Were Trails: Cultural Expression in an Indigenous Video Game," 2020, 282.

¹⁰ LaPensée, "When Rivers Were Trails: Cultural Expression in an Indigenous Video Game," 2020, 282.

way.¹¹ *Thunderbird Strike*'s gameplay envisions a flourishing ecological future emerging out of the ruins of a settler-colonial fossil fuel society – one that the player actively participates in dismantling. The game's website, where players can download *Thunderbird Strike* for free, also features "Act" and "Reflect" pages, which respectively feature a list of offline actions that players can take to resist the construction of pipelines - including divesting from banks, taking part in ceremonial Nibi Walks, and sharing the work of Métis artist and scholar Dylan Miner - and educational resources about thunderbirds, tar sands, and the prairies, all explained from an Indigenous worldview. *Thunderbird Strike* not only opposes settler colonialism and engages in ecological activism by embodying Indigenous worldviews in its design, storytelling, and promotion of anticolonial resources, but so too does it center the struggle over extractivist infrastructure as critical to realizing Indigenous sovereignty, and to manifesting sustainable, equitable futures.



Figure 2: A screenshot from *Thunderbird Strike*.

¹¹ Jordan B. Kinder, "Gaming Extractivism: Indigenous Resurgence, Unjust Infrastructures, and the Politics of Play in Elizabeth Lapensée's *Thunderbird Strike*," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 46, no. 2 (April 24, 2021): 247–69, 249.

Thunderbird Strike's reception was critical to say the least. Upon its release, the president of pipeline advocacy group Energy Builders issued a statement accusing the game of "encourage[ing] eco-terrorism", and demanded that Michigan State University, which housed the game's development lab, "pull the plug immediately on this taxpayer-funded political campaign."¹² Additional media coverage ensued, and eventually Minnesota State Senator David Osmek decried the game as "an eco-terrorist version of Angry Birds."¹³ Following this media event, the Minnesota House of Representatives approved a bill that "would prohibit funding projects that promote domestic terrorism or criminal activities."¹⁴

Thunderbird Strike, and the reception that it received from settler politicians and corporations, demonstrates how the discourse created through video games, and the agentic role that players take in progressing a game's narrative, have real-world manifestations on politics, ecological activism, and ultimately, on the realization of Indigenous futurisms. I would argue that this is due in part to the mechanical capacities of video games as a medium, and their encouragement of aesthetic action. By embodying a thunderbird, or walking in the footsteps of an Anishinaabeg in the 19th century, Indigenous players are given the tools to learn about their ancestral histories, and non-Indigenous players are called to empathize and reflect more deeply on their own positionality and complicity within systems of colonial violence. The act of playing games created by Indigenous makers, of momentarily living within Indigenous stories, works to unsettle ingrained assumptions about Indigenous peoples and histories.

Empathy is a powerful tool of decolonization. However, when faced with the subject of Indigenous peoples' struggles for land sovereignty and access to essential resources, empathy is a response from which many inhabitants of settler society have become estranged. In their "The Body is a Resonant Chamber", scholars Robinson and Martin argue that the Canadian government's mere *acknowledgement* of its complicity in the oppression of Indigenous peoples is not alone sufficient in repairing "the damages wreaked by colonization and contemporary government policy."¹⁵ Rather, what must equally be dismantled is the way that government officials, and colonial society more broadly, approach Indigenous issues with an apathetic curtness – a desire for "the conclusion of Indigenous grievances" – that stems from centuries of government-mandated dehumanizing projects levied against Indigenous cultures and communities, and deeper still, the alienation of one's embodied sense of empathy within the Western postcolonial cultural consciousness.¹⁶ Video games, and other aesthetic media produced

¹² Kinder, "Gaming Extractivism: Indigenous Resurgence, Unjust Infrastructures, and the Politics of Play in Elizabeth Lapensée's *Thunderbird Strike*," 2021, 248.

¹³ Kinder, "Gaming Extractivism: Indigenous Resurgence, Unjust Infrastructures, and the Politics of Play in Elizabeth Lapensée's *Thunderbird Strike*," 2021, 248.

¹⁴ Kinder, "Gaming Extractivism: Indigenous Resurgence, Unjust Infrastructures, and the Politics of Play in Elizabeth Lapensée's *Thunderbird Strike*," 2021, 249.

¹⁵ Dylan Robinson and Kevy Martin, "Introduction: 'The Body Is a Resonant Chamber,'" *Arts of Engagement*, July 15, 2016, 1–20, 1.

¹⁶ Robinson and Martin, "Introduction: 'The Body Is a Resonant Chamber,'" 2016, 1.

by Indigenous creators, work to repair this detachment which, I would argue, has been necessary for settler-colonial governments' systemic denial of Indigenous land sovereignty. It is through multisensorial aesthetic media like video games, and the spectrum of emotion and empathy that becomes available through a rich engagement with the senses – through listening intentionally and witnessing actively – that we can best begin to envision regenerative actions to address the needs of Indigenous communities, and to dismantle oppressive colonial structures.

Such efforts towards regeneration and repair are deeply and urgently necessary; the reception of and litigation against *Thunderbird Strike* demonstrates that the world we inhabit remains, at present, a world held decisively under settler-colonial control. For this reason, Indigenous artists and activists are seeking out new cyber-spatial worlds on which to elevate discourse of land sovereignty. One striking example of this comes from Canadian Mohawk digital artist and independent game designer Skawennati, who is best known for her machinima (machine+cinema) project, *TimeTraveller*TM (2009). *TimeTraveller*TM is a multi-platform project that features a nine-episode machinima series that tells the cyberpunk tale of Hunter, a young Mohawk man of the 22nd century who is unable to find his way in an “overcrowded, hyper-consumerist, technologized world.”¹⁷ Hunter realizes that he must look “to his past to figure out what his future will be,” and decides to use his edutainment system – his *TimeTraveller*TM – to learn more about his heritage, in the hopes of finding his path in life. *TimeTraveller*TM immerses the player in historical events such as the Dakota Sioux Uprising, the Oka Crisis, and the occupation of Alcatraz Island, criss-crossing time and Turtle Island to discover the “complexity of history and the meaning of success.”¹⁸

*TimeTraveller*TM centers Indigenous epistemologies by embedding knowledge of the fluidity of time into the mechanics of the machinima itself. In bridging the past and the future, and presenting them as inextricable from one another, Skawennati not only conveys Indigenous perspectives of colonialism in the historical past, but also works to imagine and manifest prosperous Indigenous futurisms. In other words, *TimeTraveller*TM – and other works of anticolonial science/speculative fiction – create dynamic spaces that facilitate the revision of Western colonial histories, allowing Indigenous creatives to “map out new worlds and project Indigenous sovereignties into parallel dimensions and fantastic futures.”¹⁹

¹⁷ “TimeTravellerTM,” Cinema Politica, February 23, 2021, <https://www.cinemapolitica.org/film/timetraveller/>.

¹⁸ “TimeTravellerTM,” Cinema Politica, February 23, 2021, <https://www.cinemapolitica.org/film/timetraveller/>.

¹⁹ Emily C. Van Alst, “(RE)WRITING AND (RE)BEADING: Understanding Indigenous Women’s Roles in the Creation of Indigenous Futurisms,” in *The Routledge Handbook of CoFuturisms*, 2024, 162–75, 165.



Figure 3: A screenshot from *TimeTraveller™*, hosted in *Second Life*.

However, it is imperative to acknowledge that colonization is not a metaphor.²⁰ To reach any anticolonial future, decolonization must rather be realized through concrete, actionable strategies and radical community care, which cannot be manifested through art or representation or aesthetic discourse alone. Fortunately, decolonial futures are being actively reified through initiatives like CyberPowWow, the online community through which Skawennati's machinima projects were originally presented, that was established in 1997 and ran until 2001. According to Skawennati, "CyberPowWow started off as a virtual exhibition and chat space that would dispel the myth that Native artists didn't (or couldn't!?) use technology in their work. In addition to that, we wanted to claim for ourselves a little corner of cyberspace that we could nurture and grow in the way we wanted."²¹ CyberPowWow eventually transformed into AbTeC (Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace), and today is situated on *Second Life*, hosting a gallery of digital works by contemporary Canadian Indigenous artists, including Rebecca Belmore and Nadia Myre.²² Its creators defined AbTeC as an "Aboriginally determined research-creation network whose goal is to ensure Indigenous presence in the web pages, online environments, video

²⁰ Dylan Robinson et al., "Rethinking the Practice and Performance of Indigenous Land Acknowledgement," *Canadian Theatre Review* 177 (January 1, 2019): 20–30, 21.

²¹ David Gaertner, "Indigenous in Cyberspace: Cyberpowwow, God's Lake Narrows, and the Contours of Online Indigenous Territory," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 39, no. 4 (December 1, 2015): 55–78, 56.

²² Anna Nacher and Filip Jankowski, "Re-Writing Histories of Colonization in Video Games: The Case of Elizabeth Lapensée," *The International Journal of European Film, Performing Arts and Audiovisual Communication* 29, no. 38 (June 15, 2021): 123–41, 125.

games, and virtual worlds that comprise cyberspace.”²³ Among the plethora of projects hosted on the platform, AbTeC has facilitated the Initiative for Indigenous Futures, which offers a series of workshops in game development for Indigenous youth, and an experiment in developing a Native American programming language based on a translation of C#, a high-level programming language, into Hawaiian ‘ōlelo Hawai’i.²⁴

Narratives rooted in Indigenous epistemologies like *When Rivers Were Trails*; ecological activism and anticolonial calls to action like *Thunderbird Strike*; future-facing tellings of Indigenous history like *TimeTraveller*TM; and cyberspatial platforms that uplift and educate Indigenous communities while preserving ancestral language and traditions like CyberPowWow and AbTeC, all demonstrate how Indigenous creators are adapting video game spaces – a medium which has historically produced harmful representations of Indigenous cultures and peoples – to uplift marginalized voices, disseminate knowledge, and advocate for active decolonization. In taking up and taking back (cyber)space, Indigenous creatives are fighting to reclaim their traditional, unceded territories in the real world, positioning themselves at the cutting edge of anticolonial discourse, and actively working to imagine, manifest, and realize utopian, anticolonial, Indigenous futurisms.

²³ Nacher and Jankowski, “Re-Writing Histories of Colonization in Video Games: The Case of Elizabeth Lapensée,” 2021, 125.

²⁴ Nacher and Jankowski, “Re-Writing Histories of Colonization in Video Games: The Case of Elizabeth Lapensée,” 2021, 126.

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