

The Trudeau Foundation

PAPERS

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An independent and non-partisan Canadian charity, the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation was established in 2001 as a living memorial to the former Prime Minister by his family, friends, and colleagues. The Foundation supports outstanding creative thinkers who make meaningful contributions to critical social issues through scholarships, fellowships, mentorships and public interaction events. To date, the Foundation has granted hundreds of major awards to top researchers and highly accomplished individuals, in Canada and abroad.

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Preface

Voltaire once said that “Liberty of thought is the life of the soul.” The Trudeau Foundation fosters creative thinkers and investigators who explore the world in search of new ideas and opportunities to improve the lives of Canadians and humanity at large. We are surrounded by some of the brightest minds and influential opinion leaders in the country.

Each year, the Foundation selects five Fellows—outstanding researchers and scholars in all disciplines of the humanities and social sciences—who have demonstrated the potential to make a difference. These individuals are gifted thinkers and recognized leaders in their respective fields who have set themselves apart through their pioneering research, creativity, and the conscientious attention they pay to the needs of society. Fellows are chosen because they have proven that they can imagine and promote new solutions to major contemporary issues.

Trudeau Fellows focus their research on four key themes espoused by the late Pierre Trudeau—Human Rights and Dignity, Responsible Citizenship, Canada in the World, and People and Their Natural Environment. Despite its namesake, the Foundation has no political agenda. It is an independent and non-partisan Canadian charity. The Foundation’s only mission is to make sure that new and

essential knowledge finds its way to the public sphere—ultimately, through sound and progressive public policies. We want to marry innovative thinking with real-world practice, to bring global ideas to the community to address local needs.

In 2008, the Foundation initiated the Trudeau Lectures to permit the dissemination of the Fellows' ideas across the country and to spark further discussion among academics and policy makers. The publication of these lectures in the Trudeau Papers series is another important way to bring their ideas to a wider audience.

I am delighted that the Trudeau Foundation can serve as a catalyst for creative thinking, ensuring this wealth of knowledge leads to better inform citizens and offers heightened opportunities for democratic participation. In a world that finds itself confronted with more challenges than solutions, the generation and application of new ideas is of great importance for both Canadians and a global society.

ROY L. HEENAN, OC

Chairman, The Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation

November 2011

Thinking Against the Tide

“World history and economic understanding, then, must be humanistic and critical if they are to be at all useful in forming intelligent global citizens, and they must be taught alongside the study of religion and of philosophical theories of justice.”

Martha C. Nussbaum, *Not for Profit* (2010)

I am forever perplexed by how awkward it is to name the disciplines that deal with society, culture, and communication. In one of the agreements founding the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation, officials refer to the Foundation’s sphere of activity as “the human sciences and the humanities.” I know that by choosing these terms, our founders wished to avoid alienating parties who might take umbrage at the term “science”: philosophers, writers, jurists, artists of all persuasions. But the result rings hollow. Similarly, in our French-language publications, the Foundation has long been reluctant to talk about the “*sciences sociales*”—the social sciences—even though the term is common throughout the francophone world and figures in the names of several major academic institutions. There is no perfect solution, because our sphere is large and its limits more porous than ever. The Foundation embraces economists and theologians, urbanists and novelists, sociologists, ethnologists, historians.

At heart, even in the absence of a common language, a shared methodology, and agreement on the path from a problem

to its solution, I believe that those who are associated with the Foundation's programs share two essential traits. First, as we highlight in our communications, we bring together free spirits—people who are not afraid to think for themselves and to say or write what they think, with no other motive than impeccable intellectual and moral integrity. Second is an impassioned curiosity about the major issues of our time and the determination to ply upon them all the tools that thought and experience can supply. Members of the Trudeau community are not all *public* intellectuals, since their work sometimes necessitates discretion and the modesty required of those willing to work behind the scenes. But they are without a doubt *engaged* intellectuals, as we used to call people concerned about our collective future and dedicated to guiding society toward the good, the just, the true, and—why not?—the beautiful.

This does not mean, in fact, far from it, that everything that is said or written within the Trudeau community serves an immediate purpose. We live in impatient societies that demand quick fixes, straightforward solutions, foolproof remedies. Those who call the loudest for ambitious ideas hasten to add that those ideas must be realistic. Even the most ensconced scholars make scathing remarks about academia the moment that they get wind of a learned word or two. It is not easy, at such times, to advocate the erudition demanded by the humanities, or to uphold the value of abstract thinking so central to the social sciences. It is not easy for philosophers or lawyers to stand fast on principles and values when buffeted by the political winds of the day; nor is it as evident as it once was, to read fiction for reasons other than distraction or entertainment. It has become unfashionable to acknowledge the wisdom of the past. It is not easy to think against the tide.

Others before me, among them the great American philosopher Martha Nussbaum, have stated with proper authority how society becomes poorer and indeed weaker when it neglects the

humanities. In truth, given the current state of affairs, one could even speak of regression. Traditional injunctions to reflect with care and to advance with prudence—to weigh the risks and benefits carefully before making a deliberate choice—have ceded to an ethos of retort and rejoinder, parry and thrust. What sort of tweet would you provoke by discussing your thoughts on Calvino, on Cortázar, on Faulkner? “LOL”?

The five texts that make up this third issue of *The Trudeau Foundation Papers* are not manifestos. The authors are renowned academics, established and recognized in their careers. What sets them apart and earned them a Trudeau Fellowship is their dogged refusal of the easy. In their choice of subject, in the way they address it, and in the nature of the conclusions they reach, they are out of step with the dictates of the *zeitgeist*. First of all, their writing impressed me with its autonomy—an autonomy that is integral to the intellectual, that affirms his or her dignity. But the concrete and social vocabulary that permeates the texts also impressed me with another element: the drive for what we could call emancipation—actions that allow human relationships to break out of determinism and express themselves freely.

By the end of his journey, even the most pessimistic of the five lecturers expresses confidence in the development of social ties. Professor Simon Harel, guided by the work of South African J.M. Coetzee, winner of the Nobel Prize for literature, begins his text by exploring the stages of decline, exclusion, discredit. The world he describes is being destroyed by the very actors who speak of building it, developing it, reconstructing it—actors who leave in their wake the violence of a universe devoid of meaning and sentiment. But Harel’s conclusion is not without hope. Rather, it celebrates those who find the strength to flee—the migrants and the vagrants—in an astonishing tribute to itinerancy.

In a text that is both personal and directly political, Clare Bradford also inventories the means of asserting one's culture, in all its tragic complexity, in the face of a dominant mythology, Bradford's singular choice of medium—children's literature—is powerful in its exposure of the tensions within Aboriginal communities, between expressing the wounds to a people's identity and voicing a community's aspirations and dreams. I once wrote that the conflicts permeating Indigenous communities are the ultimate proof that they are dynamic societies in their own right: we can read this position in Bradford's work as well. Her chronicle asserts that, in communities scarred by racism and exclusion, by hatred and colonialism, societies are able to escape destiny through creativity and imagination.

Beverley Diamond's approach parallels that of Clare Bradford. An eminent musicologist working out of her research centre at Newfoundland's Memorial University, Professor Diamond has for years studied the social and cultural effects of musical performance among marginalized groups. Her text amply demonstrates how the conversion—or should we say transcription?—of cultural and popular elements into political symbols supposes the mastery of subtle and difficult codes. It is also clear that this conversion has always gone on, sometime inaudibly to the ruling class. Must-reads are the passage in which Diamond recounts how it is possible for the sounds of the Mi'kmaq language to subvert religious hymns, and the passage dedicated to the great Mohawk performer Dawn Avery.

Jeremy Webber's essay on nationalism is another exploration of liberation. Webber suggests deconstructing the usual images of nationalism to make room for the cultural elements so central to the work of Clare Bradford and Beverley Diamond. It is no coincidence that Professor Webber is an important figure in the Canadian movement to reconcile European legal traditions with the rights of Indigenous peoples. The Foundation fosters this dialogue and convergence. Webber focuses his paper on the question of Quebec, for

reasons of his own that prove once again that research can be anything but impersonal. But to me, Webber's contribution also shows how Canada's political community can at last reconstitute itself on terms of greater reciprocity, and not only on the issue of Quebec.

The fifth paper in this collection is the work of Isabella Bakker. In it, Professor Bakker makes an impassioned plea for social justice and human development in the harsh and sometimes despairing light of discrimination based on gender. A compelling aspect of Bakker's approach is her insistence from the outset on positioning her remarks in the realm of public policy. One of the paper's leitmotifs is the importance of creating spaces for public reflection and discussion, spaces where the mobilization of the outraged can morph into proposals for collective action. If the economy is to change direction and societal stability is to be restored—as the majority hopes and prays—neither political nor social realities can be overlooked.

The Trudeau Foundation Papers reflect a fundamental aspect of the life of our organization: to offer a broad spectrum of original perspectives on the world and society. The approach we have chosen is to give voice both to those who know and to those who doubt. These five papers are a convincing testament that we are achieving our vision.

PIERRE-GERLIER FOREST

President, The Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation

November 2011

CLARE BRADFORD

2009 *Visiting Trudeau Fellow*,

University of Winnipeg / Deakin University, Australia

BIOGRAPHY

Clare Bradford is a professor in the School of Communication and Creative Arts at Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia. Her research examines the interplay between children's literature and the social practices it represents and advocates. She has focused on representations of Indigenous peoples and cultures in children's texts, and on Indigenous textuality for children, publishing two books on the topic: *Reading Race: Aboriginality in Australian Children's Literature* (2001), and *Unsettling Narratives: Postcolonial Readings of Children's Literature* (2007), in addition to many essays. *Unsettling Narratives* is the first comparative study of settler society literatures for children, embracing Australian, Canadian, New Zealand, and U.S. texts. A second strand of Bradford's research has examined how post-Cold War children's literature has engaged with political, social, and environmental questions, and is addressed in her book *New World Orders in Children's Literature: Utopian Transformations* (2008), co-authored with three Australian colleagues. A third collaborative project looks at Australian children's texts since 1990, exploring their values as they relate to multiculturalism, immigration, and community relations. She was a member of a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada funded team based at the University of Winnipeg that focused on discourses of "home" in Canadian children's literature.

Her books have attracted international prizes: *Reading Race* was awarded the International Research Society for Children's Literature Award in 2003 in addition to the Children's Literature Association Book Award for the best critical work published in 2001. *Unsettling*

Narratives received the Children's Literature Association's Honor Award. She is currently president of the International Research Society for Children's Literature.

Clare Bradford grew up in New Zealand and completed her BA at the University of Auckland and her MA and MEd at Victoria University of Wellington. She moved to Australia to undertake her PhD at the University of Sydney and now lives and works in Melbourne.

She was nominated the first Visiting Trudeau Fellow in 2009 and is affiliated with the University of Winnipeg.

ABSTRACT

When Clare Bradford took an academic position teaching children's literature, she quickly realized that texts for children propose and advocate values, politics, and social practices. She realized, too, that scholars developing new fields of study (like children's literature) must work strategically to build the standing of research in their chosen areas and to demonstrate its significance in addressing contemporary questions. In this lecture, Clare Bradford talks about children's books and what they tell us about the cultures and times in which they are produced, with an emphasis on the politics and aesthetics of Aboriginal children's literature. Using examples of historical and contemporary texts, she shows how books for children address questions about colonization and its consequences, about global politics, and about childhood itself. She reflects on her own experience as a scholar in Australian and Canadian university settings.

LECTURE

What Children's Literature Tells Us

Simon Fraser University

SEPTEMBER 21, 2010

I am an accidental scholar of children's literature. When I embarked on my academic career, I fully intended to be a medievalist; my PhD was on the writings of the 14th-century mystical writer Julian of Norwich, and I aspired to work in the *hortus conclusus* of medieval studies, exploring Old and Middle English texts and the distant times and cultures in which they were produced. In 2011, I am a children's literature scholar whose work focuses on how texts for children engage with socio-political ideas, values, and practices. The unlikely trajectory of my career has played out against changes in disciplinary frameworks and in the Australian tertiary education system in which I have worked.

When I sought to become a medievalist after I completed my PhD in the late 1970s, I did so at the wrong time. In my enthusiasm for things medieval, I had failed to notice how very few medievalists were employed in departments of English around Australia. The "arguments about relevance and utilitarianism which define the modern discourse of higher education"¹ have made it difficult

1. Helen Fulton, "Medieval Studies in Australia," *Journal of the Australasian Universities Modern Language Association* 50 (2003), 10.

for the humanities to maintain staffing and resources, particularly in specialist and ostensibly arcane fields like medieval studies. Fortunately, I had a fallback position in the form of my previous training and practice as a primary teacher. So I gained a position at Catholic Teachers' College in Sydney, teaching literature to education students. It was at this point that I was asked to teach children's literature, and I very soon found that medieval studies provided me with a fine preparation for this role. It is impossible to understand medieval texts without knowing what was happening when they were produced: to read *Beowulf* is to be introduced to the concepts of honour, heroism, and masculine power that prevailed in Anglo-Saxon Britain; to read Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* is to observe how the rise of the mercantile class and disaffection with the institutional church jostled with traditions of chivalry and courtly love in the 14th century. In a related way, I read children's texts in relation to the socio-political contexts in which they are produced and received, because literature for children is inescapably implicated in practices of socialization. The audiences of *Beowulf* and *The Canterbury Tales* are vividly present in the assumptions and language of these texts; similarly, children's literature always conjures up the child audiences it implies.

I joined Catholic Teachers' College just before it embarked on a series of amalgamations with other Catholic institutions leading to the formation of the Australian Catholic University. Indeed, every institution where I worked during the 1980s and 1990s underwent the radical transformations associated with the so-called Dawkins reforms, a nation-wide reinvention of the Australian tertiary landscape under the interventionist approach of John Dawkins, Minister for Employment, Education and Training in the Hawke Labor government. In 1983 I gained employment in the Education Department at Victoria College of Advanced Education in Melbourne, which later amalgamated with Deakin University, one of the so-called gumtree universities established in the 1970s. During this period of

widespread institutional change, disciplinary boundaries were also shifting. The field of literature in Australia was no longer dominated by studies of British canonical texts, but addressed Australian texts, reflecting the “turn to theory” that had radically changed research and teaching in the humanities since the 1970s. When the Faculty of Education at Deakin faced funding cuts, the dean decided that children's literature programs were surplus to requirement, together with the staff teaching them. With my colleagues I prepared a successful proposal to move to the Arts Faculty, building a case on the strong undergraduate and graduate student enrolments in children's literature programs, and their disciplinary alignment with literature.

That well-subscribed children's literature programs might have been discontinued with a flourish of the dean's pen is evidence of the marginal position of the field. Children's literature research is relatively new, having developed during the 1970s. It is often regarded as the “immature simple sister to mainstream literature,”² lacking in complexity and existing merely to purvey innocent entertainment to its child readers. On the contrary, I would argue that children's texts are complicated and interesting precisely because of the power imbalance that imbues their production and reception: that is, they are produced and mediated by adults for children. Marginal fields of research like children's literature can be precarious places in which to work, but they can also be generative because they require new approaches and novel combinations of ideas.

Children's Texts and Politics of Race

Growing up in one postcolonial society and migrating to another, I have always been keenly interested in the politics of race. Children's texts have much to say about Indigenous peoples and cultures, the colonial past, and relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous

2. John Stephens and Roderick McGillis, “Critical Approaches to Children's Literature,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, ed. Jack Zipes (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 367.

people in contemporary societies. Historically, most representations of Indigenous people in children's literature have been produced by non-Indigenous authors and illustrators, many of whom draw upon assumptions and stereotypes that are invisible to them because they are cultural givens. For instance, it is common for Indigenous characters in children's books to conform to a limited number of types: the sage, the radical activist, the confused young person torn between cultures. The Australian Aboriginal scholar Mick Dodson says, "our [Indigenous] subjectivities, our aspirations, our ways of seeing and our languages have largely been excluded from the equation, as the colonizing culture plays with itself. It is as if we have been ushered on to a stage to play in a drama where the parts have already been written."³ In much non-Indigenous writing, accounts of Indigenous cultures are filtered through the perspectives of white culture, so that Indigenous characters are the objects of discourse and not its subjects. For this reason, Indigenous children and young people rarely encounter texts produced within their own cultures. There are notable examples of non-Indigenous texts that treat Indigenous cultures in complex and nuanced ways, and these tend to be produced by people with close and long-standing connections to Indigenous people.

One of the most significant developments in Australian, New Zealand, and Canadian literatures for children since the 1970s has been the emergence of texts by Indigenous authors and artists, often through Indigenous publishing companies, although (given the small proportion of Indigenous to non-Indigenous writers and artists) such texts still comprise a minority of works for children. Because Indigenous producers write out of their experience and cultural knowledge, they offer Indigenous children experiences of

3. Michael Dodson, "The End in the Beginning: Re(de)finding Aboriginality," in *Blacklines: Contemporary Critical Writing by Indigenous Australians*, ed. Michele Grossman (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2003), 37.

narrative subjectivity by presenting as normal their cultural values. Non-Indigenous children who engage with such narratives are positioned to learn about cultural difference and to realize that many values that they thought to be natural and universal are culturally constructed.

The principal challenge facing me as I researched Indigenous texts was how to approach them as an outsider. I realized that while I can develop an enhanced understanding through research into the cultures and histories that have shaped these texts, a full understanding of their cultural meanings will always elude me. An important aspect of my research, then, is to consider the ethical issues that arise when outsiders read Indigenous texts. I take seriously Patricia Linton's advice, that outsiders should bring to minority texts "a readerly tact that recognises boundaries and respects them."⁴

Two recent Australian Indigenous picture books demonstrate how complex and how political these texts are: *Down the Hole* by Edna Tantjingu Williams and Eileen Wani Wingfield, with illustrations by Kunyi June-Anne McInerney; and Mary Malbunka's *When I Was Little, Like You*. These books address two aspects of Australia's colonial past: the stolen generations, the forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families in line with government policy from 1909 to 1969; and the displacement of the people of the Western Desert to the settlement of Papunya from the 1950s to 1970s, when the traditional lands of these desert peoples were appropriated by pastoralists. These two books do not simply tell sad stories about stolen children and destabilized communities. Rather, they foreground cultural survival and continuity by incorporating intergenerational narratives. In this way they accord with the theory of the Cherokee scholar Jace Weaver,

4. Patricia Linton, "Ethical Reading and Resistant Texts," in *Post-Colonial Literatures: Expanding the Canon*, ed. Deborah L. Madsen (London: Pluto Press, 1999), 43.

whose study *That the People Might Live* proposes the concept of “communitism,” a blend of “community” and “activism.”⁵ I hasten to say that I am conscious that every Indigenous culture is different, with its own framework of belief and tradition; but my comparative work has made me conscious of all that Indigenous cultures have in common. Indigenous texts for children are, first and foremost, directed toward the communities whose histories and stories they recover. And they are activist texts in that they assert a politics of self-determination. An ethical reading will acknowledge that the events and circumstances these books address are beyond the knowledge and experience of outsiders, that they are informed by particular systems of memory and understanding, and that they tell only what can be publicly told.

Indigenous texts often seem opaque to outsiders because they are built on systems of narrative and knowledge unfamiliar to those outside the cultures where they are produced. My research on ethical reading of minority texts enables me to reach beyond the isolation of my scholarly work to teachers, librarians, and publishers, as well as the many national and international scholars grappling with similar issues and questions. Many students who choose children’s literature studies are training or practising as teachers and librarians. I regard these students as a key demographic in the audiences of children’s literature research because they are charged with selecting and mediating texts to children.

The authors and illustrator of *Down the Hole* have first-hand knowledge of the stolen generations and their families. Both Williams and Wingfield were mothers of light-skinned children who were taken by police and welfare officials. In the author’s notes in her book, Wingfield describes how her children were taken away while her husband was at work. She says, “That’s when they took

5. Jace Weaver, *That the People Might Live: Native American Literatures and Native American Community* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

our kids...[They] just used to rush in and grab kids. I argued to see them. But it broke our hearts.”⁶ The book's illustrator, Kunyi June-Anne McInerney, was herself taken from her mother at four or five and renamed, so that she was lost to her family for many years. The cover illustration of *Down the Hole* shows a group of five children clinging together, placed within a circle of light as if discovered by the beam of a torch (illustration 1). The three older children hold the younger two in their arms, but this signifier of connectedness and support is disrupted by the searching eyes of one of the children, who looks anxiously toward the source of light.

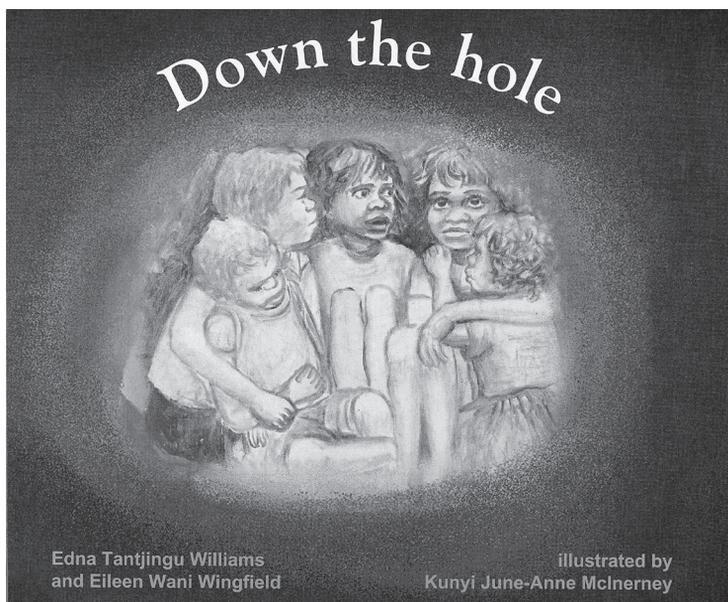


Illustration 1 : Cover of *Down the Hole* (Alice Springs: IAD Press, 2000).

6. Edna Tantjingu Williams, Eileen Wani Wingfield, and Kunyi June-Anne McInerney, *Down the Hole, Up the Tree, Across the Sandhills...Running from the State and Daisy Bates* (Alice Springs: IAD Press, 2000), 46. Illustration courtesy of IAD Press, Alice Springs, NT, Australia, www.iadpress.com.

The hole of the book's title, used by the children's parents to conceal them from the authorities, is one of many shafts and tunnels created by opal miners in Coober Pedy, a town in the South Australian outback. Light-skinned children passed entire days in these holes while their parents kept watch for "the State people" and lowered food by ropes when it was safe to do so. The children often slept in the holes until their parents were sure it was safe to bring them out.

In a crucial illustration, the controversial historical figure Daisy Bates is shown disembarking from a train. Bates is a problematic figure in the history of Australian colonialism: she was an amateur ethnologist and self-proclaimed protector of Aborigines and lived in the outback for many years, dressed always in the long skirts, boots, gloves, and veil of Edwardian fashion. The text says that "our old mothers and fathers called out 'Run away, run right away, you fair kids and keep running!'"⁷ The figure of Daisy Bates represents the incursion of colonialism, but the hidden children undercut such state power by seeking refuge in country, hiding in underground havens such as the opal mines. The mineshaft is a sign of capitalism, but it is also capable of being suborned into a place of safety, a transformation that Michel de Certeau describes as the "transverse tactics" used by subordinated populations in order to "use, manipulate, and divert"⁸ spaces that have been taken over by dominant groups.

The book's final illustration incorporates a reflexive moment as an adult shows a group of children a picture from *Down the Hole* of adults lowering food to their children. Here, memory of the children's escape into country and of their parents' resistance is woven into a triumphant assertion of communal survival and continuity;

7. Williams, Wingfield, and McInerney, *Down the Hole*, 26.

8. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 29 and 30.

the text opposite reads “I been still hiding away—and here I am today.”⁹

Like most Australian Indigenous texts, *Down the Hole* is located in a particular tract of land and speaks to the ancient associations of country and kinship. Edna Tantjingu Williams's intentions are described as follows:

Edna...saw this book as a legacy to her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. And also, her way of setting the record straight about what really happened to Aboriginal people with the “people-that-come-lately”: that is, the rest of us.¹⁰

The double-facing orientation of this text is clear in these words: its primary audience comprises Indigenous children (“grandchildren and great-grandchildren”), to whom it offers an unusually powerful subject position because its narrative deploys Aboriginal English and is informed by the values and world view of its narrators. The book's other audiences, numerically greater but differently positioned, comprise readers for whom setting, events, and language represent difference from white culture, and who are positioned as outsiders to the conceptual and material world of the book. In her author's note, Eileen Wani Wingfield describes her life as an elder: “I'm...travelling, keeping the culture going and looking after the country.”¹¹ And indeed Wingfield is looking after the country still: she formed the Senior Aboriginal Women's Council of Coober Pedy with a group of senior Aboriginal women to resist the Australian government's proposal to build a radioactive waste dump near her ancestral country in the South Australian deserts; and she won the Goldman Environmental Prize with another elder in 2003.

In mainstream picture books, narratives are generally presented either through the perspective of a child character or, more

9. Williams, Wingfield, and McInerney, *Down the Hole*, 42.

10. *Ibid.*, 45.

11. *Ibid.*, 46.

frequently, by a neutral external narrator. Indigenous picture books tend to model relationships between elders and children. The opening words of *When I Was Little, Like You* are:

*Uwa ngayuluna wangkanyi ngayuku yara, ngayulu wiima nyina,
nyuntu nyanganyi.*

I am telling you a story about when I was little, like you.

The presence of Luritja language installs difference, making it clear that those who understand this language comprise the primary audience of the narrative, but making the story accessible to the broader audience of non-Luritja and non-Indigenous children through translation. On the title page, author Mary Malbunka situates her narrative in relation to place and sociality through a map that shows the routes taken by people of the central desert region as they make their way to and from the government settlement camp of Papunya (illustration 2). In an image on the same page, Malbunka shows a group of girls and women embarking on a hunting trip, launching the narrative strand of how women introduce girls to country and to the skills required to live in country. The title page thus talks back to colonial conceptions of space in several ways: its hand-drawn lines gesture toward a personal and embodied experience of place; the colours refer not to an abstract idea of Papunya but to the red and ochre colours of the desert and its wide blue sky; and the image of girls and women foregrounds the connections between kinship and country.

Although Indigenous picture books are often intensely political, they tend to work through understatement and indirection. For instance, consider Malbunka's explanation about how the settlement of Papunya was formed:

I was born at Haasts Bluff in the *karru* (dry creekbed), where the earth is soft and sandy. That was in 1959. My mother and father were living at the old mission settlement at Haasts Bluff when I was a little *pipirri* (child).

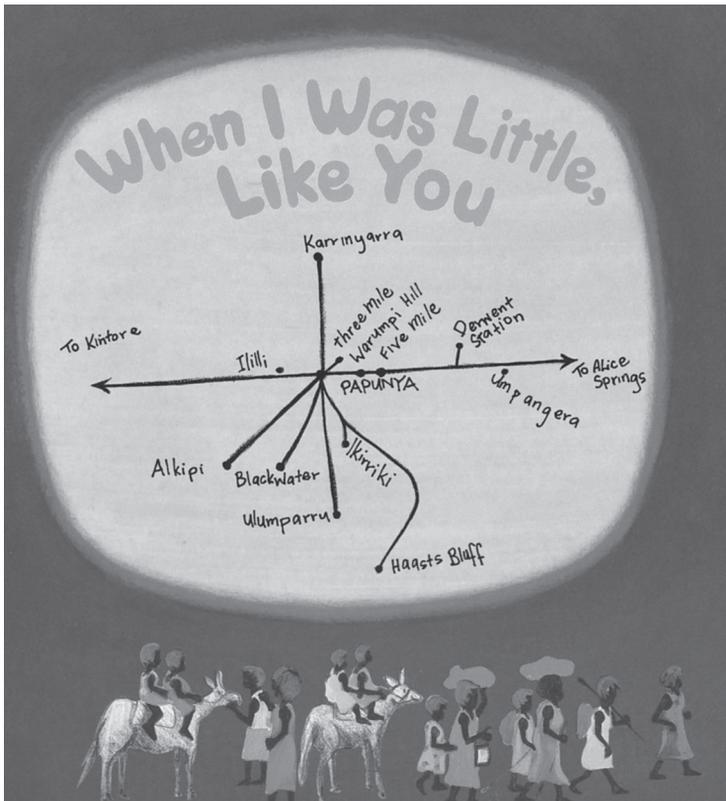


Illustration 2 : Cover of *When I Was Little, Like You* (Crows Nest, New South Wales: Allen & Unwin, 2003).

When I was about five, the mission boss said my family had to go to the government settlement at Papunya...After the mission at Haasts Bluff, Papunya was really big. There were lots of people living there, people with all different languages: Warlpiri, Luritja, Pintupi, Pitjantjatjara, Arrrente.¹²

12. Mary Malbunka, *When I Was Little, Like You* (Crows Nest New South Wales: Allen & Unwin, 2003), n.p.

Malbunka describes the effects of colonization in a muted style that avoids confronting child readers. Her account of the forced removal of Anangu, or desert groups, relies upon the knowledge of readers who will approach the text with various levels of knowledge and experience. Those with the most intimate knowledge are, of course, those Anangu and their descendants who were wrenched away from country and sacred places to live with strangers.

Rather than representing the desert people as helpless victims of white bureaucracy, Malbunka foregrounds their agency as they resisted and circumvented the rules imposed on them. The children were sent to school, where they were taught English but prohibited from speaking their first languages. The Anangu enjoyed seeing cowboy movies and war movies on an outdoor screen attached to the fence of the preschool. To maintain discipline, those children who had not attended school were forbidden entry to the movies. Malbunka exploits the possibilities of simultaneity in an illustration

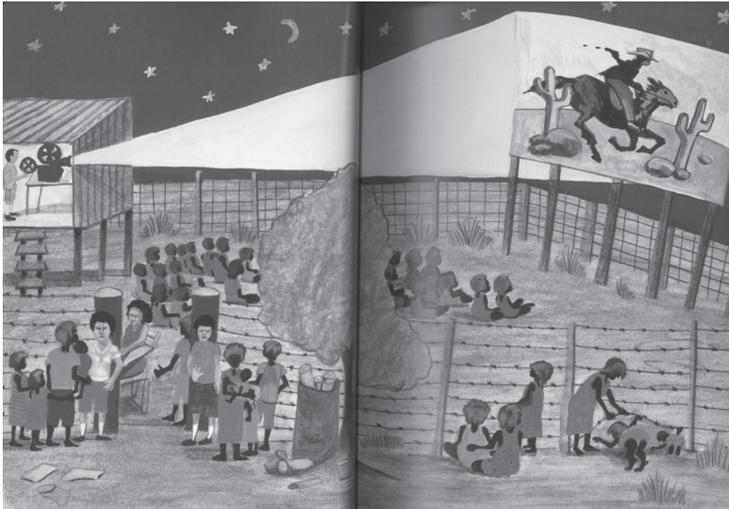


Illustration 3 : Children watching a cowboy movie, *When I Was Little, Like You* (Crows Nest, New South Wales: Allen & Unwin, 2003).

in which white mission staff sternly patrol the entrance to the pre-school, turning away “undeserving” families (illustration 3). At the same time, just around the corner from the officials, a mother is calmly raising the barbed-wire fence to let two children through, while three others wait for their turn. The cowboy scene visible on the screen makes its own comment on the ways in which films depicting the American west resonate with Anangu people. Here, one might say, is a globalizing moment in which cultural difference is elided. Malbunka's depiction of the setting in which Anangu go to the movies is, however, marked by historical and political references: the barbed wire, the institutional setting, and the groups of Anangu seated on the desert sand and distinguished from the white officials who guard the entry.

Such episodes of resistance run alongside Malbunka's stories about her induction into Luritja culture at the hands of her elders. She shows how her uncle Long Jack Philippus, an eminent Papunya artist, drew on the sand the tracks of different animals, teaching the *pipirri* techniques of tracking. Calling on Anangu traditions of dot painting as well as Western representational strategies, Malbunka locates this scene within shapes and colours that gesture toward the Dreaming narratives. The *pilkati* (snake) and the *malu* (kangaroo) in her illustrations are not merely animals but signs of the Ancestors who walked through the land establishing relations between humans and the natural world. Malbunka's paintings signal her kinship relations and her alignment with particular tracts of land, referring to the art of Long Jack and his status as elder and lawman. The meanings of Long Jack's majestic paintings are in the main inaccessible to non-Anangu audiences, who, in the words of the anthropologist Eric Michaels, are likely to perceive “meaningfulness, but not the meaning itself.”¹³

13. Eric Michaels, *Bad Aboriginal Art: Tradition, Media and Technological Horizons* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 57.

Whereas most books for children treat the assumptions and ideologies of white culture as normative, *Down the Hole* and *When I Was Little, Like You* are centred in Indigenous cultures. These texts do not merely celebrate the tactics by which minority groups undermine the strategies of the powerful but are themselves resistant narratives. They look in two directions at once: on the one hand they are directed toward communities and individuals whose histories they celebrate; and on the other hand they invite white children to read differently—to imagine a world where whiteness does not afford a position of privilege and superiority. They promote tactics of Aboriginal resistance as normal, reasonable, and ethical responses to unjust regimes of power. In this way they are deeply political, addressing questions alive in contemporary Australia and, as the current Truth and Reconciliation Commission suggests, in Canada as well.

Medievalisms in Children's Literature

While these two texts directly address the historical and contemporary experience of Indigenous people, many other children's texts work more indirectly, through metaphor and allusion. During my term as Trudeau Fellow I have embarked on an investigation into how medievalist themes, retellings, settings, characters, and allusions function in Australian and Canadian literature for children. An obvious place to begin in Canadian texts is *Anne of Green Gables*, where Anne is so “devoured by secret regret that she had not been born in Camelot”¹⁴ that she attempts a re-enactment of Tennyson's “The Lady of Shalott” in a leaky boat and is saved by Gilbert. In Australian texts, too, the medieval is often mapped onto New World landscapes, notably through the medievalist figure of the fairy. Perhaps because the formation of the Australian publishing industry

14. L.M. Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables* (North Ryde: Angus & Robertson, 1987), 186.

occurred during a period when fairy narratives were highly popular in Britain, the incidence of fairies in 19th-century and early 20th-century Australian texts is far higher than in Canadian children's texts of the same period.

In Minnie Rowe's 1919 fantasy *Gully Folk*, two children, Betty and Dick, discuss Billy Whiskers, an "old blackfellow"¹⁵ whose grandfather, Wungawarra, taught him magic words that when uttered would summon fairies to protect his people. A key element in Australian fairy books is the problematic of a European genre



Illustration 4 : Wongo and the Princess from *Gully Folk* (Melbourne: Publishing Company, 1919).

15. Minnie I. Rowe, *Gully Folk* (Melbourne: Melbourne Publishing Company, 1919), 20.

introduced into the Australian landscape. As Bill Ashcroft points out, “colonialism brings with it a sense of dislocation between the environment and the imported language [visual imagery] now used to describe it.”¹⁶ This sense of dislocation manifests in the insertion of European fairies into a landscape utterly different from those of the Old World.

As Dick utters the name “Wungawarra,” a tiny fur-covered fairy, Wongo, leaps out of the bush, demanding to know what Dick has done with Wungawarra. A crowd of fairies then materialize, led by a stern-faced princess.

Rowe’s full-colour illustrations of Wongo and the princess suggest an uncanny combination of European and Australian elements (illustration 4). Wongo’s name, his clothing (a tight-fitting garment of fur, laced at the front), and his hair (swept up in a topknot) suggest Nativeness without specifically Aboriginal references, while his face and body are white and his features European. Similarly, the princess, while recognizably a fairy with her dragonfly wings and crown, wears a simple one-shouldered shift made of leaves. Wongo, the princess, and their throng of fairies gather around the two children, hemming them in, pointing at them, scowling, shaking their fists and singing the song:

Where are all the piccanninies?
 Have you stolen them away?
 Say they are not gone forever,
 Say they’ll come again some day!
 Oh, those happy laughing faces!
 Oh, those hearts so kind and gay!
 Where ARE all our piccanninies?
 Pale-faced children, say, oh, say!¹⁷

16. Bill Ashcroft, *Post-Colonial Transformation* (London: Routledge, 2001), 153.

17. Rowe, *Gully Folk*, 27. Capitalization in original.

This uncomfortable encounter between the two children and the fairies is as fraught an episode as any in Australian colonial children's literature, evoking Homi Bhabha's treatment of the "unhomely,"¹⁸ a moment or element that inflects the familiar and normal with unease. The bush, formerly the children's playground, is now a place where an experience of the unhomely "creeps up on you stealthily as your own shadow and suddenly you find yourself...taking the measure of your dwelling in a state of 'incredulous terror.'"¹⁹ The identification of unhomeliness with an Aboriginal presence in the landscape unsettles the children's very identities as the descendants of pioneers. Betty's grandfather was a gold miner, Dick's a squatter, and it seems that their implication in the disappearance of the black children loads Betty and Dick with a sense of guilty complicity.

The dilemma of colonial children's literature is that it seeks to position non-Indigenous readers as young Australians at home in their world, while simultaneously "managing" the colonial past and its sorry stories of violence and dispossession. In *Gully Folk*, fairies are allocated the task of solving this problem of history. The princess explains to Dick and Betty that the king of fairies sent "thousands and thousands of fairy-tribes"²⁰ to prepare countries across the world for the advent of humans:

"We were lucky enough to be among those chosen for the land in the South, which, the King told us as a great secret, he loved best of all."

"Australia," said Betty, softly.

"Yes, Australia!" smiled the fairy. "We chose that beautiful name, but we had to whisper it into the ears of white men for a long, long time before we found one who understood."²¹

18. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 141.

19. *Ibid.*

20. Rowe, *Gully Folk*, 48.

21. *Ibid.*, 48, 50.

The fairies are, then, the true Aborigines, a European race that occupied Australia before Aboriginal people arrived, and taught black people bushcraft; even corroborees were based on Aborigines' observation of fairy dances: "When the full moon looked down into the gullies, they would come and watch us at our dances, some of which they would copy at any time of rejoicing, and call it a corroboree."²² Nineteenth-century British folklorists were preoccupied with theories of origins,²³ postulating that fairytales that survived in folklore comprised the remnants of stories about the dispossessed Aboriginal peoples of Britain. As Andrew McCann notes, nostalgic imaginings of "a people with an intimate, ancestral relationship to place seem to circulate at the very moment that 'belonging', in this fundamental sense, has been disrupted or rendered problematic by processes of urbanization, migration and alienation."²⁴ Rowe's fairies afford just such a fantasy of belonging, asserting their prior occupation of Australia and so displacing Aborigines, who are then treated as merely the first of the migratory peoples to come to "the land in the South."

The fairies, Rowe points out, are responsible for the naming of Australia, but also for the fatal inferiority of Aboriginal people, and here the narrative invokes 19th-century theories about a hierarchy of races in which Aborigines occupy the lowest rung. The princess explains, "We are to blame...for not teaching [black people] more quickly. While the fairies in other lands were urging their people on as quickly as possible, we were content for ours to remain like little

22. *Ibid.*, 53.

23. Carole Silver, *Strange and Secret Peoples: Fairies and Victorian Conscientiousness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Nicola Bown, *Fairies in Nineteenth-Century Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

24. Andrew McCann, *Marcus Clarke's Bohemia: Literature and Modernity in Colonial Melbourne* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2004), 2.

children."²⁵ The doctrine of Social Darwinism is reasserted, and the moment of unhomeliness passes; Betty begs the princess to "forgive the white men, and love the white children as you do the black piccaninnies!"²⁶ whereupon the fairies sing a song that reverses their earlier lament:

As long as the children need us,
We'll stay in each gully and glade,
For the fairies have lived for the children
Since the time when the world was made.
We'll pine no more for our lost ones,
But joyously dance and sing;
If we can't have BLACK piccaninnies,
Then WHITE are the next best thing.²⁷

If the fickleness of the fairies of *Gully Folk* sounds a warning about how long the white piccaninnies will remain the next best thing, the text provides enough cues to reassure its readers that they are protected by their superior capacity to move beyond childhood and into an imagined adulthood, inserted into the landscape as the country's new Natives blessed and authorized by the fairies who are the true indigenes of Australia.

Fairies continue to be put to work in texts that engage with contemporary politics. Bob Graham's much-awarded picture books generally thematize suburban life and family relationships. His 2002 book *Jethro Byrde Fairy Child* features a family living in a block of flats just over the fence from a petrol station. Annabelle is keen on fairies, and one day she finds one, a boy called Jethro Byrde, whose father, Orrin, has made an emergency landing, planting the family's hamburger van among the weeds in the service station driveway, just where Annabelle can slip through a broken paling:

25. Rowe, *Gully Folk*, 54.

26. *Ibid.*, 75.

27. *Ibid.* Capitalization in original.

There she met a boy—as big as her finger. His wings shivered in the breeze. “Who are you?” she said.

He hitched up his jeans, flew onto a leaf and wiped his nose on the back of his sleeve. “Jethro,” he said. “Jethro Byrde...I’m a *Fairy Child*.”²⁸

With their nomadic lifestyle and their fondness for fiddle-playing and dancing, Jethro and his family might be Romani; they call themselves Travellers. They are invisible to Annabelle’s parents, who good-naturedly pretend that they can see Jethro and serve “fairy cakes and camomile tea in fairy cups.” Graham here adopts a narrative strategy common in picture books, where child readers are positioned to know what adult characters do not, constructed as knowing subjects in control of the narrative. Given that picture books are commonly mediated to young children by parents or others, this disjunction of knowledge adds its own pleasure to the reading context:

“Mummy and Daddy, this is Jethro Byrde. He’s a Fairy Child, and his family have come to tea,” said Annabelle.

“We must make them welcome, *and* make them tea,” said Mum.

But she was looking the wrong way.

“Can you see Jethro, Daddy?” Annabelle asked.

“I ... I think I can, Annie. I think he’s ... ON THE FENCE?”²⁹

When the fairies leave to make hamburgers at the Fairy Travellers’ Picnic, they leave Annabelle a keepsake in the form of a watch big enough for her finger, which keeps “fairy time.” That night, from her bedroom, Annabelle sees a procession of fairies riding in the moonlight. The angle of the penultimate illustration, looking up from the service station and toward the night sky, sets the

28. Bob Graham, *Jethro Byrde, Fairy Child* (London: Walker Books, 2002), n.p.

29. *Ibid.* Capitalization in original.

Travellers against the mundane everyday scene of graffiti and apartment blocks, closing with Annabelle asleep, "their busy chattering and the buzzing of their wings and their faraway music"³⁰ filling her dreams.

Graham created *Jethro Byrde* against the backdrop of the Tampa affair in 2001, when the Howard government refused to allow a Norwegian freighter to land in Australia with 438 Afghani refugees who had been rescued from a sinking Indonesian vessel. Following the Tampa affair and during the remainder of the Howard government's period of office, a substantial number of refugee narratives for children were published in Australia, including picture books intended for young children. *Jethro Byrde* is one of a small number of picture books that approaches the topic of asylum seekers through fantasy rather than realist narratives. In line with Graham's usual approach, the narrative filters large-scale concerns through the everyday and the ordinary.

The fairies of *Jethro Byrde* are strangers, invisible to the adult world. The narrative may seem to hinge upon the familiar opposition between adults who do not see fairies and children who do, but the ideological burden of this book is more subtle than this. As a text directed to adults as well as the children they read to, it suggests a distinction between children who welcome strangers and adults who do not recognize them as being like themselves. Working backward from the narrative to the book's epigraph, it is clear that Graham's fairies can also be read as angels: "Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: For thereby some have entertained angels unawares."³¹ The epigraph will, of course, be inaccessible to most of the young children implied by the text. Like many picture books, *Jethro Byrde* performs a double act, implying plural readerships with various levels of textual experience. When Annabelle's

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

father, pretending to see Jethro, says, “I think he’s... ON THE FENCE,” this phrase echoes the debates over the political and moral implications of the Tampa episode that raged at the time. Although the fairies in *Jethro Byrde* are outsiders to the world of humans, the narrative focuses not so much on their difference as on the extent to which they are recognized as “like us.”

So, what does children’s literature tell us? Texts for children are highly responsive to socio-political events and are implicated in shaping the values of children and young people. Such texts are always informed by the assumptions and values of their producers, so that to examine children’s texts is to discern what adults regard as desirable possibilities or negative models of human behaviour. Texts for youth audiences address immediate and pressing cultural concerns, including race relations, globalization, ecological questions, and concepts of sexuality. Research in children’s literature is, I think, not so much about themes or content but about how texts position their implied readers—how these texts imagine children and their anxieties and desires—and what they propose to their readers about individuals, human relationships, and societies. The Indigenous texts I considered, *Down the Hole* and *When I Was Little, Like You*, introduce readers to ugly and painful episodes in Australian history. At the same time they advocate solidarity and assert the enduring values of Indigenous societies, founded upon kinship, country and the law handed down by the Ancestors. The 1919 fantasy *Gully Folk* points to the faultlines that trouble settler society in Australia, the legacy of the forced appropriation of land and displacement of Indigenous peoples, while Bob Graham’s *Jethro Byrde* draws on the medievalist trope of the fairy to engage with contemporary politics around the troubled topic of refugees and Australian citizenship.

I began this discussion by remarking on the unlikely trajectory of my academic career. The most unexpected twist for me has been the great privilege of receiving a Trudeau Fellowship. The Foundation’s

funding of Fellows, Scholars, and Mentors testifies to the high value that it places on humanities and social science research. At a time when scholars in these fields often struggle to maintain a sense of purposefulness, the Trudeau Foundation insists that scholarship and creative work contribute in real and tangible ways to improving the social and cultural fabric. Children's literature research, like the texts it studies, addresses crucial contemporary issues. By drawing attention to how stories and language shape and direct readers' perceptions and responses, it offers critical perspectives and modes of reading valuable to those who produce children's texts, those who mediate them to children, and the children who engage with them.

ISABELLA BAKKER

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BIOGRAPHY

Isabella Bakker is a professor at York University where she was the first woman chair of the Department of Political Science. She is a leading authority in the fields of political economy, public finance, gender, and development, and her work was recognized when she was named a Fulbright New Century Scholar in 2004. She has held visiting professorships at a number of institutions, including the European University Institute, New York University, and the University of California, Santa Barbara.

She has also held consultancies with the Canadian and Ontario governments, the Commonwealth Secretariat, and the United Nations, as well as with numerous women's advocacy groups dedicated to advancing economic and social justice. She was nominated a Trudeau Fellow in 2009 and a member of the Royal Society of Canada in 2011.

Throughout her career, Dr. Bakker's policy and advocacy work has been committed to the enhancement of democratic dialogue, equitable global social change, and gender equality. She has consistently explored and developed new national and international mechanisms and processes needed to improve governance so as to promote the empowerment of women in an era of intensified globalization.

Her pioneering contributions in scholarly and advocacy work integrate public policy, economics, international studies, and gender-based analysis and have resulted in numerous articles and books, notably *The Strategic Silence: Gender and Economic Policy*; *Rethinking Restructuring: Gender and Change in Canada*; *Power,*

Production and Social Reproduction: Human In/security in the Global Political Economy; and most recently, *Beyond States and Markets: The Challenges of Social Reproduction*.

Her work over the last decade and a half has involved an increasingly important sphere of research: the complex interplay between gender and (international) public policy, and in particular how macroeconomics, especially fiscal policy, influences gender questions. Her continuing work rests upon the assumption, supported by research carried out by United Nations agencies, that more gender-sensitive and socially equitable economic policies produce better frameworks for human development. Her research agenda therefore addresses three broad questions: What policies contribute to more equitable, socially just, and sustainable development? What is the role of gender in the global economy, particularly given that the majority of the world's poor are women and children? And what is the link between macroeconomic policies, social development, and gender equality?

ABSTRACT

Some 40 years after the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, today in Canada, most of the media, most members of the two major political parties, and the current government all seem to agree that Canadian men and women are equal now, and much of the focus of government programs is on the plight of women in other parts of the world, particularly those in the Global South.

Isabella Bakker critically examines these new directions in public policy to pose this question: is feminism still relevant for addressing questions of inequality in Canada? To do so means not only looking at the evidence since 1970 identifying the continuing institutional barriers for realizing women's economic empowerment, but also critically examining the dominant paradigms of economic policy that embody what Bakker has called "the strategic silence." This new paradigm of governance treats economic agents as generic in ways that virtually erase women and gender inequality as the subjects and objects of public policy. And this paradigm has not only influenced essential human rights commitments in the past, but is shaping also our society's future.

LECTURE

“The Unfinished Business of Women’s Economic Empowerment: A Call for a New Economic Equity Commission”

Brock University

SEPTEMBER 29, 2011

Introduction

I would like to use the occasion of this lecture¹ to argue for the formation of a national Economic Equity Commission to review our society’s and governments’ progress in tackling what Sam Bowles and Herbert Gintis refer to as the “mosaic of domination.”² The construction of a more just and democratic society involves the

1. I wish to thank Adrienne Roberts for her research and editorial help with this lecture. I have also benefited from a Standard Research Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and generous support from the Trudeau Foundation. Some of the initial ideas for this lecture were presented at the Canadian Federation for Humanities and Social Sciences annual congress in Ottawa in May 2009, in a session titled “25 Years After: A Retrospective on the Abella Commission and Employment Equity” organized by Dr. Malinda Smith. I wish to thank her and Shelagh Day for their support and comments. A more detailed discussion of the proposed equity commission will be published in Malinda Smith, ed., *Understudy: Equity in the Academy (Twenty-five Years After the Abella Commission)* University of Toronto Press, forthcoming. I am also grateful to Stephen Gill for his valuable comments and for the editorial guidance of Bettina B. Cenerelli and John Stocks.

2. Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Democracy and Capitalism: Property, Community and the Contradictions of Modern Social Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

progressive elimination of familiar forms of structural or personal domination. Indeed, my argument calls upon our government to meet its obligations to fulfill economic and social rights as promised in the Charter of the United Nations and international human rights covenants—obligations we are required to meet under international law. I shall illustrate how recent Canadian governments have undermined the very conditions of these commitments through economic policies that have chipped away at the social provisioning that collectivizes risk. This has been accompanied by a politics of silencing equity groups as claims-makers in the public policy arena.³

It is almost three decades since the Royal Commission on Equality in Employment (1984), commonly known as the Abella Commission, delivered its conclusion that persons with disabilities, women, members of visible minorities, and Aboriginal peoples did not have fair, equitable, and transparent access to the job market.⁴ The Abella Commission was propelled by a specific theorization of the nature of the Canadian political economy *as it actually existed*, and then generated a series of questions and debates about possible alternatives that would help to *mobilize progressive social change to achieve employment equity for marginalized groups*. Key to the commission's understanding of economic and social development was that national (and sub-national) levels of government bore a major responsibility for realizing the social and economic rights of all members of Canadian society.

3. For more on this, see Janine Brodie, "We Are All Equal Now: Contemporary Gender Politics in Canada," *Feminist Theory* vol. 9, n° 2 (2008), 145-164.

4. See <http://pi.library.yorku.ca/ojs/index.php/cws/article/view/12792/11875> to download the Abella Commission Report. I was very fortunate to work as a researcher for the Abella Commission. Judge Abella's bold vision and the analysis that supported her recommendations were part of a broader movement to forge a new set of debates around employment equity. It is in this spirit of democratic dialogue that I continue to conduct my policy and advocacy work for equitable global social change, human rights, and gender equity.

It seems to me that now is an opportune time to pose some very similar questions about the basic nature of the Canadian and global political economy in light of the changes that have occurred since the Abella Commission. This requires scrutiny beyond the scope of Abella's mandate and encompasses the broader institutions and policies that regulate economic and social rights. It also demands that we consider the profoundly interlinked crises of finance, environment, and social reproduction (which encompasses the daily and generational reproduction of labour, the caring for human beings, and the reproduction of values, norms, and lifestyles) that have been intensified by the recent global financial emergency and have raised widespread questions about the character of government responses. The massive sums of public funds directed at bailing out banks and financial institutions have quickly produced a series of austerity measures in OECD countries to reign in public spending. Opposition to such measures is most pronounced in countries dealing with sovereign debt crises such as Spain and Greece, yet a more general disquietude can be sensed at the level of transnational elites—the business, economic, and opinion leaders who meet at such venues as the World Economic Forum. They are signalling their own concerns about rising inequality as a pressing question for global public policy.⁵ The sense is that increasing income disparity may not only be a driver of greater instability and crises of growing severity (e.g., food riots, rise of right-wing populism), but may also yield weaker economic performance. In the second part of my lecture, I will consider what has been called the “politics of austerity” and rising income inequalities.

This lecture will make the case for an Economic Equity Commission by reflecting on four sets of issues that relate to the changing political economy and social relations. These changes present both

5. World Economic Forum, “The Davos Debrief: Policy Priorities, Sunday 30 January 2011,” <http://www.weforum.org/>.

constraints and opportunities for realizing more progressive forms of social reproduction and gender relations. An Economic Equity Commission would engage the public through direct and indirect forms of democracy to address issues of exclusion, inequality, and the realization of economic and social progress.

First, I consider the changes in the structure and nature of the Canadian labour force and unpaid care work, as well as the implications of these changes for women, who do the bulk of unpaid work. One hypothesis holds that changes under neoliberalism have increased the “social exploitation” of working-class women—in contrast to middle-class women, who can partially offset their burdens of unpaid work in the home through “global care chains.”⁶ One example of this is the hiring of foreign domestic workers by professional women to do their unpaid care work.

Second, the new macroeconomics of austerity, meaning the austerity measures enacted to meet budget deficits following the economic emergency of 2008 to 2010, is interrogated. This includes the prevailing macroeconomic model of reduced social expenditures and the practice of sound money, which has been the prevailing fiscal and monetary ideology of the genderless “self-help” society of the past few decades. It became obvious in 2008 and 2009 that this approach was a *political choice*. Enormous bailouts of banks and other corporations were endorsed when alternative policy options, such as fiscal measures that would have expanded social expenditures, were not pursued. Governments could have *chosen* increased fiscal outlays for education, health, and welfare that would have boosted effective demand and economic growth, in addition to mitigating the double burden on women in paid and unpaid work in a time of falling incomes.

6. Arlie Hochschild, “Global Care Chains and Emotional Surplus Value,” in *On the Edge: Living with Global Capitalism*, ed. Will Hutton and Anthony Giddens (London: Jonathan Cape, 2000), 131.

Third, this lecture explores *what alternative institutions and initiatives can be employed to make new progressive arguments that counter the macroeconomics of austerity*. I suggest that the time may be ripe for a new Abella Commission—an Economic Equity Commission—that is both national and international in its scope of inquiry and linked to a rights-based approach to public budgeting. A rights-based approach to public finances is embedded in a framework of rights and obligations designed to strengthen the capacities of rights-holders to make claims and of duty-bearers (state and non-state actors) to meet their obligations.⁷ This introduces mechanisms, institutions, and policies of accountability and transparency in the budget process that can ensure the realization of entitlements and respond to the violation of rights.⁸ While the Abella Commission principally focused on national questions, the intensification of globalization and its interlinkages means that a new commission will need to place the issues of gender equity and the progressive realization of social and economic rights in a truly global context.

Finally, a *new social and economic paradigm is proposed, as well as new policy proposals and priorities* that might be considered in order to facilitate progressive social reproduction and the fulfillment of key human rights commitments to women.

Changes in the Structure and Nature of the Canadian Labour Force and Unpaid Care

Twenty-seven years after the Abella Commission, serious obstacles remain on the path to gender equity—one of the pillars of the commission's work. While the decline of the male breadwinner model

7. United Nations Development Programme, *The Human Rights Based Approach to Development: Towards a Common Understanding Among the UN Agencies* (New York: UNDP, 2003), <http://www.undp.org/>.

8. Isabella Bakker, *Fiscal Policy, Accountability and Voice: The Example of Gender Responsive Budgeting*, prepared as an Occasional Paper for the United Nations Human Development Report (New York: UNDP 2002).

and the rise of a new dual-earner reality for families has meant that greater numbers of women have entered the labour force (the employment rate in 2009 for women with children under the age of 16 living at home was 72.9 percent—nearly twice the rate of 39.1 percent in 1976), women in Canada continue to face discrimination in the labour market. For instance, the wage gap between male and female workers in Canada remains significant, with full-time female workers earning about 71 percent of what males earn. The gender wage gap is greater between women and men with university degrees than those without a degree.⁹ In addition, while women have increased their representation in several professional fields (making up over half of the people employed in certain medical fields and business and financial positions), the majority of women continue to be employed in traditionally “female” occupations such as the characteristically low-paid service and retail sectors. Women are also more likely to be “precariously” employed in part-time, temporary, contract, and casual jobs, which characterized 40 percent of women’s employment in Canada in 2004 versus 29 percent for men. Women’s disproportional participation in such unprotected forms of work means that they are less likely than men to qualify for many benefits like unemployment insurance that continue to support only full-time permanent work and thus fail to provide for gendered differences in employment.¹⁰

Women also continue to take on the majority of unpaid work associated with social reproduction and have been disproportionately affected by reductions in state support for such services. The most recent edition of the OECD’s *Society at a Glance 2011: OECD Social Indicators* devotes a chapter to unpaid work inside and

9. Statistics Canada, *Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report, 1976 to 2009, Sixth Edition*, Document #89-503-X (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2011)

10. Monica Townson and Kevin Hayes, *Women and the Employment Insurance Program* (Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2007).

outside of households¹¹. The study finds that the value of unpaid work amounts to about one-third of GDP in OECD countries. In all countries, women were found to do more unpaid work than men and the gender gap to average 2.5 hours per day, or 17.5 hours per week. Canadian women continue to perform on average 4.3 hours of unpaid work per day compared to 2.5 hours by men.¹² Care work is not valued in considerations of national resources, though estimates suggest it amounts to 30 percent to 45 percent of Canada's \$1.5 trillion GDP. While some families and individuals have turned to the market for the provision of homecare services, in many instances women have assumed the responsibility for this work. For example, Statistics Canada's 2005 General Social Survey found that in higher income brackets there has been a convergence between men and women toward a "genderless" breadwinner model, with the caveat that the work of social reproduction is secured through the market and done by women, often from the Global South.¹³ The genderless breadwinner model continues to depend on women's labour, but the responsibility and risk for that work has been individualized and removed from the purview of states and capital.

In contrast, families at the lower end of the income scale are much less likely to subcontract the work of social reproduction. Only 7 percent of households earning less than \$40,000 paid for domestic help in 2004 compared with 43 percent of households earning \$160,000 or more.¹⁴ This has led to a "double burden" for many poorer women who now work longer hours in both paid and unpaid labour. Given the persistent *feminization of poverty* in

11. OECD, *Society at a Glance 2011: OECD Social Indicators* (Paris: OECD, 2011).

12. No author, *Unpaid Work and Canada's Long Form Census* (Ottawa: Canadian Federation of University Women, 2011).

13. Statistics Canada, "General social survey: Paid and unpaid work," <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/060719/dq060719b-eng.htm>.

14. *Ibid.*

Canada and the high rates of poverty for female-headed single-parent households, these trends present considerable tensions for many women.¹⁵ Indeed, as Brodie and Bakker conclude in a detailed report for Status of Women Canada, the continued fragmentation and erosion of the Canadian social assistance regime and the rise of tax-delivered social policies over the past decade (which do not benefit low-income women who often do not have enough taxable income to qualify for benefits) has left Canada's poorest—of whom women and children, Aboriginal peoples, and visible minorities represent a disproportionate amount—even poorer and more insecure.

Additional tensions associated with the increasingly marketized approach to care provision will only increase with the ageing of the population. It is estimated that by 2026, one Canadian in five will have reached the age of 65.¹⁶ While increasing numbers of women have gained access to higher education and have achieved significant gains in the political sphere, they continue to be underrepresented in Canadian politics and most of its key social institutions. For instance, in the 2008 election, while a record number of women won seats in the House of Commons, their representation was a meager 22.1 percent (Canada currently ranks 45th internationally in terms of women's representation in the lower house of parliament) and visible minority and Aboriginal women were even further underrepresented.¹⁷ By way of contrast, the Nordic countries have among the highest political representation of women in the world.

15. Armine Yalnizyan, *Canada's Commitment to Equality: A Gender Analysis of the Last Ten Federal Budgets (1995–2005)* (Ottawa: Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action, 2005); Janine Brodie and Isabella Bakker, *Where Are the Women? Gender Equity, Budgets and Canadian Public Policy* (Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2008), <http://www.policyalternatives.ca/reports/2008/09/reportsstudies1962/>.

16. Health Canada, *Canada's Ageing Population* (Ottawa: Department of Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2002).

17. Julie Cool, *Women in Parliament* (Ottawa: Library of Parliament, 2008), <http://www.parl.gc.ca/content/lop/researchpublications/prb0562-e.htm>.

The Swedish political scientist Drude Dahlerup comments on this:

This increase took place largely during the last 30 years based on the notion of “equality of result.” The argument is that real equal opportunity does not exist just because formal barriers are removed. Direct discrimination and a complex pattern of hidden barriers prevent women from getting their share of political influence. Quotas and other forms of positive measures are thus a means towards equality of result. The argument is based on the experience that equality as a goal cannot be reached by formal equal treatment as a means.¹⁸

In short, despite women's greater numerical presence and the narrowing of broadly defined gender gaps, a system of concealed gender asymmetries and segmentation remains that places limits on women's access to income, authority, and power. While we can see a convergence at the most general level toward a model that relies on both members of a household to earn a living, there is still a strong divergence in how one earns a living, the rewards and entitlements that go with it, and the extent to which unpaid social reproduction work is carried out by women and men.

Beyond the Politics of Neoliberal Austerity

Feminist economists have highlighted how neoliberal macroeconomic policies of balanced budgets and free markets have made it more difficult to reduce inequalities between women and men and intensified the burdens of both paid labour and unpaid work, producing an increase in the general rate of social exploitation.¹⁹ The recent shocks to global capitalism have also prompted severe

18. Drude Dahlerup, “Using Quotas to Increase Women's Political Representation,” in *Women in Parliament Beyond Numbers* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 1998), http://www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org/beijing12/Chapter4_Dahlerup.pdf.

19. United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, “Gender Equality: Striving for Justice in an Unequal World” (Geneva: UNRISD, 2005).

restrictions on public spending due to “fiscal squeeze”—less revenue due to trade liberalization and tariff reductions, declining tax rates on capital and high-income individuals, and a greater tax burden on workers.²⁰ The effect of fiscal squeeze has been the privatization of the institutions and mechanisms of social reproduction so that the care of the elderly, day care for children, and some aspects of health and other social provisions must either be paid for in the market or be carried out in the household, usually by women’s unpaid *work*, which the politics of austerity treats implicitly as the ultimate safety net.²¹

For example, in the United States, the fiscal squeeze has brought many states to the point of fiscal crisis: total shortfalls for all states through 2011 are estimated at \$350 to \$370 billion. As a result, over 40 states have imposed budget cuts that reduce vital services to some of the most vulnerable demographics, including women, children, the elderly, the disabled, the sick, the homeless, and the mentally ill. In California (where tax increases require a two-thirds majority in both houses of the state legislature to pass) then-Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger cut, \$6.3 million from the Department of Aging, \$7 million from the Department of Public Health, \$178.6 million

20. Isabelle Grunberg, “Double Jeopardy: Globalization, Liberalization and the Fiscal Squeeze,” *World Development* 26, no. 4 (1998), 591-605.

21. In this sense, feminists have argued that women’s unpaid labour operates as a form of what economists refer to as “moral hazard.” For mainstream economists and policy-makers, the problem of moral hazard arises when government subsidies and bailouts remove the compulsion for firms to act responsibly—in other words, when governments socialize the risks of big business as they have done in the context of the contemporary financial crisis. Feminist political economists have pointed out that women’s unpaid labour operates as a source of moral hazard as it expands to compensate for government cutbacks in social spending in times of fiscal austerity, and often in times of financial crisis. See Irene Van Staveren, *The Values of Economics: An Aristotelian Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

from a program offering health insurance to poor children, and \$16 million from domestic violence programs.²²

The key point here is that the political and economic ideology of austerity appeared to be damaged as a result of the global economic and financial implosion of 2008 to 2009. The actions not only of the Canadian government, but also of its U.S. and OECD partners in responding to the collapse by means of gigantic financial bailouts of corporations and banks to the tune of approximately US\$17 trillion, shows that these were in fact deeply *political choices* and that resources can be mobilized if the political will is available and if the political choices are recognized.

It is now evident that neoliberals are seeking to impose new forms of fiscal austerity that will target the very social policies that enable the dignified living promised by the Canadian government as per its commitments under Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979). We should be asking what the *opportunity costs* of the bailouts are in terms of the foregone alternatives. The funds could have been used to create institutions that more effectively remobilize the economy, mitigate rises in unemployment, and support the care and provisioning that underpin society and the economy.

Creating New Spaces and Institutions for Political Contestation of Budgets—A Call for an Economic Equity Commission

The present crisis closes certain spaces for equity claims-making while opening others for the promotion of alternatives and the forging of a *new common sense* about what is desirable and possible if we take a rights-based approach to public finances as opposed to the fiscal austerity of the last few decades.

22. Jennifer Steinhauer, "California budget trimmed further," *New York Times*, July 28, 2009.

One potential mechanism for widespread participation and debate should be a new Abella-like commission of inquiry—an *Economic Equity Commission*. At the outset, this commission would reflect on what equity/inequality means in the current context of governance—questions of recognition, redistribution, and representation—as well as the prevailing neoliberal mantra of market citizenship. The focus of such a commission would be on the obstacles to achieving equity for all marginalized groups and the development of effective public policy responses to these challenges. In particular, an Economic Equity Commission would begin with a focus on changing patterns of income distribution and taxation in Canada.

One result of liberalization has been the reduction of direct taxes on corporations (and to an extent highly-paid mobile labour) at the expense of public goods and the collective costs of social reproduction. According to the OECD, the shift in direct income taxes and social security contributions has played a major role in exacerbating income inequality in its member countries over the last two decades. The change toward more regressive systems of taxation can be described as a double shift²³: on the one hand, a reduction in the highest corporate income tax rates and less direct taxes for upper-income earners and on the other, an increasing reliance on broad-based indirect taxes such as value added taxes (VAT) that act as regressive penalties, since most people, irrespective of their income level, must pay these taxes on daily goods and services. In reality, this means that those at the lower end of the income scale pay a greater proportion of their total income in taxes than those at the higher end. More than 125 countries rely on some form of VAT—it is

23. I want to thank Stephen Gill for this insight. In future work I will link this double shift in taxation to the intensification of the double burden of women in paid and unpaid work.

the backbone of most of the world's revenue.²⁴ This double shift in tax regimes is a key contributor to rising income inequalities.²⁵

Recent data on rising income inequality notes that in the large majority of countries, household incomes of the top 10 percent grew faster than those of the poorest 10 percent.²⁶ In fact, the current average income of the richest 10 percent is about nine times that of the poorest 10 percent. The empirical evidence acknowledges that tax-benefit policies

have offset some of the large increases in market-income inequality but they appear to have become less effective at doing so over the past 10-15 years. The authors of the report note that up until the mid-1990s, tax-benefit systems did offset more than half the rise in market-income inequality however in some countries taxes and benefits have become less redistributive during the past decade.²⁷

The changes in redistribution are largely attributed to changes in benefit-receipt patterns and benefit generosity.

Conversely, the countries that have higher social spending are also those with more equal income distribution. The reduction in income inequality may reflect the fact that social spending partially offsets the rise in inequality caused by the market and other sources.²⁸

In Canada, government indicators of well-being illustrate that income disparities increased after 1995. There was a rise in the after-

24. Caren Grown, "Taxation and Gender Equality," in *Taxation and Gender Equity*, ed. Caren Grown and Imraan Valodia (New York: Routledge, 2001). On VAT and the question of regressivity, see James M. Bickley, *Value-added Taxes as a Revenue Option: A Primer* (Washington D.C. Congressional Research Service, 7-5700, March 22, 2011).

25. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, "Why Inequality Matters, in 1,000 Words or Less," <http://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/why-inequality-matters-1000-words-or-less>.

26. OECD, *Society at a Glance 2011: OECD Social Indicators* (Paris: OECD, 2011), 5.

27. *Ibid.*, 12.

28. *Ibid.*, 74.

tax income of the top income group and very little change for other income groups over the period 1995 to 2007.²⁹ The Economic Equity Commission would examine this changing trend and evaluate how tax reforms (e.g., tax cuts for upper income groups and increased reliance on value added taxes) and changes in the social policy regime have affected income disparities.

The second mandate of the commission would be to develop instruments and methods for linking resources to the realization of economic and social rights. Such an effort would build on existing civil society efforts such as those of the Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA), which has been actively engaged in monitoring the Canadian government's compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and other human rights obligations.³⁰

29. "Income disparities shown as ratios (i.e., the top income group divided by the lowest or middle income group) reveal that families in the top 20% earned between 8.4 and 9.1 times more than families in the bottom 20% in the period 1976 to 2007. In the same period, families in the top 20% had an income 2.3 to 2.6 times higher than the middle 60%. In 2007, the disparities were among the highest in the previous 31 years, with the top 20% having an average income 9.1 times that of the bottom 20%, and 2.6 times that of the middle 60%." Human Resources and Development Canada, "Indicators of Well-Being in Canada," Government of Canada, <http://www4.hrsdc.gc.ca/h.4m.2@-eng.jsp>.

30. In a report prepared for the most recent United Nations review of Canada's compliance with CEDAW, FAFIA (www.fafia-afia.org/) pointed to a number of recent policies that violate the agreement, including the cancellation of federal-provincial/territorial agreements put in place to develop a national childcare system; the refusal of the federal government to introduce a new pay equity law recommended by its own Pay Equity Task Force and the Parliamentary Committee on the Status of Women; changes to the guidelines for funding women's organizations (preventing them from receiving funds for domestic advocacy activities or for any activities related to the lobbying of federal, provincial, or municipal governments); and the elimination of Status of Women Canada's Policy Research Fund.

The commission would have a mandate to concretize the links between international human rights commitments and national macroeconomic policies and how these meet or detract from the obligations by governments to respect, protect, and fulfill human rights in general, and women's rights in particular.

It needs to be emphasized that over the last few decades, Canada has been a signatory to a number of United Nations commitments to women's equality, human rights, and more inclusive economic development, such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (1966), the CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action (BPA), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and, most recently, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples³¹. Canada has made commitments to integrate the goals of these international agreements into its policy plans. This includes the mobilization of resources to realize these objectives, as well as the monitoring of progress on the basis of the documented links between women's equality and broader economic and social progress. The proposed commission would therefore be completely consistent with Canada's obligations. It would examine the many ways that government could avail itself of the "maximum available resources," as expressed in the ICESCR (1966).

Recently this has meant an exclusive focus on budget expenditures at the exclusion of other key economic tools that can advance the realization of human rights—monetary policy, financial sector policy, taxation, and deficit financing.³² A more expansive

31. <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cescr.htm>; <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>; <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/>; <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>; www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/declaration.html.

32. Radhika Balakrishnan et al., *Maximum Available Resources and Human Rights*, prepared for the Center for Women's Global Leadership (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers, 2011), <http://www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/globalcenter/publications/marreport.pdf>.

consideration of what it means to use maximum available resources would focus on other determinants of resource availability in order to move toward equality by extending substantive benefits and protections in the economic and social realms.

The commission would also tackle the disconnect between commitments to human rights and political action through budgets. This disconnect exists for a number of reasons. First, there are fundamental differences between human rights thinking and the dominant governing philosophy of neoliberalism—the latter consciously seeks to undermine the idea of social collectivities and instead promotes an individualized market-based logic of self-help. Second, the disconnect stems from skepticism on behalf of the women's movement and the Left that the language and politics of a human rights strategy necessarily individualizes and depoliticizes social struggles and cannot challenge systemic inequalities. I would echo Nancy Fraser's insight that rights must be viewed dialectically: they are both a language of mobilization and an institutional device for translating social movement power into structural change.³³ From this perspective, the content and meaning of rights become a site of struggle rather than a given or fixed position. By linking rights to resources, a case can be made that there has been substantive discrimination in the application of the ICESCR that commits signatories to ensure an adequate standard of living through the use of the maximum available resources. Such a focus relies less on the legal architecture of the human rights state than on governments and central banks as key sites for directing financial resources toward the realization of human rights.

33. Nancy Fraser and Kate Bedford, "Social Rights and Gender Justice in the Neoliberal Moment: A Conversation about Welfare and Transnational Politics," *Feminist Theory*, vol. 9, n° 2 (2008).

Progressive Policy Proposals and Priorities: The Need for New Paradigms

The need for such a shift in policy and a new paradigm for our dominant social and economic system could not be more pressing than in this current moment of widespread global financial crisis, economic meltdown and social dislocation. The call for a new “common sense” holds great appeal to politically significant segments of the population and has the potential to generate political mobilization and momentum as a movement for change. A new common sense would start with a critique of the existing order of things but would also involve progressive and constructive political proposals that move us beyond the present unequal, unjust, and economically less productive situation.

A critique might begin with a review of the existing policy initiatives that are associated with the global economic and financial crisis, which in most countries is also a profound social and ecological crisis. The effective socialization of the risks and losses of a small minority (big corporations and wealthy people) has meant greater downloading of risk to the vast majority of individuals as the institutions designed to socialize risk such as health care, unemployment insurance, and pensions systems become increasingly subjected to expenditure restraint, privatization, or mediation by stock markets.

Beyond a critique, a more democratic policy agenda would rest on several elements that I outline in detail below. The first set begins with a re-examination of the notion of equity in taxation. Second, the taxation principle of ability-to-pay needs to be related to more effective and encompassing forms of tax collection. This would also require more effective funding of tax surveillance systems to track forms of evasion such as corporate transfer pricing, tax loopholes, tax subsidies, and offshore havens. Third, systems of public finance need to be made more democratically accountable

through popular participation in budget formulation and auditing. Fourth, expenditure frameworks should be consistent with social justice and widening prosperity. This means recognizing that macro-economic policies related to questions such as deficit repayment are also social policies that redistribute income, risk, and opportunity among different segments of the population. Finally, a progressive policy agenda must ensure that decent work is available and that the burdens of care are shared equally between women and men.

The following changes are some I propose:

- *Broadening tax structures and developing global institutional arrangements that prevent tax evasion and strengthen national tax regimes (preventing competition that may lead to a “race to the bottom”).* This would involve a series of measures. The first would seek to establish a more progressive tax regime given the links between stability, sustainability, and more egalitarian income distributions. The second would address the sustainability of the tax base through more equitable income distribution, the amelioration of the most immediate crises of social reproduction, and the fulfillment of substantive economic and social rights commitments. This would require more effective funding of tax surveillance systems to track forms of tax evasion such as corporate transfer pricing, tax loopholes, tax subsidies, and offshore havens. The Stiglitz Commission recently took a similar position, advocating that the UN Committee of Experts on International Cooperation in Tax Matters should be strengthened and upgraded to an intergovernmental body that would help root out tax evasion and corruption and repatriate illegal funds. The commission also suggested that certain international taxes could be earmarked for global objectives, including a carbon tax and a tax on financial transactions.³⁴ Proposals for a global currency tax—the so-called

34. United Nations. *Report of the Commission of Experts of the President of the United Nations General Assembly on Reforms of the International Monetary and Financial System* (New York: United Nations, 2009).

Tobin tax³⁵—are designed to prevent speculative manipulation of currency transactions for short-term profit and to help to sustain consistent flows of capital to less developed countries. Revenue from such a tax could be used globally as a source for universal public provisioning of basic social services and to create a fund to realize gender-equality goals. It has been suggested that a portion of the revenues could be awarded to governments for the design of gender-equitable social protection systems.³⁶ The European Commission has recently called for such a Tobin-style tax on the EU's financial sector to generate direct revenue for its first trillion-euro budget.³⁷ Feminists also point out that a more progressive and equitable tax system needs not only to be inclusive, involving tax compliance for all, but also to be gender sensitive, particularly since different taxation regimes affect men and women across the social spectrum in very different ways.³⁸

- *Facilitating greater public popular budgeting (e.g., gender-responsive budgeting) that would integrate social and economic policies as one, as well as introducing direct democracy into macroeconomic policies.* Since the mid-1990s, there has been a growth of such alternative budgeting processes, with more than 50 countries having engaged in some form of gender budget initiative. However, these initiatives require greater funding from governments and mechanisms to ensure compliance. In the Canadian case, the government has promised to undertake gender-responsive budgeting, yet no

35. The North South Institute, *The Currency Transaction Tax*, <http://www.nsi-ins.ca/english/pdf/CTT.pdf> (n.d.)

36. Isabella Bakker, *Financing for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women: Paradoxes and Possibilities*, prepared for United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women Expert Group Meeting on financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women, Oslo, Norway, September 4-7, 2007.

37. Ian Traynor, "EU calls for 'Tobin' tax in a move to raise direct revenue," *The Guardian*, June 30, 2011, main section, 30.

38. The latter requires support for expanding existing efforts to improve the collection of sex-disaggregated data and data on the gender bias in indirect taxes such as value added, consumption, and trade taxes.

systematic effort is under way and the governmental capacity to undertake gender-responsive budget analysis is on the decline.³⁹ In order to reverse this trend and to achieve equal representation in all stages of the budget process from a broad spectrum of civil society, increased funding for a range of organizations, including women's organizations and gender-quality experts, is needed. Gender-responsive budgeting must be part of the work of the Ministry of Finance and the Bank of Canada as part of the concerted effort to democratize macroeconomic policy-making.

- *Fully costing (global) human rights commitments and aligning these with (national) budgets to support policy coherence.* The proposed Economic Equity Commission would identify the key human rights covenants and methods for linkage.
- *Implementing decent work and equal conditions and wages for women and men.* A number of countries have already made commitments to promoting gender equality in the workforce—the European Employment Strategy (EES) launched in 1997 being one of the most ambitious—but more work needs to be done to develop policies that meet these objectives and strengthen enforcement mechanisms. As the International Labour Organization (ILO) has argued, ensuring equal remuneration for work of equal value (a fundamental right enshrined in ILO Convention No. 100) does not simply involve paying women the same amount as men but is also fundamentally about “redressing the undervaluation of jobs typically performed by women and remunerating them according to their value.”⁴⁰ Among broader structural changes, achieving this goal involves the development of job evaluations that are transparent and free from gender bias. In Quebec, for instance, all companies with over 100 employees are required to set up pay equity commissions of which two-thirds are employee representatives, 50 percent of whom must be women. In addition, as the ILO has outlined, creating gender equality in employment involves a recognition of men's caring

39. Brodie and Bakker, *Where Are the Women?*

40. International Labour Organization, *Equality at Work: Tackling the Challenges* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 2007), 74.

role (through paternity leaves, etc.), increasing the flexibility of schedules to make work more family-compatible, making available good quality and affordable childcare, and promoting a more equal division of family responsibilities between men and women.

These proposals and suggestions are fully consistent with the original intentions of the Abella Commission, yet they also recognize the increased interdependencies and inequalities of the current global political economy. For instance, in the context of the pressures to liberalize cross-border transactions in money, goods, services, people, and information, a “fiscal squeeze” or “structural gap” has created increasing pressure for further privatization to achieve fiscal balance. Feminists must be central to public debates to ensure that women’s economic and social rights, especially the rights of the poorest and most marginalized in Canadian society, are realized through public policies of finance.

Such a turn implies new forms of leadership whereby both women and men place questions of social reproduction at the centre of their private and public lives. It also requires that new structures and relations of democracy be both imagined and created. As the Brazilian experience of the Lula government illustrates, the answer to who should speak for economic policy and the public interest lies in direct and indirect democratic public engagement that addresses exclusion and inequality in an effort to promote greater dignity and social empowerment.⁴¹

41. Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *Free Trade Reimagined* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 215.

JEREMY WEBBER

2009 *Trudeau Fellow*, University of Victoria

BIOGRAPHY

In his research, Professor Jeremy Webber explores the constitutional structure of democratic governance with a keen eye for the challenges and opportunities of cultural diversity. The great task of any society is how to affirm principles and rules to govern society—how to maintain mechanisms for making public decisions that can claim to be legitimate—in the face of continual disagreement over what those principles should be. In highly diverse societies, disagreement is often grounded in different cultures of social debate and decision, indeed often in different practical ways of life. The process of engaging with those differences is difficult, essential, and exhilarating. It forces us to reconsider preconceptions. It reveals aspects of our lives that we might otherwise overlook. It challenges us to find ways to live together, in peace and respect, with people who are different from ourselves. Professor Webber has explored those issues across the domains of labour relations, the interaction between Quebec and the rest of Canada, rights of Indigenous peoples in Canada and Australia, issues of nationhood and cultural minorities generally, and questions of constitutional design and interpretation. He has published widely in all these fields.

Professor Webber was raised in British Columbia. He has degrees from the University of British Columbia (BA in political science), McGill University (LLB and BCL), and Osgoode Hall Law School (LLM). He taught at McGill University from 1987 to 1998, in a faculty that drew value from the fact that it internalized the encounter between two major legal traditions (common law and civil law) and among Canada's linguistic, cultural, and political communities.

He was then recruited to be Dean of Law at the University of Sydney. Professor Webber had a long association, personal and professional, with Australia. His time at Sydney enabled him to speak to constitutional theory in a new context and to contribute, as dean, to a very fine faculty of law. In 2002 he returned to take up the Canada Research Chair in Law and Society at the University of Victoria, attracted by that faculty's quality, its commitment to social justice, its engagement with Indigenous traditions of law and social order, and its desire to bring those lessons into political and legal theory. Victoria is now his home. He was nominated a Trudeau Fellow in 2009.

ABSTRACT

Much of the literature on nationalism, especially cultural nationalism, takes the position that nationalism is an abomination, productive of much harm in the world. Many of the defences of nationalism, including many defences of Quebec nationalism, take refuge in some notion of civic nationalism, in which the nationalism is said to have no cultural content whatever but to be concerned purely and simply with attachment to a nation defined in institutional terms alone. In this lecture, Professor Jeremy Webber takes issue with both of these positions. He argues that nationalism cannot be defined in purely civic terms—or at least, that such definitions misstate the true foundation and driving force of contemporary nationalisms, including Quebec nationalism, the quest of Indigenous peoples for self-government, anticolonial struggles in the Third World, and even the commitment of Canadians to their continued separate existence from the United States of America. At the same time, he argues that there is a form of cultural nationalism that does not fall into the pathologies often associated with nationalism—that is neither chauvinistic nor closed. Drawing upon an analogy to national traditions in music (among other things), he sketches the nature and justification of that form of nationalism and shows that such nationalist commitments, rightly conceived, can allow us to cherish what is most valuable in national communities and nevertheless guard against xenophobic and oppressive deformations.

LECTURE

A Nationalism Neither Chauvinistic Nor Closed

Université Laval

MARCH 24, 2011

I am delighted to be delivering my Trudeau Lecture in Quebec City. It was here that I began my long engagement with the topic of this lecture: how we should understand the encounter of languages and of cultures, and what that encounter tells us about the significance of culture to political life what it tells us about nationhood.

I first came here in the summer of 1979 on a work exchange between the governments of Quebec and British Columbia. It was an interesting summer—two years after the adoption of Bill 101 and less than a year before the referendum on sovereignty-association. I was posted to the Service des études économiques of the Ministry of Agriculture. I will forever be indebted to two people: Mme Danielle Lafrenière, my supervisor in the service, who was welcoming of a rather incompetent and not very bilingual assistant; and Mlle Julia Hunter, a woman who, although she was of a certain age, made clear that she was nevertheless mademoiselle, for she had never been married. She came from a rural area of L'Islet, had only a little schooling, but explored the world of knowledge through her crossword puzzles, assisted by her Larousse. She lived in the second unit on my floor of the modest apartment building on rue Richelieu. She was infinitely gracious and generous, willing to speak with me even when I

was unable to answer back. Under her tutelage, I began the hard but rewarding apprenticeship in learning a second language.

There are so many lessons that I owe to Quebec, both the city and the province. I remember the landlord of that small apartment building telling me that, as a young man, he had worked in the Canada Lafarge cement plant in town. The crew was entirely French-speaking but the foreman spoke English, and so every member of the crew learned English in order to communicate with the foreman. For me, it was an early lesson in the importance of institutional structure to language rights.

Moreover, I returned to Quebec in 1980 to study law at McGill University. I later taught there from 1987 to 1998. The McGill Faculty of Law is resolutely bilingual and bijuridical, teaching in both English and French and both the Quebec civil law and the English-derived common law. Studying and teaching there was a continual education in linguistic and legal diversity, the significance of culture to law and government, and the challenges—and great benefits—of working across cultures.

Those challenges and those benefits have been at the core of all my work in constitutional law, Indigenous relations, and constitutional theory in both Canada and Australia. We are often tempted to think that the most perfect community is uniform in its culture and language, bounded by what its members agree upon and defined by a rich set of shared values. But that is wrong. Every human community contains within it diversity and disagreement, often over its members' most fundamental commitments. The miracle of human community is not that people organize themselves in societies because they are the same, but that they can sustain societies that are rich and satisfying despite their disagreements, despite their continual—and I will argue their invaluable—differences.

But how should one design a constitutional order appropriate to such a diverse community? Some people argue that one should

abstract from cultural differences, rigorously ignore them, and subject everyone to the same rules and procedures within a single polity. A government should be purely civic and decline to adopt any particular culture or language. But that is not the vision I will present to you today. On the contrary, that vision profoundly understates the role that culture and language already have—that they necessarily have—in shaping political interaction. It ignores the fact that we are always already working within a language and culture, that we can never get outside culture, even when we are engaged in a process of translation between languages or, when it comes to constitutions, when we are organizing a multilingual or multijudicial state. If we want to sustain a diverse constitutional order, we cannot simply ignore language and culture. We have to understand them, understand their social and political role and adapt our institutions accordingly.

This lecture is about nationalism. I will defend a form of nationalism that is not purely civic—not based, that is, only on adherence to a set of institutions—but a nationalism that has a real cultural dimension, demanding that political institutions be adapted to certain kinds of cultural difference. Cultural nationalism has a very bad reputation for some very good reasons. It is usually considered to be xenophobic, to be hostile to the value of diversity, to be closed and resistant to interaction, and to presume that by definition every country should consist of only one culture. Most forms of cultural nationalism do have these defects. They are deformations that I entirely reject, indeed, that I abominate. One of my principal tasks, then, is to distinguish the nationalism for which I am arguing from these chauvinistic, closed, and aggressive forms.

The task of articulating an open and tolerant form of cultural nationalism is crucial. If, as I will argue, culture is relevant to political organization, then we have to understand how that relevance should be manifested in institutional form. Otherwise we are

abandoning the field of culture to the chauvinists. We will be unable to understand and respond adequately to the non-chauvinistic and entirely acceptable forms of nationalism that exist in the world, such as the insistence of Indigenous peoples that they be able to govern themselves; the commitment of Canadians to maintaining a political existence separate from the United States; and the deep attachment of Quebecers to continued political autonomy within Canada.

Moreover, I will argue that the chauvinists fundamentally misunderstand culture. They would stultify culture, presenting a caricature of their country, offering only a partial and rigid idea of what it means to be a member of a nation, excluding many of their compatriots just as they seek to exclude outsiders. Think of the cramped and dead-end visions that ultra-nationalists have traditionally sought to impose on their own people. If we care about culture, we need to defend its dynamism against those who would freeze it, narrow it, and shut it off from the world.

The State of Nationalism

Let me start by describing where my argument fits within contemporary theories of nationalism.¹ One way to classify conceptions of nationalism is to focus on what makes the nation: What produces the nation? What underlies it? The literature contains a wide range of answers. It is useful to group them into three categories.

1. Naturalistic Theories

The first category might be termed “naturalistic” theories of the nation. In these theories, nationalism is the projection into political life of cultural identities that are given, not constructed. People are held to belong naturally to cultural, linguistic, or perhaps even racial

1. Examples of most of these theories can be found in good anthologies of nationalism. See, for example, *Nationalism*, ed. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

groups. These groups are the foundation of solidarity. They provide the sense of identification as a people—a people that is concerned with its own fate and that ought to be able to chart its own destiny in time.

This sense of nationhood is resolutely single. A citizen belongs to only one nation. Each nation has a right to determine its own future, free from domination or influence from any other. Each nation is committed above all to its own interests.

Naturalistic theories have been very influential. They have become much less popular in the academy because of the horrors that such nationalisms have produced, especially in the 20th century. Indeed, those very horrors made clear that nations are not very natural after all. States invariably contain, within them, elements that do not conform to the simplified image of a single language and culture. Citizens speak variant dialects; they have different ancestries; they profess different religious beliefs; they pursue different conceptions of the national good; they interpret the country's history and destiny in different ways. Are some citizens real and others imposters? We have seen all too clearly where that line of attack can lead.

Moreover, the very singleness of national attachment seems too simple. Our allegiances are always more complex than that. I am an Australian as well as a Canadian citizen, and both my original and my immigrant identities mean a great deal to me. But even beyond such obvious dual allegiances, we are attached to multiple communities—communities within communities that are concentric and overlapping. I was born and raised in British Columbia, and cannot think of the places where I grew up without remembering their particular histories and their particular character. I was marked by them. I am very much a British Columbian with roots in Vancouver, the Okanagan, and Kitimat. But I also established my life as a scholar in Montreal teaching civil law, labour law, and constitutional law, and became deeply engaged in the constitutional battles of the late

1980s and 1990s. Along with my friend Wade MacLauchlin, I organized a pan-Canadian group to fight for approval of the Meech Lake Accord. I am deeply attached to Quebec and feel part of this society, even though I now live at a distance. Moreover, for me, these two attachments are not independent. My country—our country—is made up of the conversation among these and other strains of the Canadian experience. It is constituted by their interaction: the great, sometimes frustrating, sometimes conflicting, but always stimulating interaction between French and English; the fundamental and still unresolved set of relationships with Indigenous peoples; the regional diversity and regional histories of this land; and the contributions of successive waves of immigrants. This country would not be what it is without those interactions, difficult as they have often been.

Comparable stories could be told of other societies. Purely naturalistic theories inevitably oversimplify. That does not mean they have lost their power. I suspect that they continue to exercise considerable attraction even in academia, despite the fact that they have fallen out of fashion. But they are too simple, doing violence to the complexity of our lives together.

2. *Constructivist Theories*

The second category—“constructivist” theories— is much more common in the universities. Instead of seeing nationalism as the natural expression of ethnic communities, it sees nationalism as a tool for political mobilization, embraced and developed because of its utility. Nations do not simply exist; they are constructed. Indeed, many of these theories claim that nationalism precedes the nation. Nationalism has created the nation.

In some of these theories, nationalism is consciously manufactured by elites in order to marshal support for those elites' projects. In others, the construction of nationalism might not be so deliberate; nationalism may emerge from propitious social conditions but, if so, it is then seized upon and developed because it serves elites'

ends. In either of these views, nationalism is created or sustained because of its usefulness to those in power.

Some of these theories take the idea of construction very far indeed. They doubt that nationalism has any foundation apart from the fabric woven by its own ideologues. For these theorists, nationalism is created out of whole cloth. Benedict Anderson captured this idea wonderfully in the title of his 1983 book *Imagined Communities*.² National communities are products of imagination; they do not simply exist.

What drives the construction of the nation? Again the views are diverse. Some argue that nationalism is tied up with economic growth and modernization. There are two versions of this thesis. In one, nations are built from above in order to expand markets and produce an educated, homogenous workforce. In the other, nationalism arises as a reaction against economic expansion, as people on the outside—peasants in an industrializing economy or linguistic minorities chafing in institutions that operate in the majority's tongue (my landlord's experience at Canada Lafarge)—use it as a way of clawing their way back in.

How does cultural identity count in constructivist analysis? Some constructivist theorists do emphasize humiliation as one of the drivers of nationalism. But most treat cultural identity as a product of these processes, not a cause, so that consciousness as an ethnic group emerges in the very process of economic modernization. Indeed, for all the constructivist theorists, identities are at least to a very large extent constructed, more often from the raw material of ethnic identities, more often from features of human beings—"markers"—that can be turned into ethnic identities.

Some theories take the idea of construction to the extreme. They believe that allegiance can be emancipated entirely from its ethnic

2. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

markers so that citizens unite purely and simply in support of a set of institutions. These are the “civic nationalists” or “constitutional patriots.” Civic nationalism is very familiar in Canadian political life. Pierre Elliott Trudeau was a civic nationalist, attempting to create through the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms an ethnically neutral, purely legal focus of citizenship. It is a rich irony that many *indépendantistes* also claim to be civic nationalists.

But for all constructivists, cultural and linguistic identifications are contingent—a product of social processes and political action. There is nothing natural or necessary about them. There is much to be said for this perspective. Nationalism is a complex phenomenon. We can all come up with examples of how nationalist sentiment has been consciously created and manipulated. What is unique about constructivist theories is that they take these features to be dominant—the most useful and interesting features of nationalism.

They stress the **contingency** of nationalism. It does not have to be this way!

They alert us to **the contextual factors that generate nationalist movements and account for their success**. Those movements are not simply the projection of a cultural community, but gather strength as a result of economic development or ethnic oppression.

Contingency opens up the possibility of **agency**. There are ways to respond in order to maximize the possibility that one can construct peaceful and harmonious societies.

But while there is a great deal to be said for constructivist theories, is their account of the origin and role of nations sufficient? They tend to treat language and culture as though they were mere markers, mere tokens, with no political significance of their own. These are then seized by political elites, fashioned into a cohesive identity, and deployed for political or economic advantage. But even if elites do seek to work with language and culture, why do they find these markers useful? Why are they successful? Nationalist movements are effective precisely because they play off something real. Elements

of national cohesion—language, histories, religious traditions, and cultural references—have political consequences even before they are mobilized. That is precisely what allows them to be mobilized effectively.

3. *Hybrid Theories*

This brings us to the third category of nationalism: “hybrid” theories.

These theories acknowledge that nationalist movements take shape within particular political contexts. Nationalism, like any other political phenomenon, is the result of human agency. It is a product of argument and deliberation, formed by the power and resources that political actors bring to bear. There is no necessary equation between cultural identity and the structure of states.

But nationalist arguments do work with something real. Even if communities are always to some extent constructed, not just given, and even if culture is manipulated for other ends, nationalism obtains its force from the role of culture in political life. One cannot do justice to nationalism unless one understands that connection. One cannot understand what drives nationalism, what is valuable and what is reprehensible, what is justified and what should be strenuously resisted. Hybrid theories take the role of culture seriously.

As you will have guessed by now, I adopt a hybrid vision of nationalism. I take seriously the role of culture, seek to understand it, weigh what is valuable about it, and then argue for principles and institutions that build on what is valuable and resist what is not.

Nationalism Neither Chauvinistic Nor Closed

1. *Culture*

The linchpin of my argument is an understanding of culture. People often define culture—and by extension nationality—as though it were characterized by a rich set of agreements. People who

share a culture hold certain beliefs in common. But that is wrong. Commonality certainly exists within cultures, but it does not consist in members signing up to a set of beliefs.

Take the United States, for example. Liberty and equality have clearly been central to the national life of that country, but it would be hard to pick two values that are more fiercely contested, with very different meanings attributed to them, right up to the present day. Moreover, the fact that there is a fierce debate does not undermine the American national identity. On the contrary, the debate itself is very American—the terms in which it is phrased, the texts to which it makes reference, the history against which positions are framed. Americans share those terms even as they disagree profoundly. The debate over liberty and equality in the United States is very different from the invocation of those concepts in France, for example even though liberty and equality are just as central to French political identity. One might even say that Americans are defined by the terms of their disagreements, not their agreements.

Cultures are best understood not as sets of principles but by analogy to languages. Like languages, they provide their members with a set of terms, a set of concepts, which members then use to frame their positions. They contain particular ways of posing questions and an accumulated set of past answers. They share a particular history, which has itself been understood in terms derived from the language. And by sharing a language, one does not adhere to a common philosophy. On the contrary, one may still disagree vehemently. Rather, one shares a conversation through time, in relation to which one formulates one's understanding of the world.

This also means that cultures do not confine what one has to say. Like languages, they can be used to express a great variety of ideas—although, also like languages, the categories do shape what one says. Some concepts are much easier to express in one language than in another. Statements carry connotations in one that are absent in the other. I do not mean to exaggerate the separation. One can school

oneself in both, familiarize oneself with their histories, immerse oneself in the practices of each society, and carefully explore and explain distinctions of meaning. But translation that is at all faithful involves significant effort on the part of the translator. That effort reveals the extent of the gap.

Of course, languages are more than simply a good analogy to cultures; they are an important determinant of cultures. But I want to insist on their relative independence—on the fact that although languages are an important constituent of cultures and have a substantial impact on them, cultures are not reducible to linguistic difference pure and simple. Think, for example, of France and Quebec. The two nations share a language and in large measure a common literature. But there are also points of real difference, where the expectations, arguments, and cultural resources of Quebecers are marked by the experience that has occurred here. To take one example from the field of constitutional law, Quebecers have certainly accepted that it is appropriate to recognize national differences within a single state—that Quebec constitutes, for example, a distinct society.³ For many French constitutionalists, that would be anathema. In 1991 the Conseil constitutionnel rejected the invocation of the “people Corse” on the grounds that the people of France must be indivisible.⁴ The experience of sustaining a vibrant French-speaking society in a multinational federation has shaped the sense of political possibility of francophone Quebecers. And this is just one striking example. Scholarship and political debate within Quebec have their own concerns and concepts, producing a rich and distinctive discourse that has things to teach us all, including, of course, scholars in France.

3. This was the phrase used to describe Quebec in the failed set of constitutional amendments known as the Meech Lake Accord: Peter W. Hogg, *Meech Lake Constitutional Accord Annotated* (Toronto: Carswell, 1988), 11.

4. Cons. constitutionnel, May 9, 1991, Statut de la Corse, Recueil 1991. 50, 91-290 DC.

One could multiply the identification of cultures and subcultures, even within Quebec: different regional cultures; the rural/urban divide; Quebec and Montreal. And those very comparisons point toward another dimension of Quebecers' experience: the fact that it has been marked by the interaction of French and English—certainly at the boundaries of Quebec, as Quebecers interact with leaders and citizens from other parts of Canada, but even more within Quebec, contributing to the contrast between Quebec and Montreal, or engraved in the very name of my neighbour, Julia Hunter. Some cultures cross linguistic lines in Canada. They are rocky and unevenly distributed (a little like the land itself), involving frustration as well as understanding and collaboration, but all parts of this country, even my home province of British Columbia, have been marked by them.

Cultures are, in short, federal in character. There are cultures and subcultures, concentric and overlapping. Indeed, any context in which there is repeated interaction over time—even our workplaces, religious institutions, villages, and neighbourhoods—will generate their own distinctive terms and histories, their own cultures, which are then reinterpreted and deployed.

2. The Value of Culture

Obviously, with such a capacious definition of culture, not all cultures will have the same significance for political life. In a few minutes I will discuss the ways in which culture should shape political institutions, but let me first address the reasons we should care about the persistence of cultures.

First, of course, we care about our own cultures. They have provided the terms in which we have come to understand ourselves, debated our future directions, and sought to organize our societies. Our aspirations have been framed in their terms. It can be disorienting to be cut off from them and have to develop new ones, as generations of immigrants have discovered. Of course, it is possible

to learn new ones. That too is part of the immigrant experience. But the capacity to master another language and to find one's place in another culture—while immensely enriching—does not diminish the value of one's acquired cultural expertise. There is an obvious advantage to using terms through which one has already defined one's positions and over which one has established mastery.

Moreover, if we are forced to abandon those terms, we end up severing our connection to our predecessors. One crucial way in which we orient ourselves in our lives is through narrative, by weaving stories of how we came to this point and projecting those stories into the future. That is how we incorporate experience, draw lessons, and determine ways of acting more effectively. If those stories come to an abrupt end, it can be devastating.

By maintaining our cultures, we are not simply trapping ourselves in the past. On the contrary, we are preserving our capacity for present agency. We maintain our knowledge, our social skills, our understanding of institutions and processes, and our sense of a trajectory through life. We draw upon the past so that we can put it to work today.

Above all, then, cultures are important to their members—and as individuals, not simply as people who identify with a collectivity. But beyond that, cultures hold value for the world at large, accessible (with effort) to people who are not members. Let me say a word about this value, because its recognition is essential if we are to avoid a closed and chauvinistic form of nationalism.

The body of concepts, debates, accumulated reflections, and considered experience that makes cultures distinctive carries distinctive insights, insights that are not present in the same way in other cultures. A culture carries knowledge. By engaging with another culture, one accesses that knowledge, expanding the stock of reflection on which one can draw. That holds three benefits. First, one comprehends the insights expressed within that culture. Second, one gains access, through the culture, to the body of experience on

which it relies. And third, by engaging with a different view of the world, one can often see with greater clarity elements of one's own.

Interaction across cultures therefore holds great benefits. The presence of Quebec within Canada contributes a distinctive perspective to this country, one that would not be present if Canada were monocultural and monolingual. I am not thinking so much of the body of high European culture in French, although it is true that that culture has much more salience in Canada than would be the case were it not for Quebec. I think especially of French Canadians' distinctive reflection on the North American experience, on settlement, relations with the First Nations, the encounter with the United States, and the successful struggle to maintain a vibrant society in the face of pressures for assimilation. I think of Quebec's tradition of labour militancy and social action, and its scepticism of foreign wars. I think of its history of religious belief and the ways in which it has distanced itself from that belief. All those things have marked and continue to mark Canada.

It is easy to think of a culture's contributions as consisting of sets of ideas but, important as those are, we draw upon much more than that. Cultures often reflect ways of ordering society or interacting with the natural world. Cross-cultural encounter expands the body of human experience from which one can draw, sometimes permitting one to envisage alternatives with a definition that would otherwise be impossible. I have had the great privilege of working with people deeply knowledgeable about Indigenous forms of social ordering. It has been a continual revelation, disclosing so much about the possibilities of law and governance, especially the nature of law in highly decentralized, non-state communities. And, of course, the encounter with Indigenous peoples is not merely academic; it is a fundamental part of our present and our future.

Members of other cultures are our resident experts. There are times that we may not like what we find. There may be things that we cannot tolerate. But we should not be too quick to condemn; we

should first learn. We may find that the reality is more interesting than we had expected. The hijab may not be simply about gender inequality and Islamic extremism. It may be about modesty, a turning away from sensualism, or a walking declaration of faith. Or it may be some complex combination of good and not so good, as might be said of many cultural phenomena—relations within marriage in western history, for example. My point is that it is worth inquiring. We might learn something, and out of the encounter of Muslim piety and western secularism we may develop new, more subtle positions that speak to both.

The diversity within our societies is not a curse. It is a resource, a reservoir of experience from which we can learn. If we value the body of knowledge within our own cultures, we should also value the body of knowledge within others. Nationalism of the kind for which I am arguing and toleration go hand in hand. The same impulsion underlies both.

3. *Musical Interlude*

I have been approaching culture very much as a constitutional theorist. It is now time for something different: a brief musical interlude. Well, not exactly. I am a constitutional theorist after all. I will therefore talk about music, not play it.

An engagement with national traditions in music is instructive at this point, especially because I want to make clear that cultures are not just about sets of principles. In fact, culture is not really about a defined accumulation of cultural stuff at all. It is about the ways in which we engage with experience, think about it, interpret it, seek to express what it is all about, and contrast our interpretations with others. That is why any sustained interaction produces its own distinctive culture or subculture.⁵

5. See Jeremy Webber, "Culture, Legal Culture, and Legal Reasoning: A Comment on Nelken," *Australian Journal of Legal Philosophy* 29 (2004), 27-36.

The same thing happens in music. There is a marvellous study of the great Finnish composer Sibelius by Lisa de Gorog. Sibelius came from a Swedish-speaking family, though his ancestors had probably once spoken Finnish. Early in his career, he immersed himself in Finnish folk poetry, the *runos*. His music drew heavily on those influences and on occasion he incorporated folk tunes directly into his compositions. Generally, though, the elements were more subtle and allusive: the rhythms of the Finnish language and folk poetry, and repetition in the structure of phrases akin to the chants of the *runos*. De Gorog gives many examples. She refers to Sibelius's "common melodic pattern of a long note followed by a triplet" and suggests that it is easy to see this "as a reflection of enclitic personal endings of verbs and case endings or possessive endings of nouns" typical of the Finnish language. Sibelius used sounds that evoked Finland's folk culture: choral ensembles and pizzicato strings to suggest the Finnish *kantele*.⁶

One can draw many lessons from the comparison: the continual reworking and deepening that is typical of the way people engage with their traditions (fidelity does not mean stasis); and the richness that comes from the encounter between traditions, in this case between folk and high classical cultures, or indeed Sibelius's own encounter with a tradition that was expressed in a language other than his mother tongue. But let me emphasize two lessons. First, the power of the work is a product of its engagement with the tradition, its distillation of a form of life elaborated in language and song. Second, it does not have to be our language to speak to us. There is something in the fidelity of Sibelius's interpretation that communicates the possibilities of that life to us, even if it is not our own.

6. Lisa de Gorog, with the collaboration of Ralph de Gorog, *From Sibelius to Sallinen: Finnish Nationalism and the Music of Finland* (Westport CT: Greenwood, 1989), quotation at 86.

4. *Political Institutions*

How does all this relate to political institutions?

First, it should be clear by now that cultures are eminently social phenomena. They are created and sustained through interaction—through speaking, interpreting, disagreeing, deliberating, singing, and a host of other interactions. They exist in between people. Their sustained vigour is entirely dependent on their use. If opportunities to use them are foreclosed, a culture is stifled.

Now, many cultures can be left to themselves as long as a number of individual freedoms are available. They can be sustained by the autonomous effort of individuals. But other cultures are intimately tied up with institutions. This is true because, whether we like it or not, institutions are infused with culture, and the cultural choices they embody feed back into social life. Schooling, for example, has to be offered in a language or languages, and the language one chooses will have a huge influence over the students' future lives. One could say the same about the workplace. If one has to learn English to keep one's job, as my landlord in the rue Richelieu did, then whole patterns of language use will be skewed by the power relations of the workplace. It is this reasoning that underlies the principal provisions of Quebec's Bill 101.

Governments too have to work in a language or languages. In this I am thinking not so much about the provision of services (though this too is true) but about the essence of democratic self-government: political debate, the consideration of future policies, argument, and the formulation of law. Again, the language one chooses will be fundamental to citizens' participation. If French isn't at least one of the primary languages of political debate—if everything important occurs in English—, then there will be a disconnect between political debate in Quebec and political decision. French-speaking citizens will continually be forced to work in someone else's language, dependent on translation instead of direct communication.

It makes very good sense, then, to adjust political decision making to our various cultures by framing government institutions in ways that allow citizens to participate. That does not mean that every political institution has to have a single culture. I believe strongly in the maintenance of a political community in which French and English Canadians come together. That community has been immensely stimulating. But we sustain that community not by studiously ignoring language, but by developing institutions in which English is dominant, institutions in which French is dominant, and institutions in which we actively foster deliberation in both languages. We pursue, in other words, a deep and culturally informed federalism.

What I have just said about language also goes for certain other cultural phenomena. The very arguments that support Quebec's autonomy support autonomy in Indigenous governance. Indigenous peoples also have distinctive languages of public debate, traditions of social ordering, their own procedures, their own forms of family life, and their own way of relating to the land. They have held to those traditions with great tenacity. Shouldn't there be institutions in which their cultures can find expression in, for example, distinctive patterns of land management or child protection? We have insisted that they work exclusively through our institutions, in which their traditions are overpowered by a majority that does not speak their languages and often does not know the first thing about their cultures. If we want to put the colonial age behind us, we have to support structures in which Indigenous peoples can govern themselves.

Conclusion

This is the nationalism, then, for which I argue. Note that it does not depend upon the coercion of other people to conform to our culture. On the contrary, it recognizes that institutions are necessarily already imprinted with culture and that, if that is someone else's culture, individuals will be systematically excluded and democratic

self-government undermined. Not only that, but the very existence of those institutions will tend to discourage the cultures in society at large. It is important, then, to consider how institutions should be adjusted to culture.

In doing so, we have to avoid measures that would impose a narrow and restricted vision of culture. We must not be chauvinistic or closed, for if we are, we will be cutting ourselves off from the sources of knowledge and stimulation that other cultures provide and, even more importantly, we will be making caricatures of ourselves—imposing a narrow and limited idea of what it means to be a Quebecker, or a Canadian, or a Cree, or some complex combination of all of those identities. Our institutions have to be framed with a light hand. They have to be open to the changing contributions of their members. And they have to enable the richness that results from dialogue across cultures.⁷

You—the citizens of Quebec—have been responsible for setting me on this path and for teaching me many lessons about the challenges and benefits of communication across cultures. The foundations for my work were laid here in Quebec City. I remain forever in your debt.

7. For specific institutional recommendations, see Jeremy Webber, *Reimagining Canada: Language, Culture, Community and the Canadian Constitution* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994) and my many papers on Indigenous governance.

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BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Simon Harel is the director of the Department of Comparative Literature and a full professor at the Université de Montréal. From 1989 to 2011, he was a professor in the Department of Literary Studies at the Université du Québec à Montréal and director of its Centre interuniversitaire d'études sur les lettres, les arts et les traditions (CELAT).

A researcher and prolific writer, he broke new ground in the unexplored field of migrant writing, especially among minorities. Simon Harel's work is at the frontier between literary studies and cultural studies. His research examines different forms of recitation to explore portrayals of the reaches of otherness, the phenomenon of exclusion, and intercultural issues. *Voleurs de parcours*, published in 1989 and re-released in 1999, is recognized as one of the most noteworthy Quebec cultural studies of the 1980s and 1990s.

Simon Harel is a leading intellectual and a renowned scientist with nearly 30 essays and multi-authored volumes to his credit. He has organized several major scientific and cultural events, proving himself to be an enthusiastic and impassioned speaker. He has often represented Canada at international fora and is regularly invited to be a guest professor in France, the United States, and Brazil.

He won the 1992 Gabrielle-Roy award (in partnership) and was jointly awarded the 1993 Prix du Conseil des Arts de la Communauté urbaine de Montréal, literature category. He also accepted, on behalf of the CELAT, the Association des communautés culturelles et des artistes (ACCA) 2006 Nelson Mandela award for diversity and inclusion. He was nominated a member of the Royal Society of Canada and a Trudeau Fellow in 2009.

Dr. Harel edits the “Théorie et littérature” collection for Éditions XYZ. His most recent works include *Les passages obligés de l’écriture migrante* (2005), *Braconnages identitaires : Un Québec palimpseste* (2006), *Espaces en perdition. I : Les lieux précaires de la vie quotidienne* (2007), *Espaces en perdition. II : Humanités jetables* (2008), and *Attention écrivains méchants* (2010).

ABSTRACT

What are cultural and social mobility? Or more generally, what is contemporary mobility? Narrative, and particularly written speech and the construction of words, images, and space, can capture and explain the fundamental dynamic of individual identity and social integration, as well as the basis for the support required in the face of marginalization and immigration. Literature’s discussion of mobility contributes to an examination of the apparent “desolidarization” of the socio-cultural body.

LECTURE

The Universal Singular

University of Regina

MARCH 31, 2011

We would like the world to be doing better. We would like it to avoid the aridity of compartmentalization and oversimplification. On one hand, the world as seen from above (reflecting our image of vertical architecture) is a universe that holds itself apart from the minutiae of daily life. On the other hand, the world as seen from below jars, treads and tramples on the fragile shelter of our inhabited spaces. My comments here are built on a crossbreeding of images from above and below, near and far. At first glance, the theory behind these ideas may seem simplistic, resting, as it were, on questionable distinctions. Are we really reduced to ham-fisted approximations that tear us apart, forcing us to choose between an aerial world and a chthonic universe? These geometric considerations about the composition of the real world may not seem to be very useful. And yet the people we refer to as “subaltern subjects” are still scurrying along alleyways and tunnels, urban spaces with sharp corners, windowless places, the seedier parts of which conjure up the works of Dostoyevsky.

While loss of reputation was once a personal matter, this is changing, as we witness the emergence of a much wider spread discredit. In the works of John Maxwell Coetzee, we will have an opportunity to see that discredit can be expressed through minute

actions, as if, rather than sinking into the abyss of non-being, the subject can once again exercise a fragile civility and claim reprieve without being pitiful. Is there such thing as narrative action that can repair minute instances of discredit? This is the point of view that I will take with regard to Coetzee's novel *Disgrace*.¹ While this novel adopts a traditional narrative structure (a university professor loses his job following a trite incident of "sexual harassment"), the dreaded catastrophe (loss of reputation that signals a fall, a permanent loss of status) never materializes.

The novel does explore a loss of reputation that reflects a lasting habitus that is hard to undo: a university colleague greets his former fellow with deep discomfort, not knowing quite what to say or do; a neighbour tries to avoid the professor's eyes when he ventures furtively outside his home. But in every case, this moment of minor discredit, although disagreeable, does not lead to any real consequences. It may be painful not to be acknowledged by a neighbour concerned with appearances, it may be humiliating to be reduced to the point that you do not exist in the eyes of the people around you, but this is no doubt a limited perception of the actual issues of discredit. In this regard, the narrator of *Disgrace* does not seem to be the worse off. Of course, the embarrassment and indifference of others are not pleasant attitudes to experience, because these expressions of avoidance clearly indicate that you are no longer welcome in the public space. For Coetzee, this disgrace surfaces in places of traffic or transaction (supermarkets, chance encounters at street corners). These are the situations where the loss of status is felt.

To be sure, discredit presented this way tallies with our idea of the bankrupt who may still at times be overcome by terrible anguish. It expresses the dread of the disintegration of the social order, as if the integrity of the financial system (and the social rules that go with it) were veering dangerously close to the breaking point. In this

1. John Maxwell Coetzee, *Disgrace* (London: Vintage, 2000).

situation, social self-regulation (which gives us the feeling that our points of reference—whether moral, cultural, or economic—are irrefutable) is extremely vulnerable to demonization. This is not a new train of thought. We are confronted with it again, right now, in 2011, as a financial crisis of enormous scale threatens the stability of the international banking system. But if we look more closely at what constitutes the profound originality of the work of John Maxwell Coetzee, we see a surprising calm, considering the scale of the anticipated disasters.

I advanced the idea, earlier, that the fictional works of Coetzee propose to examine these minute postmodern lives in the domain of everyday life. It is a prosaic existence in which the principle of horizontal architecture takes on its full meaning. In response to grandiloquent expressions of decline and the rebirth of hope, of life and death, of success and failure, it is easy to picture, with a sensitivity suitable for the present age, a disgrace that consists of not being “in step” with life, of endlessly suffering a lag that means the facts and actions of the world pass us by. The idea of discredit that we imagine is no doubt excessive. It is not so very different from old ideas of banishment, people forced to live outside of their world, in a place devoid of all known and native comfort. While the main protagonist of *Disgrace*, David Lurie, is doomed to discredit, the consequences that go with it, although unpleasant, are not an unbearable punishment. The story unfolds as if the objective destitution caused by his dismissal as a professor is actually a type of liberation.

His liberation should not be perceived as simply a break with the stable beacon of his professional universe. On the whole, it is not only his loss of employment but also the “lost cause,” the minute form of which speaks volumes about the individual failures of late modernity. The novels of John Maxwell Coetzee are all characterized by what I call decelerated cultural mobility, as if the accelerated signs of consumption (of culture, financial assets, and property)

and the squandering of our heritage (signs of human occupancy in our territories) justified a very abrupt stoppage. So life stops for a moment. The subject is no longer on the alert. To put it more clearly, he is in a limbo that has nothing to do with our usual discourse on the virtues of placelessness.

Coetzee's *Disgrace* leads us to a problem of domicile, which connects back to my reflections on the various aspects of livability. The intention I put forward² assumes a merciless battle between restricted space and a subject who is trying to establish a spreading existence. For Chekhov, Conrad, and Antonin Artaud, it was a matter of unleashing insults and invective in order to eventually master the wrongness of the place. Unfurling waves of the Pacific, torrid temperatures of the Sierra Madre, poverty of exile: all signs of implacable battles. It is not the same in Coetzee's *Disgrace* because the subject, even though he is in some ways banished, can count on places where a loss of status is not shameful. It may seem strange to put it that way, and yet it corresponds to the imaginary space put forward in *Espaces en perdition* with this difference: the tone of desperation that I used is no longer required. This passage of *Disgrace* demonstrates this:

"You can help at the clinic. They are desperate for volunteers."

"You mean help Bev Shaw?"

"Yes."

"I don't think she and I will hit it off."

"You don't need to hit it off with her. You have only to help her. But don't expect to be paid. You will have to do it out of the goodness of your heart."

"I'm dubious, Lucy. It sounds suspiciously like community service. It sounds like someone trying to make reparation for past misdeeds."

2. Simon Harel, *Espaces en perdition. I: Les lieux précaires de la vie quotidienne* (Québec : Les Presses de l'Université Laval, InterCultures collection, 2007); *Espaces en perdition. II: Humanités jetables* (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, InterCultures collection, 2008).

“As to your motives, David, I can assure you, the animals at the clinic won’t query them. They won’t ask and they won’t care.”

“All right, I’ll do it. But only as long as I don’t have to become a better person. I am not prepared to be reformed. I want to go on being myself. I’ll do it on that basis.”³

We can see the impact of the words. The public interest, which maintains the collective order, is no longer relevant. But this does not mean that the subject (here, David Lurie) is condemned to live in a universe where he is denied any notion of independence.

There is, in *Disgrace*, individual responsibility. Self-affirmation and the consolidation of a personal identity suggest the development of a positive narcissism. This discourse, which is the implicit ideological basis in current thinking on pedagogy, knowledge transfer and the education of children, relies on the following postulate: when the usual points of reference are in crisis (at least, this is what is continually being said about the recognized obsolescence of the family, the nation and the State), we need to establish a foundation (individual, this time) to slow down the heightened mobility we are discussing. That makes late modernity the setting for frenzied individualism. This is not a randomly chosen expression. It too provides food for thought. Do we not live in an era when slaves to identity behave like true lunatics? Are we not living in a world where the requirement to be ourselves is like a true prison? The quest for identity has become an imperative.

This seems to be the stance of David Lurie who, despite his disappointments, continues to display what others see as stubborn pigheadedness. As his daughter says, “So you are determined to go on being bad. Mad, bad, and dangerous to know. I promise, no one will ask you to change.”⁴ Can *Disgrace* be viewed as the portrait of

3. Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 77.

4. *Ibid.*

an “age of man”⁵ in defiance of the accepted code of conduct, the record of clearly difficult masculinity struggling in a crisis of frayed morality? So what is left? The self? Surely that is the most banal statement of postmodern naivety! Of course, the expression is inept. It suggests decline, as if the subject, without too much fuss, had agreed to lose his reputation. Certain passages confirm this description of a gradually eroding life. For example:

Without the Thursday interludes the week is a featureless as a desert. There are days when he does not know what to do with himself.

He spends more time in the university library, reading all he can find on the wider Byro circle, adding to notes that already fill two fat files. He enjoys the later-afternoon quiet of the reading room, enjoys the walk home afterwards: the brisk winter air, the damp, gleaming streets.⁶

On reading this passage of *Disgrace*, the reader readily accepts the image of a world that is at risk of triviality. While Michel Leiris’s stories explore the anguish of death, Coetzee’s works mull over a gradually eroding mobility. In other words, Coetzee’s novels, which belong to the world of Commonwealth Studies (although the term is rather simplistic), stand in stark contrast to the defence of movement that is almost required in novelists as varied as Salman Rushdie and V.S. Naipaul. It is of course problematic to lump together writers who often diverge on nearly everything. The influence of Beckett and Dostoyevsky is clear in Coetzee, while the works of Joseph Conrad provided the main narrative model for V.S. Naipaul. In this regard, we have to admit that Coetzee’s novels demonstrate a troubling marginality. The novelist describes a progressive exhaustion (reminiscent to some extent of V.S. Naipaul’s *The Enigma of Arrival*). While the image of the journey (current vector of thought on cultural mobility) is widespread in the discourses of late modernity,

5. Michel Leiris, *L’Âge d’homme* (Paris: Gallimard, Folio, 1973).

6. Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 11.

Coetzee's writings reveal that stagnation is the consequence of excessive movement.

Is immobility the future of the world, this troubling feeling that we are repeating ourselves in our middle age, as if the subject, rather than projecting himself into an unlimited universe, is struggling with the least common denominator of self-awareness? I referred earlier to triviality and anonymity as if, in the long run, the euphoric reign of multiple identities resulted in a sort of disillusioned narcissism. Everything unfolds as if the identity vertigo that consists of defending the status of subject (to and against everyone) gives way to the realization of diminishment. Suddenly the story is an inaugural disgrace, the troubling recognition that the subject is only playing a role that is already included in the list of qualifications and disqualifications of identity. In this regard, I defended the description of minute lives as if not yielding to the full and entire awareness of "subject" were a considerable advantage in carrying on one's daily business in the heart of postmodernism.

What more can be said about this remark, which questions the subjectivity shown through language?

It has been repeatedly asserted that the subject has no existence except insofar as described. To this we have added that the subject's credibility (our confidence or lack of confidence in him) depends in the first place on the statement of a passion, as proven, for example, in the works of Naipaul. If credit is the pledge of confidence in the world (the principle of a self-organized world in which we can situate our actions), what happens when words are no longer enough, when the subject is mute, when talk is forbidden? When I was writing *Espaces en perdition*, I was interested in the words of society's rejects, who are confined to the eccentricity of barely human discourse. Cries, whisperings, mutterings: veiled expressions that do not belong to the world of articulate discourse, revealing a subject at risk of eradication. The men and women who inhabit the stories

of Chekhov are definitely vulnerable to violence. They are cheated because the world of language is somehow stolen from them. For Coetzee, the categories of subhuman or infrahuman (even though we recognize their highly derogatory nature, which equates the subject with trash or debris) nevertheless contain a tenuous trace of subjectivity that, despite everything, we want to recapture.

From *Life and Times of Michael K* to *Disgrace*, Coetzee's novels tread a weary, back-breaking journey. In *Espaces en perdition*, I discussed the unique role of vagrancy that consists largely of stagnation, evoking movement despite the repetition that suggests deceleration. I suggested that this blind progression (the result of the combined stresses experienced when the world no longer welcomes you) was an allowable practice because the certainty of wandering is so similar to a crazy dream. It is no different with Coetzee. David Lurie is an idle academic. He inhabits the world of learned discourse, the pursuit of vague research projects that may or may not be serious intentions. This world of learned discourse is actually a firewall that protects him from an unbearable exterior reality. When he is dismissed from the university, David Lurie is set adrift, so to speak.

It is not the shakeup caused by his dismissal that demands attention (a moral failure, a faux pas with its highlighted guilt), but the fact that places suddenly acquire a density, a brutality from which there is no escape.

The discredit in *Disgrace* is not set (as it is in Henry James's novels) in a muted and cosmopolitan world. Unlike James's approach, which places the subject who is prey to a brutal loss of reputation in a conventional setting, the discredit that David Lurie suffers is an example of generalized pain. It is not the protagonist's bourgeois identity that is on the line after the trite matter of sexual harassment. Convincingly, David Lurie is the protagonist of a world that is crumbling from all sides and in which the university is only the shallow golden cage. What will David Lurie's exile be like? Will

he be condemned to banishment, forced to inhabit distant worlds reeking with terrible infamy? Listen: “This is how his days are spent on the farm. He helps Petrus clean up the irrigation system. He keeps the garden from going to ruin. He packs produce for the market. He helps Bev Shaw at the clinic. He sweeps the floors, cooks the meals, does all the things that Lucy no longer does. He is busy from dawn to dusk.”⁷ This is a very strange banishment, consisting of becoming responsible for domestic tasks that tie the mind to the place. Rather than describe an ethereal world (an abstract exile, reduced to the portrait of an unhappy conscience), Coetzee’s *Disgrace* paints a very concrete portrait. The post-apartheid society rejects provide an admirable incarnation of this distress represented by a cultural mobility that has no resonance.

In another Coetzee novel, *Life and Times of Michael K*, we read: “Crossing the city on his way to work, K rubbed shoulders every day with the army of the homeless and destitute who in the last years had taken over the streets of the central district, begging or thieving or waiting in lines at the relief agencies or simply sitting in the corridors of public buildings to keep warm.”⁸ In Coetzee’s world, the imperatives of work (accelerated), wandering (frenzied) are ways to pin down a place that vacillates, prey to upheaval or instability. It is in the heart of the world, in its filthy folds, that we have to live. And discredit, as we have seen, is an experience that bankrupts repeatedly face. Recall the passage in *Disgrace* about life on credit. The protagonist remembers that he has not paid any bills for months, counting no doubt on some providential intervention that will seal his fate. It is a trivial life that relies on nothing solid. But what exactly does this surrender mean? There is clearly a surrender in Coetzee’s

7. Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 120.

8. John Maxwell Coetzee, *Life and Times of Michael K* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1985), 13.

works that does not coincide with the excessively hackneyed figures of postmodern disillusionment.

I believe it is important to point this out. The world of lost causes, which corresponds to the ideas of Edward W. Said,⁹ is too often reduced to temporal causality. Old age and illness are obvious expressions of this examination of the meaning of existence. Likewise, if we follow Edward W. Said's ideas to their logical conclusion, we must recall the reason for the crisis of the Ideals (a factor that Said claims justifies recognition of lost causes). Updating Ideals (a salient feature of a society that relied on a secular statement of a meaning to be defined) was a credible choice. Although Don Quixote may well sink, crew and cargo, into a wandering folly, the Ideal is nevertheless a reassuring solution (as regards the acknowledgment of a world that surrenders any religious reference). But here is another world collapsing like a fragile scaffold. In order to maintain course, the Ideal assumes awareness of time as well as space it can master. Whether we like it or not, the Ideal is still the pledge of hope in a temporality that is the sign of continuity. So the militant political ideal and the expression of "noble" causes attest to trust in a world open to change. Trust paints a world that still arouses our desire to belong. It is possible to live, to believe in a future in which "our" children will be the happy inhabitants.

Bringing the Ideal into play assumes in every case that a shared discourse can be adopted. But the complexity of Coetzee's novel is the juxtaposition of the imagined world of lost causes (in the era of bankruptcy) and the quest for a fragile solidarity. Listen:

9. Edward W. Said, "Causes perdues," in *Réflexions sur l'exil et autres essais* (Paris: Actes Sud, 2008), 657-686. In this article, Said questions the acceptance of "lost causes" in recent history. He indicates that the Palestinian movement, for the last 40 years, has raised great hopes (perception of a justified rebellion) but also a loss of credibility in the eyes of the United States. From this perspective, Said broaches the meaning of "lost causes" in historical discourse, not to mention the moralism of this kind of value judgment.

Again the feeling washes over him: listlessness, indifference, but also weightlessness, as if he has been eaten away from inside and only the eroded shell of his heart remains. How, he thinks to himself, can a man in this state find words, find music that will bring back the dead?

Sitting on the sidewalk not five yards away, a woman in slippers and a ragged dress is staring fiercely at them. He lays a protective hand on Lucy's shoulder. *My daughter*, he thinks; *my dearest daughter*. *Whom it has fallen to me to guide. Who one of these days will have to guide me.* Can she smell his thoughts?¹⁰

This passage from *Disgrace* tells us that there is something tangible in this imagined world of lost causes. Contrary to Edward W. Said's point of view, which reflects a more Hegelian logic (an end of the story whose "lost cause" is, in the context that interests us, a nihilist expression), Coetzee's works leave room for small-scale emotional earthquakes, catastrophes that are both inaugural and terminal. With these figures in mind, we come back to the image of the little thought connections so loved by François Laplantine.¹¹ But more substantially, we see an original use of credit. *Disgrace* is a reflection of a world whose apparent simplicity hides an absolute pain that is expressed brilliantly in another Coetzee book called *The Master of Petersburg*.¹² When disillusionment is no longer a convenient expedient, the protagonist of *Disgrace* moves (barely) in a demonetized world. Things and beings no longer have intrinsic value. They certainly have no trade value. In this setting, the pursuit of a shared life is an exercise doomed to failure.

With regard to this, I suggest that phoenixology be taken seriously: the deaths and (re)births of personal (and cultural) identity

10. Coetzee, *Disgrace*, 156.

11. François Laplantine, *De tout petits liens* (Paris: Éditions Mille et une nuits, 2003).

12. John Maxwell Coetzee, *Le Maître de Petersburg* (Paris: Seuil, collection "Cadre vert," 1995).

seem to tally with the passage of time. This updated travel path, represented by phoenixology, appears to me to be a coherent way to consider the latencies of modernity and the anxious haste of postmodernity. Whether we are talking about Artaud, Chekhov, or Coetzee, it seems clear that the turbulence we are describing is caused by hesitations. The characters in the works of Chekhov (speakers of so-called popular speech) are at a loss to speak... They never stop rushing into the deadends represented by closed spaces: asylum, school, hospital. More than a century later, the works of Coetzee partly echo this concern of the marginalized subject in a world he barely inhabits.

Society's rejects, people of little means, the homeless, seem to have the right to speak in Coetzee's fictional works. They describe what I have called a minute life. It is not, however, a matter of death and (re)birth, a metamorphosis of the subject who thereby claims the means to live a new life. It is not a matter of the grandiloquence of an identity being changed from top to bottom so that it takes on the new characteristics of an era. The art of phoenixology could be justified in a world where it is possible to change identity.

Contrary to this point of view, I have focused on the singular role of a decelerated approach. The characters who inhabit the works of Coetzee are indeed often diminished, not to say permanently incapacitated. And while I focused on the role of little connections, which suggests a denial of grandiloquent discourses (from the bellicose rhetoric of literary nastiness to architectural representations fashioned by a vertical impulse), it seems to me today appropriate to consider the deceleration of verbal expression, the discomfort of the body (its clumsiness, its loss of autonomy?). Could it be that the dream of a triumphant phoenixology is the ultimate death-defier because it is important to prove (to ourselves) that we can once again renew ourselves, demonstrate courage and resilience?

To follow this train of thought to its conclusion, it seems that the works of John Maxwell Coetzee are a clear indication of defeat.

The various protagonists of the tale are always waiting, as if this stance were a symbol of retreat. This is not an ironic attitude, a cynical posture, that characterizes Coetzee's works. Rather than being cynical and standing purposefully off to the side (the better to watch life with disdain, as if the narrator did not want to share the destiny of his peers), Coetzee recounts the remnants of postmodern rubble (legacy of 9/11?) in a universe that brings together, in total confusion, the violence of society's rejects and the indifference of the wealthy.

As such, the motif of cultural mobility that we spoke of earlier demands re-examination. We know that mobility is a practical topic, that it is the object of attentive consideration on the part of intellectuals and artists who *want to move* with the times. Is it surprising that the postmodern condition (our particular point of interest being the space of the poor and the badly off) is characterized by a progressive deceleration tending toward immobility? For want of (theoretical) certainty, I would like to offer an intuition. The triumphant phoenixologies of identity offer the clearly seductive idea of a (re)configuration of the self.

The protagonists of *Disgrace* seem to think otherwise. They move in a limited world, but their actions, without necessarily being restricted, suggest cautious movement. It may seem strange to express it this way. Shouldn't disgrace, for the reasons just outlined, be a powerful factor of subjectivation? In its negative form, disgrace refers to the anguish of a loss of reputation. Not knowing who we really are in the eyes of others (in short, not being perceived with an amiability that reassures us of our goodness) is definitely a narcissistic injury that we cannot simply set aside. In this case, the loss of reputation (the normative expression of disgrace) is similar to a punishment.

Although the goal of our discussion is to identify, with regard to the perception of vagrancy, an aporia in the current discourse on the transhumance of identities (the cultural relativism that serves as the new middle-class universalism) and to explore the organized

obstacles that hinder the free exercise of mobility, I have to agree, with some humility, that the right to movement is a platitude that camouflages much crueller issues. In other words, the right to movement (much as we talk about the right to housing, the right to an environment free of toxins) cannot serve solely as a theoretical platform. For the same reasons, exercising cultural mobility cannot be reduced to creating a symbolic “market” of places and routes that will, in the long run, give us back the right to full and whole subjectivity. We must take care not to adopt a uselessly optimistic point of view. Mobility, of course, entails exercising a right of way. But once again, we need to ask ourselves about the fractured forms of our pathways.

In the works of John Maxwell Coetzee, the choice of South Africa as the site of this discourse on the impossible forms of mobility is not a matter of chance. Trying to build a cart that will allow him to take his mother from Cape Town to Port Albert, Michael K beavers away furiously with the obstinate single-mindedness of the truly desperate:

He went back to the hostel where he lived and paid the back rent. “I’ve given up my job,” he told the warden. “My mother and I are going to the country to get away from things. We are just waiting for the permit.” He took his bicycle and his suitcase. Stopping at a scrapyard he bought a metre length of steel rod. [...] But though the wheel bearings slid smoothly over the new axlerod, he had no way of preventing the wheels from spinning off. For hours he struggled without success to make clips out of wire. Then he gave up. Something will come to me, he told himself, and left the bicycle dismantled on the Buhrmanns’ kitchen floor.¹³

We need to carefully assess the restricted scope of this movement that is barely a beginning, a desire to move. This is not a matter of transhumance or a journey that takes us toward infinity, but the placement, in a confined space, of the need to be. Michael K is kicked

13. Coetzee, *Life and Times of Michael K*, 26-27.

out of his home. He is obliged to move, to seek, in short, a location that will allow him to (re)claim the status of subject.

Do we need to dwell on the small violences that render us helpless? I have adopted this point of view because the singularity of these tiny actions, echoing the works of Anton Chekhov, is a way to deal with a reality that transcends us. In Montreal, for example, if we look at the tramps at Place Émilie-Gamelin, we can observe that this difficulty of being is staged like an immobile ballet, a disconnected choreography. These expressions communicate images that belong to a rhetoric expressed in space. Describing an urban ballet, when it is performed on the “main stage” of Place Émilie-Gamelin, is not a gratuitous political gesture. The tramps in this public square (who have only the “street” as their home) are, like Michael K, condemned to dwell on the perimeters regulated by the zones of power. Here is a “green space,” a “public square,” a place for “rest” and “relaxation” (all key words in an urbanism that embraces the precepts of shared life) that suddenly looks like a combat zone.

The melancholy of the wanderer (we know this expression is weak, because, following our examination of David Lurie’s wandering, it elicits a reflection on vagrancy) is a cruel act, a gait that rhymes with nothing. While the walker picks up his pace (it is so important for him to criss-cross the vast world, to contemplate new vistas), the vagrant exhausts himself. He goes well beyond what reason dictates and health permits. Under duress, caught in the crossfire, the walker is actually a slave. While the worldly wanderer likes to hear himself talk, the vagrant with the empty stomach hears the impulses of urban disorder echo in his skull.

It is clear that the distinction expresses a rupture, a disassociation. I mentioned in *Espaces en perdition* how anti-human statements lodge themselves in the heart of the language. The expressions “delete” and “reboot” belong to computer technology—what we used to call artificial intelligence. In this case, the description of network automatisms (whether they are computer or cognitive

networks does not matter) continues to obey a principle of codified regulation based on the binary unit of measurement called a “bit.” In this regard, I suggested in *Espaces en perdition* that this codification of information technology was becoming the main argument of a new rhetoric of tropes that places little emphasis on “subaltern subjects.”

As I am writing these lines, the “financial crisis” is the subject of endless commentary. It is all summed up in one obsession: an economic recovery plan (whether or not it is truly useful is not the point of our discussion) will put an end to this unfortunate decline. Transnational capitalism must be “civilized”! Looking like a savage beast of unpredictable behaviour, the market economy (this phony representation of real “trade” between subjects) serves as a phantasm that we must once and for all domesticate. In world business, human intervention is the pledge of a serious mind. But what does this intervention actually mean? What are the conditions that define this necessary “presence” of a responsible subject capable of imposing its guidance on a turbulent world? This is a scenario that has already been widely discussed. While the Conrad of *Heart of Darkness* described the violence of a colonial power relationship (thwarting African “nature,” dealing the death blow to Indigenous powers), the current discussion suggests an imaginary enemy that needs to be battled relentlessly. This enemy is the fantasy (turned real, we say emphatically) of endless credit, of an annuity of which we are all the irresponsible trustees. So now our virtuous protectors are telling us, “You have to pay!” Although the economy of “pretence and simulation” was the subject, as far back as the 1970s, of relentless criticism on the part of Jean Baudrillard (as his 1972 *Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe* attests¹⁴), the era of network

14. Jean Baudrillard, *Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe* (Paris: Gallimard, Essais collection, 1972).

automatism is called into question in a tone that does not manage to hide its persistent uneasiness.

Praise for walking (an impulse both curious and invasive) stumbles over the debris of spaces in distress. A consequence of this description of a ruined urban universe, vagrants are the new figures in a rhetoric of tropes in a decidedly sorry state. While the walker (from the famous angle of the migrant, in the 1980s) could see far and had no fear of forcing the obstacles stacked up before him, the vagrant, as we perceive him today, seems doomed to endless repetition. I have used this image several times (notably with regard to the works of Chekhov) because it seems to me to describe a playing field reduced to its weakest expression. In this context, our study of the comings and goings at Place Émilie-Gamelin is meant to perceive a rarefied universe. Subject to the constraints and vexations of the forces of the law, exposed to administrative harassment at every level, vagrants, who barely live in the cracks of Place Émilie-Gamelin, are indeed beings that escape all society life: homeless, “disqualified” in the eyes of effective power, the unacceptable markers (could they be urban scarecrows?) of a “presence” that upsets and angers.

In the course of this discussion of the forms of vagrancy in the era of discredit, I have tried to define the meanderings of the law, its determination to trap and shackle the weakest. The discourse makes use of obsessive references: mazes that are migrainous and hallucinated worlds of folly, oxymorons (another rhetorical torture that forces us to say the same thing and its opposite). There is indeed a long list of these devices with their pointless violence. It is as if we were living in a world made of borrowings and tricks, in a funeral suit drawn perfectly by Michel Leiris.¹⁵ Decidedly, it is a world of little joy that we are describing, a universe of uncertain reliability

15. Michel Leiris, *Le forçat vertigineux* (November 26, 1925), 13 leaflets. Dated and signed original manuscript. Manuscript text dedicated to Georges Bataille, Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, cote BRT 158.

that demands our anxious vigil once again. Thus the vagrancy that we observed in the tales of Chekhov develops zones of tension that appear at nightfall, on the edges of share lands, in pathways that are hard to navigate.

In terms of preventing opinions from being voiced (which is partly related to our discussion of vagrancy), Chekhov interests us in that he does not testify, does not claim to adopt a fair tone. Like François Laplantine, I want to focus on the small connections of thought, modesty, euphemism, these barely visible tropisms that imply a (re)definition of vertical forms of culture (from eloquence to sublime). This implication of grandiloquence may, however, transform itself into a commonplace. Is it appropriate to oppose greatness to smallness?

We can clearly see that this discourse, if not clarified, can be a simple approximation without serious relevance. Does referring to “people of little means” come down to the same thing as simply opposing “lower-class people” to “upper-class people”? The expression is practical and has the merit of being clear. But shouldn’t we, once again, re-evaluate this culture of abasement and sudden elevation? Of course, class constraints (unequal access to health care and education) and discrimination (based on ethnic origin) help perpetrate the abasement. But our discussion of this question cannot be content to verify the entwined markers of vertical and horizontal architecture. I raised this notion (which is still in the news) because I wanted to define, following the example of Michel de Certeau’s¹⁶ demonstrations of the infraordinary, a multi-figured universe that we can barely perceive. We have unintentionally adopted the stance of an entomologist straining to see the smallest of the small, who uses microscopes to plunge into the heart of the insect world. The works of Jonathan Swift also come to mind, with his famous Gulliver

16. Michel de Certeau, *L’Invention du quotidien. Tome 1 : Arts de faire* (Paris: Gallimard, Folio, 1990).

who inadvertently tramples the world of the Lilliputians. So our journey to the heart of the infraordinary would have served as a cultural metaphor. Although our intention was laudable (to explore the mysteries of an elusive universe), we need to ask ourselves today seriously about the consequences of this point of view.

Relentlessly fleeing without knowing the exact object of the crime, fearing completely unjustified incarceration, walking endlessly as if the ground were burning our feet—these are the signs of vagrancy that doom us to play the role of prey. No doubt it is this secret anguish that we feel. Our dread of being seized, assaulted, and ravished insidiously contains the unseemly form of the expected trauma. Throughout this discussion, it seemed appropriate to me to describe these often disagreeable affects that make us live all wrong. Like Michel Leiris's dizzy slave¹⁷ (reminiscent of imminent death or death that has already come to pass), omniscience (the desire for a society life with no imperfections) is a life upside-down, a life gone sideways.

On the contrary, vagrancy is a meandering walk that runs along the walls of dreary cities, abandoned neighbourhoods. It is also having the experience (which rushes us toward the traumatic universe) that the sum total we can dream of is a world in the negative, a pathway haunted by a demonic awareness. All these bad dreams that we cherish, the complaints and snivelling take the place—another paradox—of affirmative discourse. We struggle to drag them along like a procession of nightmares. But why do we cling to this disability that is perhaps an indication of our inability to live fully? What else does this cultural mobility, with its restrictive nature, mean? Following the characters in Coetzee's works, their short-range meanderings in *Slow Man*,¹⁸ it clearly seems that our

17. Michel Leiris, *Le forçat vertigineux*.

18. John Maxwell Coetzee, *L'homme ralenti* (Paris: Gallimard, Points collection, 2007) (Original title: *Slow Man*).

migrations are dying down, that they no longer know the aerial scale of the world that Gaston Bachelard described. As far back as *Notes from Underground*, Dostoyevsky enticed us to penetrate into this world that we perceive as a *claustrum*. Unlike the radiant spherologies described by Peter Sloterdijk¹⁹—“bubbles” heralded in the Aristotelian world of forms—our *claustrum* functions as an evil eye, blood-stained gaze, traitor’s expression, double agent at the heart of a paranoid universe.

With regard to the forms of credit and discredit, we have restricted our discussion to the impression of correction or imperfection suggested by reading stories off the beaten track. The vagrants whose modes of wandering we are trying to define are not, however, eccentric characters or stigmatized beings. Their pain (as we can see in Coetzee’s *Life and Times of Michael K*) is the expression of a universality: rather than describe a new human condition (a repertory of rejects and unfortunates), perhaps we should study the breaking points that create (with a sudden rupture) communities of disposable men and women.

At first glance, the theory of “disposable man” corresponds to expulsion from the domain of social space, as I demonstrated in *Espaces en perdition*: being disposed of means no longer having a proper life, being doomed to abasement. In keeping with this working definition, I advanced the idea that this expulsion is expressed by complete denial in the domain of language. The expressions “delete” and “reboot” were meant to be a literal description of a mode of operation in which the automatism of a self-regulated system holds sway. In this story we propose to read, exclusion is not even a matter of a decision founded on intersubjectivity. It simply embodies, with an operational rationality, a decision whose apparent autonomy

19. Peter Sloterdijk, *Bulles: Sphères I* (Paris: Fayard, Pluriel collection, 2011) (Original title: *Sphären I—Blasen*).

overpowers all human interpretation (with everything that implies in the way of errors, hesitations, prevarications).

The discourse we hear the most frequently about “disposable humans” vaunts beneficial displacement (the gradual abandonment of the forms of good old human conscience, with its wanderings, its doubts, its quibblings). As a corollary of this point of view, the flow of information (facilitated by the dissemination of the Internet in daily life) is modulated and refined so that the flow of meaning is never interrupted. Like the “disposable man” that we are examining, we have to imagine a soothing swell that reminds our sometimes disillusioned selves that it is possible to be comforted.

The excess flow of information knows neither earthquakes nor floods, because it is understood that the backsurge (this drawdown of the network on itself, the information interference that never stops colliding with itself) is the horror of any system that lays claim to transparent functionality. This is another perspective that may help us understand more exactly what we mean by disposable humans. Like detritus that washes up on a shore, building strange marine statues over time and tide, Internet dumps are heaps (of bits of information in network memories) that are nevertheless unaware of backsurges. The Internet is a becalmed sea, with a soothing pace. Although it offers the illusion of living at the heart of a world that is always mobile, the very form of the Internet claims to capture all discord, process it—that is, digitize it.

The portrait of vagrancy in Coetzee’s *The Master of Petersburg* is completely different—and I admit, very distant from our contemporary virtual conceptions. Here is a dreary world, a *claustrum*, a collapse that forbids all aerial grace. In this setting, there is no question of raising oneself, aspiring to a better life. There is no question of improving a status that is steeped in precariousness. If society life expresses a view of the world (an eye that defines the scope of a field of action), we have to acknowledge that this view (for Dostoyevsky,

Platonov, and, today, Coetzee) does nothing but flood back inside, like a toxic sea that poisons you. Of course the image does not reassure us, because it presages catastrophes to come; and why not: earthquakes whose (archeological) scars are already gouged across the land. It is the imagined image of the cesspit, the excavation, the detritus that immobilizes us. In a way, we fear the regressive rage of the backsurge more than anything else.

To put it concretely, could this swarming mass of pain (emotional imprisonment in a world that is no good to live in) suddenly give birth to something else? In this case, the backsurge we are talking about (as we explore the forms of discredit) is what is left of us after all our confidence is broken once and for all. Because this backsurge of confidence on itself (which we could also call the undertow of the awareness confronting, in its movement, its own inertia) is a way of saying that we are both “outside” of the world and “in” its innermost interiority.

The confidence that interests me today assumes that the value of discredit has been exhausted, as if it was becoming a strange therapy. Our masters here are Artaud, Chekhov, and, closer to us, Coetzee. They tell us about escaping the worse (disgrace?) and then coming back to the surface of the world. Living the worst, relentlessly, is an immense task that is, actually, an outrage, a way of defying a world that does not like us. Is this our destiny? It is as if we have to slander, be bad, content ourselves with the bitterness of the rejection of others (their negation, even) to finally be...alone. That is what *The Master of Petersburg* teaches us.

For this, my wish is to fall back on reading contraband. Expressions of cultural pluralism have led to the appearance of new words: relocation/dislocation, displacement, migration... these are the current terms of a discourse that I would suggest is, itself, vagrant. This expression may be surprising. After all, until now, we have been speaking of the mobile and agile forms of a literature that

is able to renew itself. In other words, the primary objective of my discussion of cultural mobility has been to promote works that draw on this famous resilience (which I also call psychological plasticity) that can lead to the emergence of flexible and adjustable literary devices. That was definitely my intention at the beginning. But my optimism (is optimism required to deal with precarious places?) soon stumbled on the distressing reality of a collapse (of thought, territory) that is the total opposite of freedom of movement.

The issue of cultural mobility is one of the underestimated traits of globalization. Most of the time, cultural mobility is defined as one of the consequences of the advanced tertiary economy: new forms of communications technology, development of the Internet, effective globalization of the financial system that acts, so to speak, in real time. All these factors seem to substantiate the image of an ineluctably accelerating world. As such, the notion of cultural mobility belongs to the optimistic expressions of the present time. We move, we are displaced. The signs of the discourse are themselves migrations.

You may have recognized here an academic enterprise that we draw on without questioning ourselves too closely about the foundation—that is, what exactly is mobility? A preliminary answer is resolutely concrete: mobility is the capacity to move without hindrance. It occurs in situations where so-called ancient ideas of rootedness, belonging, heritage are no longer appropriate. Thus mobility is the opportunity to become part of an inevitable progress whose sole and unique function is to erase territorial enclaves. Such enclaves are diverse: in contemporary academic discourse, the geographic representation of the nation-state, downtown (the places of power listed by Michel Foucault,²⁰ from the prison to the asylum) are convincing expressions of this misfortune that is experienced today by

20. Michel Foucault, *Le corps utopique* suivi de *Les hétérotopies* (Fécamp, Nouvelles Éditions Lignes, 2009. Postface by Daniel Defert).

the statement and description of places that are associated with the establishment of an “own space.”

In this discussion, I have tried to focus on a cultural mobility that cannot be summed up, as you no doubt understand, by the simple nomenclature of territorial markers in a geography of locations. In brief, cultural mobility allows us to take into account, beyond the simple empirical description of a territory, the conflicts of signs and languages that come into being in what Michel de Certeau called, once again, “own space.” I have suggested that the expression of this cultural mobility is in crisis today. Unlike the optimistic discourses that advance the idea, as is often the case, that mastering mobility is a major advantage, I wanted to focus on the meaning of vagrancy today, on what it means to stagnate, endlessly repeating the same gesture, the same movement.

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BIOGRAPHY

Beverly Diamond is the Canada Research Chair in Ethnomusicology at Memorial University of Newfoundland, where she established and directs the Research Centre for the Study of Music, Media, and Place (MMaP). She received her training at the University of Toronto, where she worked with Mieczyslaw Kolinski. Prior to assuming her current position, she taught at McGill, Queen's, and York universities, and held visiting appointments at the University of Toronto and Harvard University.

Since the early 1970s, she has worked extensively in Inuit, First Nations, and, more recently, Sami communities in Scandinavia and has conducted oral history projects in multicultural communities in Canada. Her publications have explored cultural identity, feminist musicology, Canadian music historiography, Indigenous modernity, and the construction of social meaning via audio technologies. She has co-authored *Visions of Sound* (1994), and co-edited *Canadian Music: Issues of Hegemony and Identity* (1994), *Music and Gender* (2000) and *Post-Colonial Distances: Popular Music in Canada and Australia* (2008). Her book, *Native American Music of Eastern North America* (2008) is part of Oxford University Press's Global Music Series. In 2008, she was elected to the Royal Society of Canada. She was named a Trudeau Fellow in 2009.

ABSTRACT

After a century in which innovation was arguably a defining feature of modernity, what is the political and social weight given to various concepts of repetition and return in defining contemporary Indigenous modernity? The paper begins by asking why the discursive formations of Indigenous studies are arguably dominated by so many “re” words. Drawing on her research with Native American musicians and dancers, the paper also explores Indigenous concepts of history as a “recursive” construct, one that underpins contemporary creative work that defines new forms of community and cross-cultural engagement. It offers a vigilant reading of the most politically charged of the “re” words—relocation and reconciliation—by looking at the way sound was simultaneously a form of oppression and resistance in the residential school system. It comments on the strategies of artists before and during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission era. These strategies both articulate the experience and impact of the residential school system and, at times, contribute to the charged debates surrounding reconciliation and its utopian claims. The study comments on the way “re” thinking might shift approaches to cultural rights in the context of social justice struggles.

LECTURE

“Re” Thinking: Revitalization, Return, and Reconciliation in Contemporary Indigenous Expressive Culture

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St.-Thomas University/University of New-Brunswick

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Why “Re” Thinking

“Big thinking” —as Congress organizers have labelled a group of special lectures this year—has until quite recently rarely been a label assigned to those of us who study the arts. Indeed, my discipline’s primary focus, music, and other performance traditions were often regarded by people in powerful positions to be divorced from power, politics, or persuasion, or even from public and personal well-being. The Palestinian scholar and prolific writer on music Edward Said, for instance, claimed as recently as 1991 that musicology failed “to connect [sound sources and structures] to ideology, or social space, or power, or to the formation of an individual (and by no means sovereign) ego.”¹ I hope he would have been heartened by the burgeoning of recent music scholarship concerning such things as conflict, human rights, governance, and healing,² among other social domains.

1. Edward Said, *Musical Elaboration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), xvii.

2. Among the ground-breaking publications in the burgeoning literature on these topics are Suzanne Cusick, “Music as Torture / Music as Weapon,” *Transcultural Music Review* (2006), 10; Jonathan Ritter and Martin Daughtry,

My focus today is less on “big” thinking than on “re” thinking—not “rethinking” but “re” thinking—thinking about the diverse ways in which pastness (both memory and history) is used as a tool in the present by Aboriginal creators and culture bearers in North America. This theme evolved from an easy observation: the number and variety of “re” words used in Indigenous studies by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars is unusually large and rarely scrutinized. Some of these thinkers name colonial processes: forced relocation, removal, problems of recognition. Many assume uncritically that “re” words are positive and above scrutiny; remembering, renewal, respecting, recovering, revitalizing, reviving, reclaiming, reconnecting. Other scholars use “re” words with less warm connotations: resistance, rejection, revolution. Even the CBC has not a “vision quest” program but a “re-vision quest” one. More neutral “re” words—rethinking, recontextualizing—are remarkably few. Arguably, traditional teachers have been “re” thinking for a very long time, but the embrace of these concepts by governments, non-Indigenous teachers, and others is relatively recent, only decades old. And there are differences in what the “re” means. That is what I am attempting to think through in this paper.

eds., *Music in the Post 9/11 World* (New York: Routledge, 2007); Frederick Moehn, “Music, Citizenship and Violence in Postdictatorship Brazil,” *Latin American Music Review* (2007), 28/2, 181-219; David M. McDonald, “Poetics and the Performance of Violence in Israel/Palestine,” *Ethnomusicology* (2009), 53/1, 58-85; John Morgan O’Connell and Salwa El Shawan Castelo Branco, eds., *Music and Conflict* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Andrew N. Weintraub and Bell Yung, eds. *Music and Cultural Right* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); Jocelyn Guilbault, *Governing Sound. The Cultural Politics of Trinidad’s Carnival Musics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); John Troutman, *Indian Blues: American Indians and the Politics of Music 1879-1934* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009); Benjamin D. Koen, *The Oxford Handbook of Medical Ethnomusicology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Who uses which “re” words and within what cultural framework? Who can speak about removal and relocation, for instance, histories that are so painfully central to the colonization process? Why does no one use “renovation”? Words relating to innovation have been strikingly absent in Indigenous studies, even in disciplines that claim to address creativity so centrally. Is the “re” necessary all the time? In this regard I think of a comment that Mi’kmaq curator Stephen Augustine made to me: that it was not “revitalization” that was needed in Indigenous communities but “vitalization.”³ The “re” implied that the cultures were not vital and it failed to recognize the ongoing need to vitalize, in order to keep any culture strong. I thought about “re” words that I associated with myself. “Re-doing,” “re-writing,” “re-searching.” These words implied that by doing something again I might eliminate a few deficiencies, get better. The work ethic “re” words, I suppose. Linear words. I also thought about feminist theory, particularly work by philosopher Judith Butler who has, for over 20 years, demonstrated how reiterated behaviours become “performative” in that they naturalize stereotypic constructions of gender and race. “Re” thinking, then, also queries whether Aboriginal artists find strategies for avoiding stereotypes that may be expected of them. The issue that connects all these “re” words is how memory and history are constituted and represented, or denied.

We seem, furthermore, to be at a “re” moment in the history of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships in Canada, marked strongly by the establishment of the truth and reconciliation

3. Stephen Augustine generously served as a member of an Aboriginal advisory committee for the textbook *Native American Music in Eastern America* (2008) that Oxford University Press commissioned me to write for its Global Music series. The conversation about “vitalization/revitalization” took place in 2006.

commission on residential schools. In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, many elders and artists were already making reference to a new circle in the history of North America (the end of the seventh fire or beginning of the eighth in Anishnabe narratives), to return, to coming home, and going back.⁴

On the other hand, the current historical moment is one in which some Indigenous rights activists and legal historians are questioning the efficacy of cultural rights arguments in social justice initiatives. I will argue that their doubts result from a particular kind of “re”thinking that is inconsistent with ones I have encountered in Aboriginal communities. I will suggest some significant aspects of the way history and memory are curated⁵ by Aboriginal artists and elders with whom I have worked, ways in which the past is mobilized to address the present and the future. I will draw examples from two quite contrasted research projects: one exploring museums artefacts, the other contemporary performance both live and in the recording studio. Both embody history and both trigger reflection. In the final section, I will turn to the most difficult and contentious of the “re” words, “reconciliation,” to consider the peril and potential of positioning artistic production at the centre of the truth and reconciliation process.

4. A few examples of work that incorporates the ideas of circularity, return, and coming home in titles include Jan Kahehti:io Longboat and Dawn Avery’s *Coming Home. Stories of Residential School Survivors* (Bradford, Ont.: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2010), and CDs by Jerry Alfred and the Medicine Beat, *Nendaä. Go Back* (Whitehorse: Caribou, 1996), Mishi Donovan, *Journey Home* (Winnipeg: Arbor, 2000), and Aboriginal Women’s Voices, *We Are Full Circle* (Banff: Banff Centre for the Arts, 2003).

5. I thank Amber Ridington (currently a PhD student in folklore at Memorial University) for developing the concept that oral traditions are means of “curating” memory.

The “Re” of Indigenous Ways of History: Remembering, Returning, Revitalizing

English is practical, good for getting things done. History echoes every time a Seneca word is uttered.

Sadie Buck, Haudenosaunee⁶

My people’s memory reaches into the beginning of all things.

Dan George, Salish⁷

The very way that we evoke memory or selectively represent history is culturally diverse as many historians⁸ have argued. Different “ways of history,” as Peter Nabokov calls them in his writing on Indigenous concepts of history,⁹ may be diverse, incompatible, and even unthinkable. My education led me to see memory as a reflection back, not a beginning. My teachers taught history through printed documents not in the very resonance of the spoken word. I have repeatedly encountered alternative perspectives. The epigrams at the head of this section, for instance, point to one of the most frequently described aspects of Aboriginal historical narratives: their recursiveness. Often oversimplified as circular rather than linear thinking, the ideas of returning full circle, turning back, or coming home evoke both memory of the past and a way forward.

Over 20 years ago, I undertook an archival project that taught me a lot both about the ways memory is embodied, and the way the past is “read” as a tool for the present. I formed a small research group to explore music-related artefacts in museum collections,

6. Personal communication, 1986.

7. Poem titled “My People’s Memory Reaches,” in *Native Poetry in Canada. A Contemporary Anthology*, eds. Jeannette C. Armstrong and Lally Grauer (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2001), 9.

8. See, for example, Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

9. The most expansive of these writings is his book *Forest of Time: American Indian Ways of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

largely because a number of Aboriginal teachers told me and other colleagues that they were eager to know more about those collections. We documented hundreds of artefacts, took copious photographs to communities, and discussed what knowledge should be shared about those objects.¹⁰ We were told hopeful stories about the day when the artefacts would be liberated from this period of incarceration to return with knowledge about the museums and other institutions that imprisoned them. Repatriation initiatives were beginning albeit haltingly, perhaps proving them right. We knew that ceremony was a way of renewing historical narratives. Now, we were taught how objects and places also embody history, demonstrating what Mohawk historian Deborah Doxtator has observed, that while Europeans relied mostly on words and especially writing to record history, Native Americans had a much wider array of documentation. She notes that images, places, and objects were more effective than specific languages in facilitating a shared history.¹¹

Consider a few examples that challenged my thinking. Many objects embodied or were inscribed with personal or group histories. A Haudenosaunee cowhorn shaker belonging to Seneca chief Bigbone, who was educated at the Carlisle boarding school in Pennsylvania, was incised with symbols (as shown in the line drawing below; they include a seven-pointed star, zigzag lines, a cross, and an arch of words “Jesus Onem to Pray”; illustration 1) that seem to signify his conversion from traditional belief to Christianity. But the object is round: which came first and which next? Some

10. See Beverley Diamond et al., *Visions of Sound. Musical Instruments of First Nations Communities in Northeastern America* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1994).

11. Deborah Doxtator, “Inclusive and Exclusive Perceptions of Difference: Native and Euro-based Concepts of Time, History, and Change,” in *Decentering the Renaissance: Multidisciplinary Perspectives from Canada and Europe 1500-1700*, eds. Germaine Warkentin and Carolyn Podruchny (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 43.

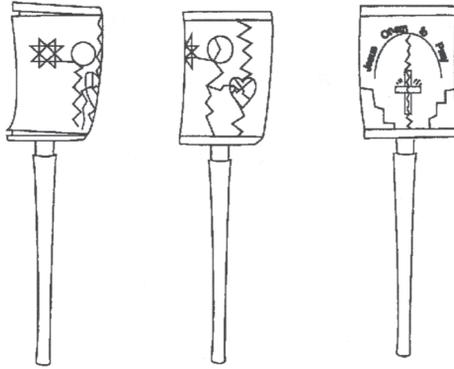


Illustration 1: Images on Chief Bigbone’s cowhorn shaker. Artifact is in the collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization III-I-465.

contemporary interpreters described the symbols as an “ecumenical” accretion of beliefs, not a linear move from one to another.

Handmade objects embodied time because they took a long time to make. Young Anishnabe women may work for a whole year to make a jingle dress, one jingle cone per day in the tradition of some communities.¹² Other regalia may also involve an accumulation of pieces over time. A dance outfit, then, is a physical manifestation of commitment as well as a narrative of personal experience.

The sound producers we documented in the archival project were not static and fixed but often had additions at different points in time: a new layer of paint, a new image, an appendage. Elders told us new colours or designs were needed for new contexts, different ceremonies or life stages. Old and new meeting points—meetings that included but were not limited to the social encounters of humans—were designed with particular care. The two interlaced

12. Similarly, older Innu women add beadwork rings to the band of their hat, signifying each year in the life of their family with a new ring of beads.

membranes of a frame drum might be edged with red and blue to signify the meeting of earth and sky, or divided with a line that marked the meeting of good and evil. More lighthearted were additions of new “technology”: mirror-like CDs sewn into a powwow outfit, for instance. Both the dance outfits and musical instruments were palimpsests of individual or group experience.

The museum project revealed a great deal about how old life gives itself to generate new forms. In traditional narratives, the turtle gives itself to become a shaker, the deer to be the “voice” of a drum. Arguably less traditional are the tobacco tins and baking soda containers transformed into Anishnabe shakers. “Why were these mundane objects used in ceremony?” we asked an Anishnabe elder. The tins had the necessary colours of the thunderbird—black and red or blue and red—he explained. He told us that, for a while, Pepsi cans were preferred; the metal alloy produced a “sound that you can hear inside the sound of thunder” when it occurs in the unusual circumstance of a clear day. He signalled a way of paying attention to sounds inside other sounds, to materials around us that recreate or evoke certain visual qualities or sounds, to very specific environmental circumstances. The Pepsi can shaker demonstrates what my fellow ethnomusicologist Victoria Lindsay Levine has articulated so clearly when she writes: “Native American processes of musical change include the adoption or adaptation of music performed by other peoples, the blending of indigenous and external idioms, and the revitalization and recontextualization of repertoires that have become moribund or have been temporarily discontinued.”¹³

Elders’ readings of archival objects taught me much about the different ways history might be inscribed, layered, adapted, used for renewed purpose in the present, or viewed as prophecy. New materials, images, and lifeways are integrated not as some less

13. Victoria Lindsay Levine, “American Indian Musics, Past and Present,” in *The Cambridge History of American Music*, ed. David Nicholls (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004 <1998>), 19.

authentic form of the past but as a way of speaking to new circumstances or renewing beliefs that are central to Indigenous knowledge. This plasticity was purposeful and vigilant. I agree with Nabokov that the question “What is history?” may be far less important than “When is it necessary, permissible, or culturally appropriate for Indian historicity to come to life?”¹⁴ The late Art Solomon, an Anishnabe elder from northern Ontario, put it slightly differently. Only when the fire is strong enough, he said, can a lot of people be invited to share in its warmth. Otherwise, someone might stumble, fall on the kindling, and put it out.¹⁵ The careful, purposeful nature of history also suggests that there can be many different agents of history; individual narratives have validity. Multiple histories, as Doxtator has eloquently argued, can coexist.

Recontextualization, Relocation, Reconciliation

A more recent project seemed, as I had originally devised it, to be in a different world altogether. In the 1990s, I developed an interest in the ways that audio technologies and the processes of using them were invested with social meaning. The burgeoning Aboriginal music scene in the late 20th century was a dizzying place in which to think about these aspects of Indigenous modernity. Thousands of CDs and tens of thousands of new songs¹⁶ were created in an astonishing variety of styles,¹⁷ I started working with recording artists and

14. Peter Nabokov, *A Forest of Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 34.

15. Notes on a presentation he made at an Elders Conference at the Native Canadian Centre, Toronto, in 1986. SPINC archive, now housed at the MMaP Research Centre, Memorial University.

16. A very useful discography is Brian Wright-McLeod’s *Encyclopedia of Native Music* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2005).

17. Relative to Anglo-American popular music with its fixation on romantic love relationships, there are some noteworthy patterns: far more historical songs, and reference to family and to place. As in many musical traditions, there were songs that spoke eloquently to injustice but many songs that refused the victim role for Aboriginal people and spoke strength.

sound engineers focusing in particular on the parts of the recording and mixing processes that are most often hidden from public view. I thought I was studying the impact of globalization on one facet of Aboriginal culture and had not anticipated the ways it would connect to the earlier archival work. However, I began to understand how both live performance and commodified forms of Aboriginal music were thoughtful and intentional forms of social action.

Social action, however, was inseparable from “ways of history.” Like the museum artefacts, audio recordings could also embody memories of place and personal experience (sonically as well as verbally), recontextualizing and resituating the past to be useful in the present and future. I was interested in how the technology itself facilitated this. How were the very distinctive regional sounds of drums, for instance, brought out or altered in the studio, and why did that matter? Why were reverb and echo used to excess for Aboriginal music, and how did the musicians themselves interpret this? More specifically relevant to this lecture were questions about how sampling was used to create an aural palimpsest not unlike the layers of materials and images on objects I just described. Today I want to focus on several examples that relate specifically to those colonial “re” words: removal, relocation, and residential school experience.

A precursor to the ways Aboriginal recording artists articulated their “re” experiences, however, were their aural memories, particularly those of the residential schools themselves. Is sound so important, you might ask? To respond, I think of Basil Johnston’s account of his own residential school experience, a more literary account than most of the other published survivor narratives. In a chapter titled “A Day in the Life of Spanish,”¹⁸ he describes a typical day, primarily in terms of sound and silence, showing how both were forms of oppression and coercion. One of his most vivid descriptions is as follows:

18. He attended the residential school in the town of Spanish in Ontario.

Clang! Clang! Clang! I was nearly clanged out of my wits and out of my bed at the same time. Never had anything—not wind, not thunder—awakened me with quite the same shock and fright... Bells and the black book [were two] instruments of oppression.¹⁹

In volumes of residential school testimonies published over the past 10 years, the bell is consistently described as a tool of regulation. “We lived by the bell. A bell for everything.”²⁰

The first bell rang early in the morning calling the Sisters to prayer. The second bell range at nine o’clock calling us to class. Next came the welcomed recess bell followed by the not-so-welcome one calling us back to class. The dinner bell range at noon and another at one o’clock summoning us to the afternoon class and then another telling us that class was over. The eighth bell of the day was the supper one which had a different sound because it was a smaller bell and finally, the bell calling us to Benediction. Nine bells in each day.²¹

Many describe the violent intrusion of “the incessant bells,”²² regimentation, and rigid organization of time that contrasted markedly with the context-sensitive way of life that Aboriginal children had come from. Isabelle Knockwood, for instance, tells one such story about the traditional listening skills she learned as a child. She recounts that her mother told her “to listen to my footsteps as I went along so when I retraced my steps back home I would recognize the different sounds and realize if I was going the wrong way before going too far.”²³

19. Basil Johnston, *Indian School Days* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1988), 28-29.

20. Oral narrative by Fran Luther on the DVD *Residential School* (Vancouver: First Nations Films, n.d.).

21. Isabelle Knockwood, *Out of the Depths. The Experiences of Mi’kmaq Children at the Indian Residential School at Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia* (Lockeport, NS: Roseway Publishing, 1992), 48.

22. Lorna’s story in Longboat and Avery, *Coming Home*, 28.

23. Knockwood, *Out of the Depths*, 18.

Another oppressive aspect of the residential school soundscape was the absence of familiar sounds—the sound of the voices of parents and siblings, the sound of one’s own language, which was forbidden. Pete Sydney (Tlingit) explains that “after a while you get so damned embarrassed [that] you don’t do anything Indian, eh. I didn’t even want to tell them my name after a while.”²⁴ Isabelle Knockwood gives a similar description: “For a long while, about three years, I kept quiet so I wouldn’t be noticed.”²⁵ Some stories reference the silence of the nuns who stole up and down the aisles looking for errors in students’ work, errors to be punished with a slash of the switch they carried.

Music was behaviour modification. The regulations for teachers at the Shubenacadie Residential School in Nova Scotia, for instance, state that the children should be taught “simple songs and hymns. The themes of the former to be interesting and patriotic. The tunes bright and cheerful.”²⁶ Knockwood explains the irony of learning “Columbus sailed across the sea and found this land for you and me.”²⁷ But she also notes that she sang with pleasure some of the hymns she had learned, on the rare occasions when her parents could visit.

School children used the same tools, however, as forms of resistance. Hymns were parodied with new words: “There is a boarding school far far away/ Where we get mush ’n’ milk three times a day” replaced “There is a happy land, far far away.”²⁸ Mi’kmaq children in Shubenacadie developed “Shubie slang” to shift meaning and to criticize while laughing. Isabelle Knockwood described how

24. Interview (1992) with Daniel Janke in the archive of the Canadian Musical Pathways project, MMAP Research Centre, Memorial University.

25. Knockwood, *Out of the Depths*, 54.

26. *Ibid.*, 47.

27. *Ibid.*, 50.

28. Musical and text transcription printed on the back cover of Elizabeth Graham, *The Mush Hole. Life at Two Indian Residential Schools* (Waterloo: Heffle Publishing, 1997).

Clara Julian could reduce us all to helpless laughter in church when she would take a line from one of the Latin hymns for Benediction, *Resurrexist sicut dixit* (“He said he would rise up again”). But Clara would sing at the top of her voice “*Resurrexist kisiku piktit*,” which in Mi’kmaq means “When the old man got up, he farted.”²⁹

Parody, then, was indeed a kind of hidden transcript.

As the many volumes of narratives published by survivors and their collaborators (mostly since the late 1980s) demonstrate, Aboriginal people did not wait for the Harper government to offer an apology and set up the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada to give voice to the experience they or their parents had in the residential schools. The same is true of musicians who have narrated experiences of removal and forced relocation for decades.

Jerry Alfred, a Tutchone musician from Old Crow in the Yukon, attended residential school in Carcross, where he was immediately placed in the choir because he had a good voice. His “Residential School Song” uses the studio to show the remarkable contradictions of his experience. The ubiquitous “bell” signals the beginning of the song. He starts the song with the Tutchone frame drum and melodic shape of a gambling game song, but it morphs into a pop refrain. Swirling electronics convey confusion and disorientation. Later we hear children’s voices, but they are faint, suppressed, barely an allowable memory. The words, on the other hand, defiantly assert that he did *not* forget his own language even though he was not allowed to speak it. As performance often does, more than one message is conveyed at the same time: the pain of memories but the resilience that leads him to the future. When I met Jerry in 1999, he explained that his three CDs formed a circle, after which he would return to his community of Old Crow to work on land claims. The title of the second CD, *Nendaa. Go Back*, signaled his intention to return. Music was the vehicle that prepared him for the political work he would do.

29. Knockwood, *Out of the Depths*, 124.

Many responses to the residential school experience have been made by the second generation, the children of survivors who suffered the disconnection that was inevitable if their parents were not able to relearn to give the care and affection that had been denied them. The title song of Inuit Lucie Idlout's debut album, *E5-770 My Mother's Name*, expresses anger about the system of numbering Aboriginal people of an earlier generation. She samples her mother's gentle and jovial voice as a radio announcer and as a throat singer, implying a backgrounded murky memory perhaps. The anger over the dehumanizing of people by not recognizing their names is palpable in the hard rock beat and her intense voice. A snare drum evokes authority and regimentation. But she also taunts by changing her vocal timbre on the line "I'm not lying," a line that follows the hard-hitting critique.

Mohawk cellist, singer, and ethnomusicologist Dawn Avery, the granddaughter of one of the high-steel Mohawks who helped build the skyscrapers of New York, did not grow up in a family touched by residential schools, but her art and research give voice to those who have suffered from the process. Both a composer and performer, Dawn who is "as at home in a sweat lodge as on stage in Lincoln Centre," as her online bio accurately asserts, has performed with artists ranging from Pavarotti to Sting. But she has turned in the last decade back to her Mohawk roots, learned the language she heard but never spoke, participating in social and ceremonial events, and establishing a close relationship with Haudenosaunee elder Jan Longboat of Six Nations in Ontario, with whom she has co-authored a book of survivor narratives: *Coming Home* (see footnote 4). As a composer, Avery is a leader in what many are calling the Classical Native movement. One of her compositions, "Decolonization," reveals how she puts those parts of her life together. She told me, "I wanted to use old American tunes," but she challenges what "old American tunes" are by including a plainchant with Mohawk words, a Geronimo song, a Stomp Dance. As Idlout did, Avery cites the past

to comment on contemporary life, nowhere more dramatically than in a section where she performs an exaggerated imitation of Jimi Hendrix’s legendary parody of the American national anthem at the Woodstock Festival in 1969. “People get it,” she says. “Even if they’re too young to remember Woodsock,” I add. But it’s an acoustic cello, not an electric guitar. Like her moccasin and elegant gown attire, not a combination you expect. Hard to read as rock and roll or as Indigenous. The Creek poet and musician Joy Harjo once wrote, “The saxophone complicates things,”³⁰ (referencing expectations we have about the history of Aboriginal performance, the history of jazz, the alliances we read among oppressed peoples, and so on). Well, so does the cello. Is the Hendrix reference thumbing the nation-state, or does the cello proclaim the cracks in the public solidarity of the United States or perhaps imply a sense of futility about American popular culture? Avery explained that she likes to use found objects. Who has the right to use such objects? Are the citations of earlier music “safe symbols of authenticity” as Steven Feld has claimed of such references,³¹ as components of an aesthetics of pastiche as Veit Erlmann has asserted,³² or as means of connecting generations, connecting tribal peoples, and positioning them in relation to the nation-state, as Avery asserts?

Finally, the late Floyd Westerman was one of the first Native American musicians to articulate his residential school experience in a song called “Relocation Blues.” He too cites tradition, by using a powwow melody and vocables. Buffy Sainte-Marie subsequently included the Westerman song text in a history of residential schools

30. In “The Musician Who Became a Bear,” recorded on *Heartbeat. Voices of First Nations Women* (Washington: Smithsonian Folkways, 1995).

31. See Steven Feld, “From Schizophonia to Schismogenesis: On the Discourses and Commodification Practices of ‘World Music’ and ‘World Beat,’” in *Music Grooves*, Charles Keil and Steven Feld (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 265-71.

32. See Veit Erlmann, “The Politics and Aesthetics of Transnational Musics,” *The World of Music* 35, no. 2 (1993), 3-15.

she wrote for her online Cradleboard curriculum.³³ An interesting aspect of the song's recontextualization in this innovative curriculum is the question she poses to teachers and children: "What emotions do you find in the words to the song? Anger? Despair? Hope? Determination?" She insists that listeners read the song like the elders read those archival instruments as past evidence that requires present and personal interpretation. Sainte-Marie performed the Westerman song at the first national TRC event in Winnipeg in 2010, right after she sang an energetic orchestrated pop tune from her latest album *Chocho Nishige*. In contrast, "Relocation Blues" was sung a capella with her trademark vibrato intensified to resemble a "powwow voice." As she said by way of introduction, "Sometimes a song can make more of a difference than a fat tome or a political speech." The unaccompanied performance and powwow voice arguably traditionalized Westerman's country inflections, claiming Indigenous pride. The audience (75 percent of which were estimated to be residential school survivors) went silent.

These few examples, then, demonstrate a variety of creative strategies that Aboriginal musicians have used as a means of response to the painful legacy of residential schools and a strategy to promote recovery. These songs showed that painful memories and resistant attitudes can coexist. They prepared a composer for political engagement, critiqued specific abuses, and laughed at the arrogance and ironies of "civilization." Many of these and other musicians use citation to recontextualize and reorient the meaning of memories.

Ironic Twists in the Relation of Indigenous Expressive Culture to Political Action

Performances such as the ones I have just discussed have a huge potential for impact. The impact of both traditional and contemporary Indigenous song cultures, however, has often been affected by

33. Cradleboard was an imaginative Aboriginal-centred curriculum project that Sainte-Marie developed during the 1980s and 1990s.

political policy, and there have been several ironic twists in the patterns policy has taken. The first ironic twist is in the power accorded Indigenous performance at different historical moments. Music has been a key component in both the Canadian and U.S. government’s agendas of citizenship. A severe instance was the 1880s banning and criminalization, by both countries, of traditional Indian performances together with joint initiatives by government and Christian churches to eradicate traditional language, traditions, and land-based knowledge by establishing boarding schools. At the same time, there were performances, some for ethnographers and some for entrepreneurs who contained performance in such strange phenomena as Wild West shows. Ethnomusicologist John Troutman posits that music served as a hidden transcript of resistance (to use James Scott’s concept)—

blatant in the public nature of performance, yet hidden in the sense that music could be considered an innocent social entertainment as much as it could represent an assault on the assimilation policy. That is what made the practice of music such a viable, cunning, and complex political form—its transformative power often lay in the eyes and ears of the beholder as much as in those of the performer.³⁴

By the turn of the 21st century, governments seem to have completely reversed their policy to control, contain, or eradicate traditional performance. Is this ironic moment incredulous or hopeful? There are many who agreed with Buffy Sainte-Marie that “a song can sometimes make more of a difference than a fat tome or a political speech,” and yet there is a big gap between those who regard expressive culture as innocuous, as entertainment, as aesthetic experience that transcends the mundane, and those who see its potential to effect social change or to reinforce patterns of domination. The stakes of that gap are considerable.

34. John Troutman, *Indian Blues. American Indians and the Politics of Music, 1879-1934* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 13.

A second ironic twist is in the place accorded “culture” in the language of social justice struggles. It is useful to remember that, prior to the 1980s, the language of human rights and certainly the “right to culture” was mistrusted by Indigenous people as a Euro-American-centred strategy that validated individuals not groups and thereby weakened claims for territory and self-determination.³⁵ A number of initiatives in the 1980s³⁶ shifted attention to the right to culture, often simultaneously dropping language of “self-determination.” Legal historian Karen Engle has demonstrated that this new approach enabled progress of various kinds, including the recognition of group rights and, following that, land rights initiatives, since Indigenous personhood is frequently linked to knowledge and uses of land. Her 2010 book *The Elusive Promise of Indigenous Development*, however, argues that the right to culture approaches have been misguided. Culture, she claims, has been framed as heritage, something past and “not necessarily what or who they are” in the modern world.³⁷ Heritage has been alienated from the source of its production, the people, permitting “states and even international institutions to pick and choose the parts of the heritage they believe are worth protecting, and to suppress those of which they do not approve.”³⁸ Engle observes that right to culture claims “fits the neoliberal model well, both nationally and internationally. It is neither threatening to the promotion of economic and

35. James W. Zion, “American Indian Perspectives on Human Rights,” in *Human Rights in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, Abdullah Am Na’im, ed., (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 211; Karen Engle, *The Elusive Promise of Indigenous Development. Rights, Culture, Strategy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 43.

36. Among them were a revised declaration by the American Anthropological Association and Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization.

37. Engle, *The Elusive Promise of Indigenous Development*, 142.

38. *Ibid.*, 143.

political decentralization nor dependent upon indigenous economic power.”³⁹ It is significant that this critique emerges near the moment when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada begins.

I agree with Engel that culture, objectified as heritage, could be a dangerous distraction from the work of redress and social justice. Culture as an intentional interjection in a process of dialogue, however, has more potential, as I hope the examples I discussed indicate. The old processes, those ways of history, are still relevant: to give thanks for the gifts of creation; to revitalize relationships with the land and with fellow beings, including humans; to welcome newcomers and prepare the way for dialogue that might in many cases avoid conflict; to legitimize alliances by representing them symbolically. In the words of modernity, these are diplomacy, peace, even law but only if the eyes and ears of the beholders are up to the task.

To realize the potential that Aboriginal expressive culture offers, however, non-Indigenous people in Canada will have to develop new ways of paying attention, new habits of ethical listening. I have argued that the multidimensionality of performance is especially effective as a means to use the past in the malleable fashion in which First Nations tradition has always functioned, to make sense of the present and future. Artistic performance does not replace land rights or sovereignty, but performance could be framed as an integral part of the work of political transformation. Particularly at the current moment, when there is a shared commitment to heal the wounds of past injustices, there is opportunity for powerful repositioning of sounds, images, narratives, and ways of being. But there is equally opportunity to focus only on the celebratory character of song or the pastness of the “re” words, and to reaffirm a dangerous victim role for Aboriginal people. If expressive culture is seen simply as entertainment, as aesthetic experience separate from social sustainability, the positioning of the arts at the current juncture in

39. *Ibid.*, 157.

the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada may well be a new colonialism, a camouflage, or celebration as a distraction from political action. Memorialization without vitalization. Alternatively, in this historical moment we could witness an acceptance of divergent ways of history, reconsideration of how past, present, and future echo together, and acknowledgment that revitalization is not a matter of bringing to life what was not living, but to vitalize regularly what will sustain powerful communities, healthy families, and strong individuals. It may depend on how we think the “re.”

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