

“pain, pleasure, shame.
Shame.”

Masculine Embodiment, Kinship, and
Indigenous Reterritorialization

In October 2011, during a survivors’ sharing circle at the Atlantic National Event of the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission (IRS TRC), a Cree woman recalled in eloquent and shattering testimony her forced separation from the younger brother for whom she had cared prior to residential school incarceration. Seeing her brother alone and despondent on the boys’ side of the playground, the survivor recounted waving to him in hopes of raising his spirits, if only for a moment. A nun in the courtyard, however, spied this forbidden gesture of empathy and kinship, and immediately hauled the young boy away. To punish him for having acknowledged his sister’s love, the nun dressed the boy in girls’ clothes and paraded him in front of the other boys, whom she encouraged to mock and deride his caricatured effeminacy.¹ In her testimony, the survivor recalled the hatred in her brother’s eyes as he was thus shamed—hatred not for his punisher, but for her, his sister, whose affection had been deemed transgressive by the surveillance systems of residential school acculturation.

What became clear to me as I witnessed the woman’s testimony was that this punishment performed intricate political work designed to instruct boys to despise both girls and “girly” boys and to disavow bonds of kinship. The punishment’s dramatization of gender opposition, its construction of the feminine as shameful, and its performative severing of intergender sibling relationships informed the type of masculine subjects that those involved in administering residential school policies were invested in creating.

Furthermore, it became clear that these punitive pedagogies of gender cannot be disentangled from the years of rape the survivor went on to describe enduring from a priest at the same institution. Nor can the gender dynamics of these impositions be extricated from the survivor's expressed vexation that she still refers to the baby she birthed in the residential school at age twelve as "him," even though the child was torn from her before she could discern the biological sex. These acts of psychological, spiritual, and physical trauma constitute embroiled elements of the same genocidal program, one that has sought not only to denigrate and torment Indigenous women but to manufacture hatred toward Indigenous women in shamed and disempowered Indigenous men.²

This paper focuses on the coerced alienation of Indigenous men from their own bodies by colonial technologies such as residential schooling. I argue that the gender segregation and the derogation of both the feminine and the body that occurred systematically within residential schools were not merely by-products of Euro-Christian patriarchy; they were not just collateral damage from aggressive evangelization by decidedly patriarchal religious bodies. Rather, this nexus of coercive alienations lay at the very core of the Canadian nation-building project that motivated the residential school system. The systemic manufacturing of Indigenous disavowals of the body served—and serves—the goal of colonial dispossession by troubling lived experiences of ecosystemic territoriality and effacing kinship relations that constitute lived forms of governance.³ Following Mark Rifkin, I understand the attack on "native social formations . . . conducted in the name of 'civilization'" as an "organized effort" to make Eurocentric notions of gender "compulsory as a key part of breaking up indigenous landholdings, 'detrribalizing' native peoples, [and] translating native territoriality and governance into the terms of . . . liberalism and legal geography" (5-6). This process of translation serves to delegitimize Indigenous modes of territorial persistence and thereby to enable Indigenous deterritorialization—both in the sense of forcing Indigenous peoples to "become what [they are] not" (Colebrook xxii) and of removing Indigenous peoples from particular land bases in order to speed environmental exploitation, resource extraction, and non-Indigenous settlement. I contend that each of these objectives was at play in residential school policy and practice in Canada. This paper thus rehearses the preliminary steps of an inquiry into a crucial but heretofore unasked question in this era of supposed reconciliation in Canada: if the coordinated assaults on Indigenous bodies and on Indigenous cosmologies of gender are not just two among several

interchangeable tools of colonial dispossession but are in fact integral to the Canadian colonial project, can embodied actions that self-consciously reintegrate gender complementarity be mobilized to pursue not simply “healing” but also the radical reterritorialization and sovereignty that will make meaningful reconciliation possible?

This paper proceeds by theorizing the technologies at play in residential school obfuscation of what Rifkin calls “indigenous forms of sex, gender, kinship . . . and eroticism” (5) through analysis of selected literary depictions by residential school survivors that focus on gender segregation and the shaming of the body.⁴ I then assess the political fallout of such impositions through a reading of Cree poet Louise Bernice Halfe’s “Nitotem.” I argue that Halfe’s poem depicts the disintegration of a young Cree man’s sense of embodied personhood through shame, a process in which his body becomes instrumentalized as a weapon capable of assaulting both women and the very principles of kinship that hold his community together. The paper concludes by considering the potential for what Maoli scholar Ty P. Kāwika Tengan calls “embodied discursive action” (17) by Indigenous men in Canada to reaffirm bonds of kinship and enact cross-gender solidarities that might encourage Indigenous reterritorialization. A model of such action is offered by the Residential School Walkers, a group of predominantly young Cree men who walked 2,200 km from Cochrane, Ontario, to the Atlantic IRS TRC event in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in support of residential school survivors. The paper examines a variety of Indigenous contexts—including Gwich’in, Mi’kmaq, Inuvialuit, Maori, and Maoli—to demonstrate the widespread and systematic nature of colonial technologies of disembodiment; yet, having begun with the testimony of a Cree residential school survivor, the paper hinges on analysis of a poem by a Cree writer before culminating in discussion of the extra-literary, embodied actions of Cree men who, I argue, model what Cree scholar and poet Neal McLeod refers to as the “ideals of the *okihcitāwak* (‘worthy men’) from *kayās* (long) ago” (*Gabriel’s Beach* 10).⁵

Before I continue, I must explain that I choose to begin with a paraphrase of a survivor’s testimony aware of the fraught ethics of witnessing. I was one of perhaps twenty witnesses encircling the intimate survivors’ sharing circle in Halifax when this testimony was delivered directly across from where I was sitting. I took no notes at the time, but when I returned to my hotel room later that evening, I recorded recollections of the day: documentation, field notes, emotional debriefing. The testimony in question affected me a great deal—as it appeared visibly to affect others in the circle—and I have

thought about it many times since October of 2011. It has also profoundly influenced the work on Indigenous masculinities in which I have been engaged since then. Thus, I feel it is necessary to acknowledge and honour that influence by engaging further with the words this survivor chose to share that day.

Although survivors are made aware that their “statement[s] will be audio and video recorded” and that all testimonies gathered in “Sharing Circles with the Survivor Committee” are therefore “public,” such sessions are not available for streaming on the IRS TRC website, like testimonies offered before the “Commissioners’ Sharing Panel[s].” For this reason, I could not return to and transcribe the testimony in the survivor’s own words. I approached the IRS TRC media liaison to ask if a transcript of the testimony might be available and whether the IRS TRC had protocols through which researchers (or others) might contact specific survivors to seek permission to discuss their public testimonies in a respectful way. I was informed that there were no such protocols currently in place and that the testimony I sought was available in neither transcribed nor audio/visual format. If I wished to discuss this testimony, I thus needed to use my own words to express my memory of the survivor’s statement, thereby risking misrepresenting her words and experiences or, worse, manipulating her testimony to forward the argument of this paper. As has been argued with relation to several international TRCs, the position of academic onlooker can be characterized by voyeurism, consumption, and lack of accountability—tensions amplified by my status as a settler scholar. I am aware, therefore, that the safest position ethically is to avoid discussing this testimony altogether.

However, I have been reminded in my discussions with Indigenous colleagues and friends that silence is not an apolitical stance and that ethical witnessing of trauma involves working toward the ideological and political changes that will create conditions in which justice becomes possible. At the close of the IRS TRC Regional Event in Victoria, Justice Murray Sinclair encouraged all of those present—Indigenous and non-Indigenous—to take their experiences of the event home to their families and communities and to share those memories in the service of change (“Closing Remarks” n. pag.). Because I feel the survivor testimony in question performs important work in understanding colonial impositions on Indigenous cosmologies of gender that will forward possibilities for politicized reconciliation, I include the paraphrase even as I know that doing so is ethically troublesome. As an anonymous survivor declares in *Breaking the Silence*, “My story is a gift. If I give you a gift

and you accept that gift, then you don't go and throw that gift in the waste basket. You do something with it" (161). This paper is part of my effort to "do something" with this gift.

Breaking Bonds of Kinship

"It could be anytime in the 1920s or 1930s" (9), writes Gwich'in author Robert Arthur Alexie, announcing the representative nature of a young boy's arrival at residential school with his little sister in the 2002 novel *Porcupines and China Dolls*. The siblings are "herded into a building and separated: boys on one side, girls on the other. The young girl tries to go with her brother, but she's grabbed by a woman in a long black robe and pushed into another room. The last thing he hears is her cries followed by a slap, then silence" (10). "Sometime during his first month," Alexie continues, the young boy will "watch his sister speak the language and she will be hit, slapped or tweaked. He'll remember that moment for the rest of his life and will never forgive himself for not going to her rescue. It will haunt him" (12). The boy's feelings of powerlessness, guilt, and vicarious pain provide context for the dysfunctional gender dynamics in the novel's contemporary social terrain; they also resonate all too frequently with the testimonies of residential school survivors. Of the close to one hundred testimonies I have witnessed either in person or on the IRS TRC's podcasts,⁶ the vast majority reference the pain of separation from siblings, also mentioned in testimonies found in several collections: *Resistance and Renewal* (1988) edited by Celia Haig-Brown, *Breaking the Silence* (1994) edited by the Assembly of First Nations, and *Finding My Talk* (2004) edited by Agnes Grant. Former Shubenacadie Indian Residential School survivor Isabelle Knockwood argues that traditionally, among the Mi'kmaq, "[o]lder brothers and sisters were absolutely required to look after their younger siblings. When they went to the Residential School, being unable to protect their younger brothers and sisters became a source of life-long pain" (60). At the Atlantic IRS TRC event, Keptin of the Mi'kmaq Grand Council Antle Denny elaborates, "We all come from a nation where family is the most important thing. As an older brother, you're taught to look after your younger brother and your sisters, and in these schools we could not even do that. When you look at the stories that I have heard, it makes me . . . quiver" (n. pag.).

In *The Circle Game*, Roland Chrisjohn and Sherri Young invoke Erving Goffman's term "permanent mortification" to theorize the lasting impact of the incapacity to protect loved ones from residential school violence.

Chrisjohn and Young demonstrate how the pain of witnessing “a physical assault upon someone to whom [one] has ties” can engender enduring shame or “the *permanent mortification* of having (and being known to have) taken no action” (Goffman qtd. in Chrisjohn and Young 93). The terminology is apt insofar as mortification is defined in *The Oxford English Dictionary* as both “humiliation” (“Mortification,” def. II5) and “the action” of “bringing under control . . . one’s appetites and passions” through “bodily pain or discomfort” (“Mortification,” def. I1); it also evokes a sense of numbing. Public displays of violence and humiliation were used in residential schools not only to produce a docile and obedient student population, but also, more insidiously, to damage empathy. The experience by which the young boy is “haunted” in Alexie’s novel indeed begins as empathy—the vicarious torment of hearing his sister suffer. Yet shame becomes the cost of that empathy and ultimately works to condition its suppression. The initial pain at another’s agony becomes contaminated by guilt and is thereby repositioned within the onlooker. Thus the burden of the perceived experience endures a forced migration from the primary victim to the onlooking loved one who is actively discouraged from future empathetic impulses by the trauma of the experience. While the act of suffering together has the potential to strengthen interpersonal connections—as Basil Johnston’s celebration of the community forged among the boys at St. Peter Claver’s Indian Residential School in *Indian School Days* attests—the institutional will was clearly to use such technologies to alienate the individual as completely as possible from social and familial ties and recreate her or him as a discrete, autonomous (albeit racially inferior and undereducated) individual within the Canadian settler state.

Within the rigidly patriarchal ideological space of the residential school, the corrosion of kinship bonds through permanent mortification undoubtedly bears gender implications. Inuvialuit writer Anthony Apakark Thrasher’s autobiographical discussion of residential school social engineering instructively documents the ways that boys were taught to hate women and to view their own bodies as sinful. Thrasher writes:

We were told not to play with the girls because it was a sin. I found this strange because I had played with girls before I came to school. At home I used to watch after my sisters Mona and Agnes. I even learned how to mix baby Agnes’s milk. I loved them. But now I wasn’t supposed to touch them and thinking about girls was supposed to be dirty...

One day Sister Tebear from the girl’s side of the school accused George, Charlie, Adam and me of sinning with the girls in the basement. We were all out

at the playground at the time. But Sister Tebear pointed me out with the three other boys and we were brought in before Sister Gilbert and Father L'Holgouach. We were strapped to a bed and whipped with a three-foot watch chain made of silver. Sister did the whipping and Father okayed it. My back was bleeding, but something else burned more. Shame. It was branded in my mind. After this the silver chain never left me. Even to this day you can see the scar on my back. (23)

Thrasher depicts a series of assaults upon his youthful understandings of gender, embodiment, and propriety. His role as a responsible brother is made sinful and he is “protected” from the feminine by segregation. When he is actually able to engage in embodied acts of youthful play that are gender inclusive, such actions are disciplined in a manner that insists upon the inherent sinfulness of the flesh and reinforces hierarchical binaries of male over female and spirit over body. These teachings are, in effect, etched upon Thrasher’s skin in scar tissue. The body is marked by punishment as a physical reminder of the supposed filthiness of desire, a conception of desire that denies the existence of a sensual that is not always already sexual. The shame Thrasher evokes here is layered: he is shamed for the supposed sin of sexual desire, which Sister Gilbert seeks to beat out of his body, *and* for his weakness (both physically and in relation to the biopolitics of Aklavik Roman Catholic Residential School) as a young male unable to fend off the wrath of a female overseer. And as Sister Coté demonstrates dramatically, the boys are taught to perceive women as inconsequential, inferior, and grotesque: “She lined us boys up against the wall and showed us what she thought of girls—‘Winnie, Wilma, Rosie, Mary, Jean, Margie, Lucy, Annabelle. . . this is what I think of them!’ And she spat on the floor and stamped her foot on it. ‘That’s what I think of them!’” (23).⁷

Survivor accounts from the IRS TRC and elsewhere indicate that Sister Coté’s pedagogy of gender is far from uncommon. Knockwood, for instance, recalls the nuns at Shubenacadie providing

their own version of sex education, which was that all bodily functions were dirty—dirty actions, dirty noises, dirty thoughts, dirty mouth, dirty, dirty, dirty girls. [Sister] took one girl who had just started her first period into the cloakroom and asked her if she did dirty actions. The little girl said, “I don’t know what dirty actions are Sister. Do you mean playing in the mud?” [Sister] took the girl’s hand and placed it between her legs and began moving it up and down and told her, “Now, you are doing dirty actions. Make sure you tell the priest when you go to confession.” (52)

What makes Thrasher’s depiction of the nuns’ denigration of the feminine particularly troubling is its contextualization within a narrative that ultimately betrays some of the anti-woman views thrust upon its author as a

boy. For example, later in his narrative, Thrasher glosses a sexual encounter involving six Inuit men and two female prostitutes with the comment, “These nice-looking women had less morality than the most primitive people you could ever find” (74-75). “Entirely absent from Thrasher’s recollection,” as I argue elsewhere, “is any self-reflexivity about the ‘morality’ of the men implicated in this sexual act” (*Magic Weapons* 97). Rather, Thrasher falls back upon chauvinistic teachings, like those of Sister Coté, that paint women as the source of all transgression. My point is that through the residential school’s refusal to affirm familial bonds between siblings, its segregation of male students from female students, and its indoctrination of Indigenous youth with patriarchal Euro-Christian dogma, the Canadian government sought to alienate Indigenous men, like Thrasher, from nation-specific understandings of gender. In this way, the Canadian government worked to efface “traditions of residency and social formations that can be described as *kinship* [which] give shape to particular modes of governance and land tenure” (Rifkin 8). The violent inculcation of shame was the primary tool in this process of social engineering, and the conscription of Indigenous men into a Western regime of misogyny and related violence against women have been two of its most damaging and protracted effects.

The Manufacture of Gendered Violence

Halfe’s inaugural collection *Bear Bones and Feathers* (1994) explores the legacies of colonial interventions in Cree cosmologies of gender. A former student of Blue Quills Residential School in St. Paul, Alberta, Halfe includes several poems that explicitly or implicitly locate residential schooling among these interventions, paying close attention to how the stigmatization of Indigenous bodies encourages intimate violence. Poems like “Ditch Bitch” and “Valentine Dialogue” track the internalization by Indigenous women of racist fantasies about the grotesque nature of their physicality—“My brown tits / day shame me / My brown spoon / fails me” (“Valentine Dialogue” lines 22-25)⁸—while poems like “Tribal Warfare” and “Stones” track the development in Indigenous men of anxiety and even panic about physical inadequacy:

Men day
hang dere balls
all over da place
.....
scream at dem
beg dem

pray to dem
g ah sh
even
swear at dem. ("Stones" 1-3, 11-16)

Each of these gendered corrosions of self-image works to compromise sensual intimacy and collaterally to endanger members of Indigenous communities; Halfé's poems are populated by several female figures whose corroded self-worth heightens their vulnerability to the violence that erupts out of male characters' feelings of inadequacy.

Halfé examines this dynamic most closely in the poem "Nitotem," which offers a chilling portrait of a young boy abused at residential school who returns to his home reserve where he rapes women. The poem begins with Halfé's speaker observing the intensification of the boy's isolation through residential school violence. Sister Superior "squeezed and slapped" the boy's ears until they "swelled, scabbed and scaled" and he could no longer "hear the sister shouting / and clapping her orders at him / or the rest of the little boys" (2, 4, 5-7). The assault on his ears—which is emphasized by the alliterative connection among the action, its perpetrator, and its effects—blocks both the boy's sensory experience of the world and his social connection with the other boys. Deafened to his environment, he becomes imprisoned within his own body and unable to participate in the homosocial community of boys, a separation stressed formally by the line break between "him" and "the rest of the little boys." His exile is then consummated at the poem's close when the boy-turned-young-man walks with "shoulder slightly stooped," never looking "directly at anyone. / When spoken to he mumble[s] into his chest. / His black hair cover[s] his eyes" (30-33).

The third and fourth stanzas provide the turn in the poem that locates a causal relationship between the shaming of the body, the derogation of the feminine, and the sexual abuse in residential schools, on one hand, and the eruption of misogynistic violence into Indigenous communities, on the other:

He suffered in silence
in the dark. A hand muffled his mouth
while the other snaked his wiener. He had no
other name, knew no other word. Soon it was no
longer just the hand but the push, just a gentle
push at first, pushing, pushing. Inside the
blanket he sweated and felt the wings
of pleasure, inside his chest the breath burst
pain, pleasure, shame. Shame.

* * *

On the reserve he had already raped two
women, the numbers didn't matter.
Sister Superior was being punished. It was
Father who said it was woman's fault
and that he would go to hell. (16-29)

In one sense, the three symbols separating these stanzas represent a temporal shift that emphasizes the intergenerational legacies of residential school abuse, as the sexual violence endured by the young boy spills out into the community. Yet I argue there is more to it. The three symbols Halfe uses to formally fracture the poem hint at the three amputations that I am arguing were enacted at residential school to subdue empathy in the service of Indigenous deterritorialization—firstly, the severing of mind from body (and the concomitant derogation of the body); secondly, the severing of male from female (and the concomitant derogation of the feminine); and thirdly, the severing of the individual from communal and territorial roles and responsibilities (and the concomitant derogation of kinship and the land).

The separation of mind and body in “Nitotem” appears legible through psychoanalytic and trauma theories that view the suppression of bodily experience as a dissociative response to trauma.⁹ Unlike the suppression of bodily sensation as a means of escaping cognitive recognition of acute violation, however, the fissure engendered between subjectivity and embodied experience in Halfe’s poem is not momentary but chronic. The opening and closing lines of the poem map the suppression of the boy’s sensory experience via assaults by Sister Superior that compromise his hearing while the weight of shame draws his face to his chest, delimiting his capacity to see. At the same time, his embodied subjectivity is further threatened by making private moments into a public spectacle: “Here everyone looked / and laughed at your private parts. / Soon they too were no longer private” (13-15). With his private parts no longer private, the boy is coaxed to perceive his body as distinct from his personhood.

The stanzas quoted above then metamorphose this crisis from the sensory to the sensual. The boy’s conflicted experiences of “pain” and “pleasure” provoke confusion within the dogmatic ideological space of the residential school. Halfe’s frantic language of “pushing, pushing” and “sweat[ing],” which leads to the “wings of pleasure,” propels the stanza into the experiential chaos of the “breath burst[ing] / pain, pleasure, shame. Shame.” The second “Shame” here comes down like a verdict, carving the poem in two, both formally and temporally. The last of three sets of alliterative pairs, this final term—repeated—stands alone, its own sentence (in both grammatical and

judicial senses). “Shame” manifests as a tool of erasure cutting the boy off from the pleasures of the body, enacting a symbolic amputation—or one might even say a symbolic beheading—that denies integrated, embodied experience through the coercive imposition of a form of Cartesian dualism. The mind is forced to treat the body as that which is other than self, creating conditions in which, as the following stanza depicts, the body can become a weapon.

Disembodiment and Hypermasculinity

The coerced disembodiment of Indigenous men is further complicated in popular cultural representations by the semiotic treatment of Indigenous males primarily as bodies. As Brendan Hokowhitu argues in the context of Maori masculinities, the synecdochic stand-in of Indigenous male body for Indigenous male-embodied agentive subject demonstrates

the link between enlightenment rationalism and colonization, where the enlightened reason of European man, in a Cartesian sense, was allegorically opposed to the physicality of the unenlightened, the savage. The process of colonization did not mean [Indigenous men] were to reach the echelons of enlightened reason, however: rather what was imperative to the colony was the domestication of their physicality, the suppression of their passions, the nobilization of their inherent violence. (2322)

Colonization has borne many of the same tenets in North America, collapsing Indigenous men with physicality while technologies of social engineering like residential schools seek to limit embodied experience and replace it with fear of and revulsion toward the body. Hence the absolute panic revealed in maniacal punishments of bedwetting, erections, and vomiting documented in the historical literature on residential schooling.¹⁰ Brian Klopotek notes that “[f]or at least the last century, hypermasculinity has been one of the foremost attributes of the Indian world that whites have imagined” (251). Elizabeth Cromley adds, however, that although it has been conceived as “physically courageous and bold,” the “manhood of the Indian” in popular cultural representations has remained tethered to “ruthless violence” (269). As Daniel Heath Justice argues in a recent interview, Indigenous male bodies have come to be viewed as “capable of and a source only of violence and harm. When that’s the only model you have. . . . What a desolation, right? When your body, the only way your maleness is or should be rendered is through violence, through harm, through corrupted power . . . it’s just tragic” (n. pag.). Justice adds that according to “the models of hyper-masculine maleness that we get—if the male body isn’t giving harm, it’s taking pleasure. It’s always extractive. It’s either assaultive or extractive.

One or the other, there's nothing else. And that is such a catastrophic failure of imagination, as well as a huge ethical breach" (n. pag.).

I argue that the ideological fallout of such colonial imaginings of Indigenous masculinity undergirds a paradox within assimilative social engineering in Canada: on the one hand, the inherent physicality and violence of those racialized and gendered as Indigenous males has been continually reinscribed through the media, literature, film, and art, while on the other hand, violence and shame have been wielded systematically through residential schooling, the Indian Act, and the legal system to discourage sensual, embodied experience. I contend that some of the legacies of trauma coming to light in the testimonies of residential school survivors during the IRS TRC can be understood, at least partially, as a consequence of treating those racialized and gendered as Indigenous males *only* as bodies (without "the advanced intellectual and moral capacity to master their masculine passions" [Bederman 85]), then systematically manufacturing disavowals of the body through shame. Among the effects of such pernicious pedagogies is the recasting of Indigenous male bodies as distinct from subjectivity and selfhood, as tools to be used and discarded. And this coerced *disintegration*—this state of disembodiment at the collision point among Cartesian dualism, imposed racial inferiority, and corporeal disgust—simultaneously works to sustain violence through the instrumentalization of the alienated body.

Indeed, the fracturing of mind and body, as depicted in Halfe's poem, is not strictly a consequence of individual experiences of abuse—although these are undoubtedly at play—nor is it merely a product of Judeo-Christian reverence for the soul over the body. Rather, it is a key weapon within the dispossessive arsenal of Canadian colonial policy, which seeks to deterritorialize Indigenous nations and corrode Indigenous sovereignties by compromising embodied connections to place and to kin. In residential school pedagogies of gender, shame is activated through the derogation of the body, coercing children's humiliation with their physical selves in order to produce docile subjects. At the same time, this shaming of the body constitutes a primary tactic for removing physical beings from ecosystemic relations with their environment. As the sensory capacity of the body is assaulted—as evidenced in the "scabbed" and "scal[ing]" ears of the title character in Halfe's poem—the potential for ongoing experiential connection to place is suppressed. Thus, it isn't just the physical removal of the child from ancestral territories and communal connections that facilitated the Canadian colonial agenda, but also the targeted attacks on the child's frameworks for interacting with

the other-than-human. In much the same way that the body becomes instrumentalized as a tool of the alienated agentive subject (body ≠ self), so the land becomes coercively alienated as an exploitable resource. Rather than upholding an ethos of reciprocity in which “the tribal web of kinship rights and responsibilities . . . link[s] the People, the land, and the cosmos together in an ongoing and dynamic system of mutually affecting relationships” (Justice, “Go Away” 151), residential school technologies of social engineering were mobilized to isolate the individual student as discrete, disembodied, and deterritorialized. If one is a disembodied soul, one can be anywhere, but if one is an embodied individual indigenous to a specific territory and tribal community, one inhabits a series of relationships to that place along with the roles and responsibilities of ecosystemic persistence. To be clear, I contend that the bodies of Indigenous youth have been deliberately targeted for violence and humiliation within (and beyond) residential schools for the primary purpose of suppressing embodied experiences of the land and of kinship. And the denial of these embodied experiences was calculated to extinguish Indigenous modes of social formation and territoriality. To dispossess Indigenous youth of their capacity for integrated, embodied experience has been to dispossess Indigenous nations of land and sovereignty.

Both fictional and (auto)biographical depictions of residential school testify to the debilitating effects of alienation from lands and land-based practices. The title character in Maria Campbell’s “Jacob” is described as “jus plain pitiful” upon his release from residential school, because “[h]e can[’t] talk his own language” and “he don know how to live in da bush” (lines 107-10). Thrasher explains: “Every time I’d go home from school I saw older boys who . . . couldn’t survive. . . . [I]n winter teenaged boys who should be able to trap and hunt had to rely on their parents. . . . Some also forgot how to speak Inuvialuktun” (84). In *Indian School Days*, Basil Johnston portrays the year of his release from residential school as being characterized by the struggle for “survival,” recounting several abortive attempts to generate means of subsistence from selling chopped wood to hunting raccoons to skinning squirrels. In each case, his lack of territorial knowledge and his disconnection from the community ensure failure until he ultimately determines that it would simply “be better to go back to school” (178). In this way, Johnston’s narrative tracks the perverse effectiveness of residential school technologies of deterritorialization. It is perhaps with similar struggles in mind that Campbell’s speaker exclaims, “No matter how many stories we tell / we’ll never be able to tell / what dem schools dey done to dah peoples / an dere relations” (103-06).

The title of Halfé's poem, "Nitotem," is translated as "my relative, could be anyone" (*Bear* 128). What's interesting about this translation is that terminology pertaining to Cree-specific systems of kinship that extend beyond the "reproductive notions of transmitted biological substance" (Rifkin 9) actually devolves through the conditions depicted in the poem into a marker of anonymity. I asked Cree poet and scholar Neal McLeod to elaborate on the meaning of the term, and he explained in a personal letter that in contemporary Cree, the stem "-tôtê" denotes "friend" and the "-m" ending denotes "something very dear or close to you," while in classical Cree, kinship terms that include "-tôtêm" are used to formally address one's relations within the kinship network—here the prefix "ni" indicates first person possession (n. pag.). Linda Goulet adds that "nitotem" carries with it a connotation of intimacy; it suggests "those to whom I am open" (n. pag.). Whereas the identifier "my relative" should affirm interpersonal connections and clarify the individual's roles and responsibilities within a kinship structure, here the term fails completely to identify the poem's focal character: he "could be anyone." The systematic assault on Indigenous cosmologies of gender and Indigenous kinship structures enacted through the separation of boys and girls, the shaming of the body, and the corrosion of empathy creates conditions in which the cyclical violence depicted in Halfé's poem can proliferate. The number of women raped "didn't matter" because the disembodied, alienated, and wounded title character fails to recognize their humanity—he fails to recognize them as kin. Having been robbed of the capacity for integrated spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental experiences, he no longer perceives himself as a participatory element of the world he inhabits; his empathy is destroyed. In this way, the violent suppression of embodied experience along with the manufacture of gender animosity fractures and disintegrates not only the individual victim of residential school violence, but also the community, the nation, and the expansive web of kinship relations—largely through shame. These are the legacies of over a century of residential schooling in Canada that need to be addressed if meaningful reconciliation is to become possible.

Embodied Discursive Action and Radical Reterritorialization

In his presentation at the Fall Convocation of the University of Winnipeg in 2011, Chair of the IRS TRC Justice Murray Sinclair indicated that for survivors of residential schooling, "the greatest damage from the schools is not the damaged relationship with non-Aboriginal people or Canadian

society, or the government or the churches, but the damage done . . . to the relationships within their families” (n. pag.). Sinclair argued, therefore, that “[r]econciliation *within* the families of survivors is the cornerstone for all other discussions about reconciliation.” To conclude, I posit that in their 2,200 km trek from Cochrane, Ontario, to Halifax, Nova Scotia, the Residential School Walkers performed three mutually formative reconciliatory acts that serve the vision Sinclair describes. The first involves honouring the body as integral to and indivisible from the agentive self. The second involves affirming responsibilities to and roles within the family—with “family” construed in accordance with Cree principles of kinship that extend beyond the limits of nuclear family biology. And the third involves (re)connecting with the land as an active principle of kinship.

Patrick Etherington Jr., a twenty-eight-year-old man from the Moose Cree First Nation, explained to reporters during the walk that when the generation preceding his “went to residential school, they became hard[;] they didn’t know how to love and they passed this on to us” (qtd. in “Walkers” n. pag.). He added on a personal note, “My dad and me, for a while there, the love was always there but sometimes he’s never showed it” (qtd. in Narine n. pag.). In an online testimonial posted on YouTube, Etherington Jr. elaborates:

When they went to residential school, the survivors had to become tough. They had to become like robots . . . in order to survive. And when they left the residential schools, a lot of them didn’t deal with it. . . . So by not dealing with it, they actually passed it down to us, the younger generation.

And I see it in our communities all the time. . . . We’re still like robots almost. We don’t know how to feel. We don’t know how to express ourselves. I see that all the time on my reserve. It’s starting to show its ugly face now too, in my home community of Moose Factory, through suicide. . . .

So that is the main reason I’m walking: the issue of suicide. We have to try to break this cycle. We have to learn to feel again. We’ve got to learn how to love. Because those survivors were deprived of it. They were deprived of love when they were at those schools. (qtd. in CSSSPNQL n. pag.)

By identifying the marathon walk as a strategy for addressing the emotional and sensory legacies of residential school experiences, Etherington Jr. affirms the capacity of embodied actions to self-consciously reintegrate minds and bodies and to foster emotional literacy—with learning to “feel again” maintaining both sensory and affective valences. In his welcoming address from the IRS TRC national event in Montreal, Mohawk elder John Cree drew upon the metaphor of the journey to express the need for emotional and physical (re)integration. He stated that the longest distance a man will

ever travel is the distance required to bring together his head and his heart (n. pag.). Cree's words are particularly resonant with the Walkers' journey, which is both literal and symbolic, involving the physical movement of wilful bodies over territory while affirming struggles within agentic subjects toward integrated personhood that honours embodied persistence and feeling.

The Walkers' movement upon the land can therefore be usefully understood as what Tengan calls an "embodied discursive practice," in which "men come to perform and know themselves and their bodies in a new way" (151). For Tengan, "bodily experience, action, and movement [play] a fundamental role in the creation of new subjectivities of culture and gender" (87). The young men of the Residential School Walkers use the "bodily experience" of agentic (as opposed to forced) "movement" over territory to better "know themselves and their bodies"; in this way, they contest the fiction of Cartesian dualism and resist the colonial pressures of both coerced disembodiment and forced relocation. Through walking and speaking publicly, these men strive to enact, embody, and model non-dominative yet empowered subjectivities as Cree men, subjectivities that honour the capacity to "feel" and to "love" while exhibiting physical strength, stamina, and masculine solidarity.

By sharing the walk with his father, Patrick Etherington Sr., and his father's wife, Frances R. Whiskeychan, Etherington Jr. engaged in locatable actions designed to reclaim the intimacy and familial connection residential school policy functioned to suppress. However, the vision of family that the Walkers trekked to "reconcile" exceeds the biologically determinate (and patriarchal) conceptions of family imposed on Indigenous nations by the Indian Act.¹¹ At the Atlantic IRS TRC national event, the Etheringtons and Whiskeychan addressed Robert Hunter, James Kioke, and Samuel Koosees Jr.—the other young men from their community who accompanied them on the journey—by familial pronouns as sons and brothers, thereby evoking Cree ethics of kinship. Etherington Jr. traced the intergenerational contours of such ethics, proclaiming, "I'm doing it for the Survivors—but more for the youth. There is a big problem with suicide in my community. The youth are lost" (qtd. in "Walkers" n. pag.). Reaching out to the generations preceding and following his own, Etherington Jr. signalled inclusive notions of communal solidarity. He added in Halifax, "I walked for my buddies who did it and for those that have attempted it" (qtd. in Sison n. pag.). Constructing their embodied actions in a narrative of communal purpose, the Walkers exercised responsibilities embedded in Cree ethics of kinship to enable Cree (and Indigenous) continuance. In this way, this group of young Cree men, whose

bonds were cemented along stretches of open road between Cochrane and Halifax, served what McLeod identifies as the “ideals of the *okihcitâwak* (‘worthy men’)” who “measured their lives by ideas of bravery, courage, and selflessness” (*Gabriel’s Beach* 10, 105). The connection to Indigenous warrior societies was certainly not lost on the men themselves, who were photographed throughout their journey in T-shirts depicting images of nineteenth-century Indigenous warriors, displaying the word “Warrior” in bold letters, or bearing the Mohawk warrior flag.

The community of worthy young men forged on the journey appears to embody principles of kinship, and, as Rifkin argues, the affirmation of Indigenous “social formations that can be described as *kinship*” simultaneously serves Indigenous modes of territoriality to which kinship roles “give shape” (8). To affirm Cree kinship is to affirm Cree relations to the land. That is why the particular form taken by the Walkers’ public action is so significant. The 2,200 km journey is not merely symbolic. It is a testament to embodied relations with the landscape; it is an assertion of ongoing Indigenous presence, an expression of resilience, and an affirmation of belonging. In short, this journey constitutes an act of radical reterritorialization that honours and reclaims the land through embodied discursive actions that simultaneously honour and reclaim the body. And, of course, both land and body are essential elements of personhood from which residential schooling sought to alienate Indigenous youth. Ironically, the opportunities created at IRS TRC events for the Walkers to discuss the experiences of their journey are often characterized by a peculiar stillness that masks the physicality of the endeavour. For example, in Halifax, an ad hoc session was organized to honour the Walkers at the close of the survivors’ sharing circle where the testimony that begins this paper was offered. In this windowless testimonial space, each of the Walkers was encouraged to translate his or her experiences of the monumental trek into words. Although the testimonies proved eloquent and powerful, the disjuncture between the physicality and motion of their content and the stillness of their form proved somewhat unsettling.¹² As a useful supplement to these testimonies, Samuel Koosees Jr. has since posted a video of photographs from the journey that emphasizes the solidarity among the Walkers, the beauty of the territories through which they travelled, and the joy, laughter, and feeling engendered through their embodied discursive actions.¹³ Of particular interest here are photographs in which the men lampoon the touristic monuments of colonially imposed provincial borders.

In one case, the four men are shown in subsequent images leaping towards then hanging from the “Welcome to New Brunswick” sign (5:07-5:16). In another, tricks of perspective are employed to portray Etherington Jr. crouched and apparently holding the miniature bodies of Samuel Koosesee Jr. and James Kioke in either hand in front of the “Welcome to Nova Scotia” sign (6:17-6:28). Each of these photos is preceded immediately by images that evoke masculine strength. In the first case, the four young men are shown in a self-portrait, walking together in solidarity and purpose with the leading Walker holding a ceremonial staff. In the second case, the comic photo at the Nova Scotia border is preceded directly by images of each of the four men shooting arrows at a target. Juxtaposing images that evoke spectres of Indigenous warriorhood with images that humorously exploit perspectival shifts to trouble the solidity of Canadian colonial borders, Koosesee’s video engages in a creative remapping that honours the strength, humour, and agency of the Residential School Walkers along their reterritorializing trek.

At the Atlantic IRS TRC event, Etherington Jr. described long stretches of silence as the group travelled the edge of the highway. As they walked and walked, he noted that each of his companions’ head was bowed to the earth. Only upon reflection did he realize that he too had his head down, much like the figure in Halfé’s poem who “walk[s], shoulders slightly stooped / and never look[s] directly at anyone” (“Nitotem” 30-31). “What are we doing?” Etherington Jr. recalled asking himself before commanding his gaze upward to survey the world around him. “And it was beautiful,” he concluded (n. pag.). Etherington Jr.’s words, it seems to me, offer a visual image that resonates with survivor testimonies that document the debilitating imposition of shame as well as the struggle to regain senses of self-worth. Walking in solidarity with his kin and raising his eyes to honour the landscape, Etherington Jr. rehearses an embodied cultural pride that colonial history has sought to deny him. The action itself is a physical expression of selfhood and cultural integrity, and its public avowal at the IRS TRC heightens its resistant force while extending its pedagogical shadow. The model of non-dominative Cree manhood enacted and articulated by Etherington Jr. and his companions offers both “survivors” and “the youth” a prototype for the reformation of what Tengan calls “masculinities defined through violence” (151), in a manner that refuses to disavow masculine strength, physicality, and agency. To borrow the words of Justice, “That’s a warrior’s act, as well, to know what’s needed to be done and to do it boldly and without need of response. To fight against shame through love” (Personal interview n. pag.).

Etherington Jr. saved his final comments in the sharing circle at the Halifax event for residential school survivors—those targeted most directly by the colonial technologies of dis-integration, dis-embodiment, and de-territorialization discussed in this paper. “This is what I’ve done for you,” he said. “This is what I’ve *chosen* to do for you.” With the insertion of the word “chosen,” Etherington Jr. affirms ongoing individual agency even as he declares himself accountable to others in an expression of kinship responsibilities. This choice, this willed performance of embodied discursive action, attests to the ultimate failure of residential school social engineering. Like the words of the anonymous survivor whose testimony began this article, Etherington Jr.’s words and actions are a gift to be honoured. Etherington Jr. refuses the identity of inevitable victimry, self-defining not as a second-generation product of residential school violence, of the denigration of the body, and of the obfuscation of gender complementarity, but as one voice among many that would call the elements of peoplehood back to balance.

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NOTES

- 1 See Assembly of First Nations (42) for a parallel example.
- 2 This system is connected to class as well as race. The same system that works to empower “pure” women—like nuns and middle and upper class girls and women—renders other women impure and sexually available to men.
- 3 For the purposes of this paper, ecosystemic territoriality refers to an abiding relationship of reciprocal knowing with(in) a specific constellation of geographic places; such relationships are enacted and affirmed through embodied practices and rendered meaningful through the embedding of personal experiences and stories within narratives of intergenerational inhabitation. By appending the term ecosystemic, I seek to affirm the interdependency of the human and the other-than-human in specific geographical spaces (while acknowledging human propensities to traverse ecosystems). See also Claire Colebrook’s *Understanding Deleuze* and Paul Liffman’s “Indigenous Territorialities.”
- 4 Robert Arthur Alexie, Anthony Apakark Thrasher, and Louise Bernice Halfe are all residential school survivors.

- 5 The focus of this paper is on Indigenous men specifically—with full recognition that all genders are mutually affecting and affected in a relational manner. For critical discussions of targeted colonial disruptions of Indigenous women’s roles and responsibilities, see Andrea Smith’s *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide*, Mishuana Goeman’s *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations*, and Kim Anderson’s *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood*.
- 6 IRS TRC podcasts are found at www.livestream.com/trc_cvr?folder as well as through the IRS TRC national event pages at www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=92.
- 7 The nuns were themselves, of course, subject to patriarchal discipline within the hierarchical power structure of the Catholic Church and the Western sex/gender system more broadly. The behaviours reported by Thrasher, Knockwood, and Alexie were complexly informed and circumscribed by a Western sex/gender system that has treated the body as both symbolically female and the source of sin. In accordance with this causal structure, the female is configured as the source of evil and purity becomes contingent on the disavowal of the female. Thus, within the gendered theological structure in which the nuns functioned daily, the female is perceived as responsible for sin and is hated for arousing sinful thoughts in men who have vowed to remain pure—ideological conditions that undoubtedly affect the anxious and violent actions of the nuns depicted above.
- 8 In a recent interview, Halfe explains that Indigenous women in Saskatchewan have “reclaimed the word ‘brown spoon’”—which has been used historically to denigrate Indigenous women’s sexuality—as a way of talking about and affirming the vagina. By discussing “not only the power of spoon but the community of spoon where people are nurtured from it, where we give feast to the people, they lick it, they nurture themselves with it, and they give birth from it,” these women celebrate the agentive power of Indigenous women’s sexuality and work toward conditions in which Indigenous women’s sensual desire will be naturalized and honoured; they reposition Indigenous women as desiring subjects rather than mere objects of male sexual desire. “The healthy men,” Halfe concludes, “know that what is between our legs will devour them” (Personal interview n. pag.).
- 9 In the Oxford *Dictionary of Psychology*, Andrew M. Colman defines “dissociation” as the “partial or total disconnection between memories of the past, awareness of identity and of immediate sensations, and control of bodily movements, often resulting from traumatic experiences, intolerable problems, or disturbed relationships” (n. pag.). Evidence of trauma’s causal role in the instigation of “disconnection” between cognitive registry and “immediate sensations” is amply supplied by a number of articles found in *The Journal of Trauma & Dissociation*. See also “Dissociation and Trauma” by Peter Fonagy and Mary Target and “The Causal Relationship between Dissociation and Trauma: A Critical Review” by T. Giesbrecht and H. Merckelbach.
- 10 Such coerced disavowals of the body occurred among female students as well, as evidenced by performative shaming around menses and similarly maniacal punishments of bedwetting and vomiting. See, for example, Knockwood’s discussion of “sex education” for the female students at Shubenacadie, quoted in the “Breaking Bonds of Kinship” section of this paper. My effort here is not to suggest a fundamental difference in colonial attitudes toward Indigenous female and male bodies, but rather to focus critical attention on the particular ramifications of such treatment on male-identified populations who have endured residential schooling.
- 11 See Bonita Lawrence’s “Gender, Race, and the Regulation of Native Identity in Canada and the United States: An Overview” for a more thorough account of just how wide-reaching and multiple these incursions were.

- 12 Having witnessed the preceding survivors' sharing circle, I stayed in the room to attend the Residential School Walkers special session of the IRS TRC in Halifax. When I say that the tension between stasis and motion proved "unsettling," I'm describing my own experience of the session along with my reflections on it after the fact.
- 13 The video can be found on YouTube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=PrVK1wsraow.

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