
C O N F E T T I



*UN JOURNAL DE LITTÉRATURES ET CULTURES
DU MONDE*

A WORLD LITERATURES AND CULTURES JOURNAL

2022 • VOLUME 8

ÉQUIPE ÉDITORIALE
EDITORIAL TEAM

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Un gros merci à nos professeurs et professeures
pour leur participation à la réalisation de ce
volume

Special thanks to our professors for their work
towards producing this volume

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BIENVENUE WELCOME

Congratulations for this wonderful eighth volume of *Confetti*! Encore une fois, le journal reflète l'ampleur et la richesse de notre programme de Maîtrise en littératures et cultures du monde, ainsi que l'étonnante curiosité et capacité intellectuelle de ses étudiantes et étudiants.

The themes of the contributions to the volume—immigration, identity, multilingualism, gender and nation, cultural revolution and resistance in Canada and Quebec, and art and the posthuman question—demonstrate how important the critical scholarly examination of cultural identities, and the impact of technological development are in our times. Je tiens à féliciter la rédactrice en chef et les contributeurs et contributrices pour cette merveilleuse réalisation.

Prof. Luis Abanto

Department Chair, Modern Languages and Literatures

Directeur du département, Langues et littératures modernes



The 2022 issue of *Confetti* is a remarkable achievement, especially considering that it has been produced in the context of a global pandemic that has impacted the academic life of our program in major ways. Le journal est le résultat du dévouement des étudiants et étudiantes de la Maîtrise en littératures et cultures du monde (the Master's in World Literatures and Cultures), un programme unique au Canada: bilingue, interdisciplinaire et dynamique.

This issue showcases their research and explorations by bringing together works that encompass critical approaches and methodologies to analyze a variety of cultural expressions from Canada and around the world. On trouve ici une collection riche et varié d'articles universitaires sur des expressions culturelles du Canada et de plusieurs coins du monde. In the name of the professors who have taught and supervised these creative and dedicated students, I would like to extend my sincere congratulations to the editor, Natasha Tremblay, and the contributors.

Prof. Jorge Carlos Guerrero

Program Director, Master of Arts in World Literatures and Cultures

Directeur du programme, Maîtrise ès arts en Littératures et cultures du monde

INTRODUCTION

Au fil des deux dernières années, nous avons été témoins de l'écriture en temps réel de l'histoire mondiale; entre pandémie, guerres, tensions et transformations sociales, politiques et culturelles, l'étude des littératures et cultures du monde est particulièrement d'actualité. Les lettres, l'art, et le cinéma sont des véhicules d'expression culturelle qui nous plongent en terres inconnues à partir de notre domicile. Je vous invite ainsi, par la lecture de notre journal, à la découverte du monde et de ceux qui l'animent.

In the past two years, we have witnessed the writing of world history in real time; between the pandemic, wars, and social, political and cultural tensions and transformations, the study of world literatures and cultures is particularly relevant today. Literature, art, and cinema are vehicles of cultural expression that plunge us into unknown lands from the comfort of our home. I invite you, through the reading of our journal, to discover the world and those who animate it.

La première section, *Immigration, identité et multilinguisme*, vous donnera un aperçu d'une variété d'expériences migratoires à travers le monde. La deuxième section, *Révolution culturelle et résistance au Canada et au Québec*, étudie des représentations artistiques des réalités autochtone et francophone au Canada; la troisième section, *Genre et nation*, se penche sur les effets des projets nationaux sur les femmes; et la dernière, *Art contemporain et la question posthumaine*, pousse une réflexion qui transcende l'Homme et ses traditions artistiques vers une nouvelle compréhension de la vie au-delà de l'être humain.

The first section, *Immigration, Identity and Multilingualism*, will give you an overview of a variety of migratory experiences from around the world. The second section, *Cultural Revolution and Resistance in Canada and Quebec*, examines artistic representations of Indigenous and Francophone realities in Canada; the third section, *Gender and Nation*, looks at the effects of national projects on women; and the last section, *Contemporary Art and the Posthuman Question*, pushes a reflection that transcends mankind and its artistic traditions towards a new understanding of life beyond the human being.

Bonne lecture, et bon voyage ! Happy reading, and enjoy the journey!

Natasha Tremblay

Editor in Chief and Master's Candidate

Rédactrice en chef et candidate à la maîtrise



Immigration, identité et multilinguisme

Immigration, Identity and Multilingualism



ABIGAIL ROCHE

*GIVING VOICE TO THE MULTIFARIOUS IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE: GENDER
INEQUALITY AND U.S. IMMIGRANT MULTILINGUALISM IN NORTE BY EDMUNDO PAZ
SOLDÁN AND ITS ENGLISH TRANSLATION BY VALERIE MILES*

Résumé

Dans cet article, j'examine le roman polyphonique *Norte* (2011) écrit en espagnol par Edmundo Paz Soldán ainsi que la traduction anglaise de Valerie Miles afin de comprendre comment les écrivains démontrent et critiquent les questions sociales et politiques pertinentes aux États-Unis. Je me penche sur la façon dont les écrivains traitent les questions liées à la violence extrême et à l'inégalité des sexes alors qu'ils transmettent des réalités très variées chez les immigrants latino-américains aux États-Unis.

Mots clés : féminisme, traduction, immigration, violence, inégalité

Introduction

Through a comparison of *Norte* (2011) by Edmundo Paz Soldán and the novel's English translation, written by Valerie Miles in collaboration with Paz Soldán, this analysis will consider the effects of the translation in relation to the characters' experiences with immigration to the United States (U.S.) as well as how women are represented in both novels. As a Bolivian American, Paz Soldán writes *Norte* by leveraging his own experiences and perspective. Paz Soldán presents

Abstract

In this paper, I examine the polyphonic novel *Norte* (2011) written in Spanish by Edmundo Paz Soldán and the English translation by Valerie Miles in order to gain an understanding of the ways in which the writers demonstrate and critique social and political issues of relevance in the United States. I consider how the writers treat matters related to extreme violence and gender inequality while they convey realities of vastly different experiences of Latin American immigrants in the United States.

Key words: feminism, translation, immigration, violence, inequality

generalizations about the traits and experiences of immigrants with a realist image of extreme violence. Furthermore, his representation of women demonstrates their marginal position in society as subordinate to men and as the victims of men's violence and objectification. By analyzing the texts through the lenses of feminist and translation theory, this paper strives to gain a greater understanding of strategies to represent gender inequality in relationships and violence against women.

At a time when international borders are of high relevance in politics and public health matters, *Norte* by Edmundo Paz

Soldán, a polyphonic novel, gives readers an inside look into the lives of various individuals who cross the Mexico–U.S. border both legally and illegally in different decades and how their distinct experiences impact their lives. The reader follows Jesús, a Mexican serial killer based on the real Railroad Killer Ángel Maturino Reséndiz, in his growing obsession with violence and larceny and his illegal lifestyle of crossing the border freely primarily by train in the 1980s and '90s. Paz Soldán uses candid descriptions of this character's twisted thoughts and actions, despite writing in third-person narrative. Paz Soldán and Miles both develop the character of Jesús in such an intimate and dynamic way that the reader may feel sympathy for a vicious serial killer. Martín's story, starting in the '30s, is based on the self-taught artist Martín Ramírez and begins with him working illegally on a train in the U.S. and then continues as he is institutionalized in a psychiatric hospital. He struggles to understand English and eventually chooses not to speak altogether. Michelle, the only female protagonist, is a talented writer and artist who drops out of college to pursue her passions outside of the confines of academia. She is the daughter of Bolivian immigrants in the U.S. Her life in the 2000s revolves around a tumultuous love

affair with an Argentinian professor, Fabián. The final protagonist, Sergeant Fernandez, is introduced later in the novel. He investigates several of Jesús's murders while dealing with his own biases toward the criminal, as he is also an immigrant from Mexico.

Valerie Miles first collaborated with Paz Soldán when he was writing the manuscript for *Norte* and then again when he approached her to ask that she translate the novel into English. While there are translations of his novel into various languages, the English version is particularly significant, as the subject matter directly relates to the U.S. In her "Translator's Note," Miles divulges information on her translation process and the challenges that she faced. While her personal insight sheds light on the translation, I examine the texts further to see how her decisions affect the story, the character development, and the reader's experience in English. Furthermore, I examine her explicit statements in relation to the text and allow space for contradiction, since a writer's own interpretation of her work is not finally authoritative.

Differences and similarities

Miles takes liberties in her translation to alter passages rather than translate directly

in order to produce a novel that can be read with ease and to create distinct character voices while also maintaining Paz Soldán's intentions for the characters. Miles and Paz Soldán, as explained in the "Translator's Note," discussed the ways in which the U.S. domesticates the diverse Spanish-speaking cultures under blanket terms and stereotypes. In order to rightly encapsulate the unique individuals and their experiences crossing the border, their voices had to show such uniqueness. Although she does not go into great detail on the specifics of how she achieves it, it is clear that each character has a unique voice portrayed through varied syntax, capitalization, spelling, interjections, and code-switching, even when the narration is not in the first person. Moreover, through close collaboration, Paz Soldán had a hand in the final product and took the opportunity to rework some points and the characters. That being said, there are notable differences and similarities alike that tell a story about the targeted reader cultures as well as the author and translator. Elianna Kan explains that the Latin etymology of the word *translate* "derives from *trans* ("across") and *lātiō* ("carrying"), which makes the translator a sort of linguistic smuggler, carrying gems from one language, one culture into another" (2015). This image resounds in reference to

Norte, which focuses heavily on crossing borders and cultures. Miles carries the ideas across the divide between languages and cultures to a different readership that may not know Spanish or prefer reading literature in English.

Miles chooses to maintain the Spanish title, *Norte*, meaning "North," and adds a colon and "A Novel," likely to distinguish her version from the source text and make it clear that the novel is in English despite the Spanish title. In the "Translator's Note", she justifies her decision well and explains that, in the U.S., the idea of "North" may cause confusion and make people think of Canada (319). In fact, when Debbie tells Sergeant Fernandez that she is considering moving to Ontario, Canada, he responds: "Canada? Why so far away? That's North of North" (226). Furthermore, it evokes a well-known expression in Spanish: "perder el norte," which means "to lose one's way, to lose sight of a goal, to lose control, to lose the sense of where is up and where is down on a compass" (319). In many ways, the characters become disoriented in their immigration experiences and, through the disorientation, they change or find themselves in a new way. For instance, Michelle suddenly drops out of university to pursue her artistic talents in a less structured

manner and Martín first comes to the U.S. to earn money and ends up fearing his home country and what he left behind. With vastly different immigrant experiences all in a state of loss of their past selves, they can encounter themselves in a different way in new and strange surroundings.

I note that, in a few passages, Miles expands on some of the sentiments regarding immigration, which reflects the social and political situation in the U.S. at the time. In chapter 6 of part 3, an American news figure reports on the Mexican Railroad Killer with strong words regarding immigration. In the source text, Paz Soldán writes the section in English: “It’s time to build a wall so they can’t come here so easily” (168). Through translation, Miles amplifies the negative statement: “It’s time we build a wall and keep them out!” (186). Miles’s version echoes the politics in the U.S. at the time, with presidential campaigns ramping up and focusing on immigration issues and Mexico–U.S. relations.

Another example of Miles’s expanding on an immigration-related statement is in chapter 2 of part 2, when Martín reflects on his experience leaving Mexico. He explains: “Dolía tanto, irse” [It hurts so much to leave] (74). Miles takes a creative turn and writes: “Leaving one’s

place on Earth is a cruel experience” (77). Adding “Earth” into this statement adds a new element of being an alien in a foreign place. Furthermore, instead of saying that it hurts to leave, she deepens that pain and says that it is *cruel*, implying that the pain is imposed upon him by another person or entity and not by himself. Her translation supplements the passage about his experience by showing the reader that Martín does not consider the U.S. as his home and that it feels foreign. It also shows that he feels that going there for economic reasons was not truly a choice—it was required of him and has been cruel to him.

While she alters some passages and translates in a way that inserts her authorial voice, she also balances it with Paz Soldán’s voice and intentions, translating a large part of the novel closely and directly. For instance, she translates quite directly the passage about Michelle’s pregnancy and abortion—on which I elaborate below. Despite the complicated task it must have been, the translated polyphonic text flows well as it switches between distinct voices and narration types.

Gender inequality – Representation of women

In this analysis, I consider how Paz Soldán and Miles represent women through the diverse perspectives and experiences of the protagonists, both male and female. I have noted that every male character, regardless of his mental state, has strong tendencies to objectify women in the novel and regard female physical attributes above intellectual and non-superficial characteristics. The prevalent objectification demonstrates a lack of female agency. I therefore posit that the representation of male perspectives regarding women in the novel highlights modern gender inequality in North American society, which positions women as inferior to men and as objects to be viewed and oversexualized. The novels navigate the tension between reproducing the male gaze and criticizing it by being aware of both the social reality and the reader's presumable response to the objectification being manifested in all the characters. While it is possible that the reproduction of the male perspective and the lack of female agency in the novels are inadvertent or inconsequential, and I cannot assume to know what the author and translator think, the predominance of these elements coupled with Miles's

contribution as a modern woman led me to the conclusion that the novelist and translator are critiquing the position and treatment of women.

Women through the eyes of Jesús

Jesús's unhealthy and antifeminist perception of women is the most noticeable example of all the characters, since his chapters are riddled with aggressive thoughts and actions as a serial killer and rapist who primarily targets young women. Through the feminist theory lens, I first consider Jesús's actions and perception of women's value in order to recognize some of the distinct areas of gender inequality in society.

The detailed descriptions of Jesús's brutal attacks and sadistic desires are difficult to read and force the reader to recognize and contemplate the extreme violence. Paz Soldán intentionally dedicates a large part of the novel to violence, a fact that is corroborated in his interview with the *El País* newspaper: He explains that the protagonist, ironically named Jesús, incarnates a generalized American fear of immigrants being dangerous people who will sneak into your house and kill you. Paz Soldán chooses to initiate the novel with a graphic chapter, where the reader first gets a sense of the

depths to which Jesús's psychopathic traits and violence go. He writes with great detail and from Jesús's twisted perspective how he and a group of men brutally rape and murder a Mexican woman. From that first chapter, the reader also recognizes Jesús's incestual desires, as he closes his eyes and imagines the woman as his sister as they are assaulting her. This scene also sets the tone of the novel, that is, a tone of women being repeatedly marginalized, with their rights, bodies, and agency aggressively violated. It is also Jesús's first experience with murder and it sparks a thirst within him that he continually seeks to quench throughout the novel.

Jesús feels overwhelmed by his nagging thirst to kill in chapter 3 of part 4, so he stakes out a neighbourhood near the train tracks when he sees a Hispanic woman, Noemí, pull up in her car. Miles translates the scene as follows:

She glanced over at him quickly but continued on her way inside as if in that split second she had gauged that his was an insignificant face, that saying anything to him was a waste of her time, that he was just another of her paisanos walking the streets in search of a job: carpenters, plumbers, construction workers, anything to

earn a few bucks. Why didn't they all just go back to Mexico? (212).

Jesús's story is a third-person narrative, yet the author and translator capture his volatile and aggressive mental state in their writing, resulting in an effect similar to that of first-person narration. This passage reveals how—in terms of “ego psychology”—he projects his male inferiority complex onto this woman, believing she instantaneously judges him insignificant, and he subsequently assaults her, presumably to exert his power (Scarf 10). Paz Soldán also includes a common xenophobic statement about Latin American immigrants in the U.S., demanding they all go back to Mexico.

Jesús almost exclusively chooses young, female victims to sexually assault and murder, giving the reader an impression of women in the novel as inferior and powerless victims against a man. In his analysis of the novel, Olivier Mongin argues: “[Jesús] jouit de cette bande frontière qui le rend invisible et lui permet de retrouver sa sœur vivante dans chaque femme qu'il tue” [Jesús enjoys this boundary strip that makes him invisible and allows him to find his sister living in every woman he kills] (147). I do not endeavour to psychoanalyze the motives behind his hatred of women, but Mongin raises an interesting perspective about Jesús

targeting and hating women because of the frustration of not being able to have his sister in that way. He thinks: “*Las mujeres*. All just a bunch of bitches, like his sister. They’ll see, he’ll put them all in their place” (84). He explicitly shows the reader through his actions and thoughts that he hates all women and makes the connection frequently with his sister, for whom he has always had desires. However, when he sees that a woman is having car problems, he helps her and contemplates attacking her but ends up leaving her alone because she has eyes like his sister’s (216–218). That scene is set up in such a way that the reader would expect him to assault her, as he has never resisted an opportunity to do so before, yet it ends with him leaving her safely. If he finds his sister in every woman he kills and that serves as part of his sadistic motivation, it begs the question of why he does not therefore kill this woman who bears resemblance to his sister.

In a similar vein, Jesús selects a young Hispanic woman like his sister as his target in the aforementioned scene. Jesús assesses and judges Noemí harshly in a sweeping generalization: “Fucking puerca. They were the nastiest, the bitches who changed their clothes style and accent, took on snotty airs, tried to hide their origins” (212). It is noticeable that he only criticizes

Mexican women for their actions and says nothing about men. It could be a projection of his inferiority complex because he feels insecure that this woman seems to have successfully immigrated to the States and has the American dream that is out of his reach while he crosses the border illegally. However, he enjoys the power he feels in evading border security and even goes so far as to express disgust for the American lifestyle (86), so it stands to reason that this passage primarily exemplifies his targeted hatred of women.

Although he judges Noemí’s actions and character and the reader gets a strong sense of hatred in his words, he then selects her as his victim because of her physical attributes. He switches immediately from disgust to desire for her body, which is described as follows: “She was wide-hipped, with fat legs and a plump ass. Meat everywhere, the way he liked his women” (212). According to Jonathan Culler, feminist theory looks at what difference it makes or should make if the reader of the text is a woman (63). If the reader of this description is a woman, she likely sees this as more than just a serial killer on the hunt; it is also a disempowerment of the female subject. Describing the woman as having “meat”

construes her as an animal or meal, as if he is the hunter and she is the prey.

Laura Mulvey coined the term *male gaze* in her essay entitled “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” and, while she applies the psychoanalytical term to films, I argue that it can be applied to literature as well and is evident in Paz Soldán’s novel. Mulvey writes that, in “a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure” (62). In this particular chapter, Jesús embodies the *male gaze* of the reader. He is, in fact, “peeping through a back window” as he examines Noemí’s body (212). Mulvey argues that the man “emerges as the representative of power in a further sense: as the bearer of the look of the spectator” (63). His power as the observer of an oversexualized person diminishes her power and portrays the idea that the woman is an object and not an agent.

Jesús’s other attacks that are described in the novel continue in this way, with oversexualization and hatred toward women. In contrast, the male characters in the novel are either devoid of any physical description or are described with minimal detail. This disproportionate portrayal of people who identify as women versus men

further tips the scale in favour of patriarchal dominance and the oversexualization of women.

Martín and Sergeant Fernandez

Jesús’s actions and perspective of women could be explained by his psychotic mental state as a serial killer and rapist; however, when all the other male protagonists also openly and often objectify women, it cannot be inconsequential. The author and translator deliberately represent women in this way, allowing the reader to notice the lack of female agency and draw the link with modern gender inequality through the lenses of various individuals. Martín Ramírez is degrading in his thoughts of his wife, María Santa Ana, who resides in Mexico. Similarly, Sergeant Fernandez regards his companion only as a body to use and enjoy, and he does not respect her or her profession as an escort, even though he consistently uses her services.

While it is difficult to judge the veracity of Martín’s stories because of his schizophrenia, he often objectifies the real or imaginary character of María Santa Ana. When Martín first describes his wife, he centres in on her appearance:

How's he supposed to get over something like her? She was the center of everything. A hot number. Her ass drooped a little maybe, but no matter: her big titties made up for everything else. She had the kind of curves a man could hold on to. Others used to gawp at her. Most women get fat and ugly when they get old, and that's when you have to say oh, she's so nice, she's so good. But his María Santa Ana was both at the same time: a good-looker and a good woman (30).

He is evidently attached to this woman, yet the elements he cares about are physical—degrading and sexualized, too. María Santa Ana does not receive any distinguishing character or personality description beyond being a “good woman”, and what being a good woman to him means is difficult to judge. It is worth noting that Miles translates “superarla” [get over her] (Paz Soldán 34) to “get over something like her” (Miles 30). Her choice to write *something* instead of *someone* further emphasizes to readers Martín's perception of his wife as an object or possession rather than a human or an equal.

In general, Fernandez treats people with kindness and mercy, even going so far as to pity Hispanic criminals and let them off

the hook. However, his relationship with Debbie, an escort upon whom he frequently calls, is not one of mutual respect. Debbie does not play a significant role in the larger story and serves as a companion and deepened storyline for Fernandez. After observing her naked body and thinking about how much it is aging, Fernandez thinks about how he “should go find himself a twenty-year-old whore instead” (183). He admits that he has a weakness for Debbie, and she stopped charging him for the sex, yet he still views her as a “whore”, “puta” in Spanish, serving him only with her body regardless of any connection they may be developing. He demeans her choice of profession by calling her names, even if only in his thoughts. Miles writes: “what mattered was that as long as she was hooking, she would continue to be a whore to him” (184). He wants her to quit and only be there for him, but he never tells her that. Like Martín, he centres in on her body, placing all her value on it. He wants to be the sole possessor of her body but does not show genuine interest in her as a person. The power dynamic is unbalanced, with her virtually at his beck and call.

Michelle and Renata

Paz Soldán uses his characters, including the few female characters, to

emphasize women's marginal position in society. Lili Wright notes in her book review: "Women don't fare well in these pages — abused, manipulated, raped, murdered or simply clueless." The women do not have vibrant personalities or high levels of confidence, and their lives and stories centre around men. Judith Butler in her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* writes that representation "serves as the operative term within a political process that seeks to extend visibility and legitimacy to women as political subjects", and she considers the "pervasive cultural condition in which women's lives were either misrepresented or not represented at all" (2). While Butler is referring to political representation, the representation and participation of women in literature also extend visibility and legitimacy to women as actors in society. Therefore, the lack of strong female representation or participation in *Norte* does the opposite and abridges their visibility, painting a picture of women as marginalized and oppressed. Michelle and Renata have the potential to be strong individuals who inspire or empower women, but instead their stories and demeanours are lacking against their abusive and manipulative partners and in general.

Paz Soldán chooses to have one of the protagonists be a young woman, and her chapters are the only ones written in first-person narrative, subtly setting her apart from the others. Nevertheless, her story is less enchanting and powerful than those of Jesús and Martín. She has a fairly monotonous plotline, and the interesting elements do not impact her character development dramatically. Michelle is entangled in a relationship with her former professor, Fabián, yet she maintains that relationship solely on his terms. He strings her along without any commitment, and Michelle prioritizes Fabián over her friends and personal life. In addition, he has substance abuse issues, is openly disrespectful toward women several times, and they are occasionally violent with one another in their relationship.

Michelle is a talented artist and writer, but she is preoccupied with what others think, particularly Fabián. When she walks in on Fabián watching pornography and she tells him to turn it off, he calls her a "prude" (135). He also explains that his relationship with another woman did not work because she believed that pornography objectified women (135). In this scene, Fabián reveals clearly to Michelle his feelings toward women, as well as his violent

fetishes. He requests that Michelle slap him during sexual intercourse, and he divulges that he watched graphic and violent pornography yet blames the woman in the film for being “one of the nastiest bitches” for wanting or allowing it (135). Michelle does eventually leave after arguing with him about drugs but returns to him only a few minutes later. Despite Fabián’s misogynistic and sadistic attitude in this section, Michelle only comes across as slightly bothered by it. He exudes complete control and dominance over her and demeans her and other women. Instead of standing up for herself and recognizing her value, she pities him for his vices and seems to never see the two of them as equals.

Michelle’s agency is also sorely lacking in the third part of the novel after she discovers that she is pregnant. Fabián’s initial reaction is that he will support her but does not want to be tied down to her (164). Later, he suggests an abortion and Michelle gets enraged at the thought. She goes to Planned Parenthood but is nauseated and upset by the idea. When she tells Fabián that she refuses to have an abortion, he responds by forbidding her to keep the baby, justifying it by saying that losing his wife had led him to become depressed and that this baby would do the same. As a result of his insistence,

Michelle begins changing her mind, “thinking in his terms, seeing things from his vantage point” (165). She admits that, even though she tries to convince herself that getting an abortion is the “right decision,” she could not manage to do it. However, despite her refusal and distress regarding that option, she gives in and travels to El Paso with him to have the procedure. He wants them to leave their town to avoid people they know finding out, and she finds that notion ridiculous yet follows his instruction anyway. After the procedure is over, Fabián hugs her, and she thinks: “I would have belted him if only I’d had the strength” (167). It is clear that she wishes to go forward with the pregnancy and it is, in fact, Fabián’s strong influence that pushes her instead to go through with the procedure and in the location of his choosing. The entire passage about this significant decision spans fewer than four pages and, although a reader may expect the storyline to be more consequential or impactful for Michelle, it hardly comes up again in the rest of the novel.

It is difficult for a reader not to pity Michelle for lacking the freedom and strength to make the decision on her own without pressure and hostility from Fabián. She puts the decision almost entirely in his hands and her feelings on the matter are ignored,

establishing a clear hierarchy in the relationship. While she may have come to that decision on her own after deliberation, she appears strongly averse to the idea but does what he wants instead. Michelle's decision, which is evidently motivated by Fabián's pressure, emphasizes her passivity in the novels and her lack of authority in her own life.

The passage would have benefited from elaboration and Michelle's character may have been more intriguing if the events in her life allowed for her to grow in confidence and agency. At the end of the novel, she learns that Fabián has a daughter already, and he is going to go meet her in Santo Domingo to start a new life. She does not believe that his eagerness will last long and thinks that he needs rehab. She concludes: "All I'd ever done was enable his vices instead of helping him," taking responsibility for his problems and blaming herself for his addictions and issues worsening (287). Although she is rid of him at the end, it is not by her choice. Her character does not go through extensive character development and seems to serve more as a criticism of academia and its confines.

Renata's character, who is Jesús's wife in Mexico, concedes her control of her

life to her husband and repeatedly dismisses his abhorrent behaviour. When Jesús returns to Renata with a bag of jewelry after being in the U.S. for a significant period of time, she is angry that he had been away from her for so long without contacting her. However, as the neighbour points out, she is fortunate to live comfortably, and it is "stupid of her to complain" (236). Jesús viciously beats Renata, and her reaction after the fact is that she does not want to judge him too harshly because "all men make mistakes" (254). Her lack of self-esteem or recognition of her value as a person allow her to settle with someone who acts suspiciously, leaves her for long periods of time, and treats her as less than human, because she believes she should feel fortunate to have someone who at least supports her financially regardless of the consequences. When Fernandez and the Federal Bureau of Investigation question Renata and explain some of the crimes for which Jesús is suspected, she has a hard time believing and accepting it. She admits to herself that she "simply preferred to look the other way" (258). She convinces herself that Jesús changed and is not the man she knew, while the reader is aware that he has actually always been volatile and violent. While her denial demonstrates some of the psychological results of her suffering in an

abusive relationship, it also contributes to the novel's representation of the victimization and marginalization of women.

Conclusion

The unique polyphonic novel by Paz Soldán and Miles's portrayal in English affords both Spanish- and English-speaking readers the opportunity to be immersed in the distinctive and memorable stories of legal and illegal immigrants in the U.S. The novels are strongly rooted in realism and are influenced by Paz Soldán's thorough research on real people and events. Miles's translation brings the stories to life for the Anglophone audience, and her perspective aids in establishing a realistic representation of the characters moulded by Paz Soldán while incorporating her authorial voice and fingerprint.

The writers' decisions with respect to the female characters and their poor and imbalanced representation demonstrate the marginalization and mistreatment of women, particularly women of colour, in North American society. The stories evidence extreme violence against women in everyday life and in heterosexual relationships, accosting readers with this harsh reality. Michelle's lack of character development and

agency contrasts dramatically with dynamic male characters, such as Jesús, Martín, Fabián, and even Sergeant Fernandez. While the writers could have sought to empower women and exemplify their strength, resiliency, and agency in the texts, instead they establish a realistic representation of how women are far too often seen and treated. This decision, which is difficult to ignore, may push the reader to consider the reasons behind the drastic underrepresentation and mistreatment of female characters in these novels as well as in other literature and works of art.

The novels confront the readers on the prevalent issue of gender inequality and force them to consider the xenophobic dialogue that resounds too often in the U.S. Each novel in its unique context and writing process holds power in the messages it incorporates and emits to different readerships. A person may revel in following a serial killer's journey down a dark path, identify with Michelle's experience in academia, sympathize with a tormented mentally ill person who cannot seem to communicate with anyone, or he or she may not identify with any of the distinct characters and instead simply be hooked by the realities that the stories convey. Readers may even recognize that, although some immigration or

displacement experiences may be shared, each person has a unique story and journey that does not fit into a tidy box of expectation. Paz Soldán and Miles exemplify that an integral part of enacting change is honestly facing reality, whether that reality shocks,

hurts or inspires you. The next step toward positive change is deciding what to do with the knowledge of what has happened and is happening presently.

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P A M E L A C I S N E R O S

OZEKI'S A TALE FOR THE TIME BEING: THE VALUE OF HERITAGE THROUGH PRIVATE WRITINGS

Résumé

Cet article examine la représentation de *kikokushijo*, ou rapatriés japonais, dans *A Tale for the Time Being* de Ruth Ozeki à travers les yeux de son protagoniste, Nao Yasutani. Dans les mois précédant le tremblement de terre et le tsunami de Tōhoku en 2011, le roman examine les luttes de Nao pour appartenir à la société en tant que jeune femme qui retourne dans son pays natal comme ressortissante japonaise de l'étranger, ainsi que sa résistance à voir sa langue d'origine - le japonais - d'un œil favorable. Ces facteurs suscitent un intérêt pour la tenue d'un journal intime, qui devient le catalyseur permettant à Nao d'apprécier son individualité.

Mots clés : *kikokushijo*, Ruth Ozeki, famille, langue patrimoniale, discrimination, bouddhisme zen

Ruth Ozeki's 2013 metafictional novel *A Tale for the Time Being* converges two distinct narratives beyond time and space. After the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami, Ruth finds Naoko Yasutani's diary inside a lunchbox washed up on the shore as debris from the disaster.¹ Nao is a Japanese

Abstract

This article considers the representation of *kikokushijo*, or Japanese returnees, in Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* through the eyes of her protagonist, Nao Yasutani. In the months prior to the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami, the novel considers Nao's struggles to belong as a young woman who returns to her homeland as a Japanese national from abroad along with her resistance to view her heritage language – Japanese – in a favorable light. Her reflections lead to a personal exploration of Japan's reception of citizens from abroad and her own family history. These factors spark an interest in keeping a diary, one that becomes the catalyst for Nao to appreciate her individuality.

Key words: *kikokushijo*, Ruth Ozeki, family, heritage language, discrimination, Zen Buddhism

American girl who returns to Japan with her family as a *kikokushijo* and records her life pre-3/11 in her journal.² Ozeki's work addresses the challenges that Nao faces during her time in Tokyo at home and school when she clashes with her family about their heritage culture and navigates the extremities

¹ On March 11, 2011, a 9.1 magnitude earthquake hit the eastern region of Tōhoku, notably Tokyo. An hour later, a tsunami struck the coast and shut down the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. As of December 2021, there are over “19,747 confirmed deaths ... [and] [more] than 2,500 people are still ... missing” (Oskin).

² *Kikokushijo* refers to “Japanese returnees, [or] students who return to Japan after a prolonged sojourn abroad. They are mostly children of Japanese businessmen and government personnel ... stationed abroad” (Kanno 362).

of *ijime* from her peers.³ As she navigates these difficulties, Nao considers her diary a confidant to whom she reveals her family history, her suicidal thoughts and even a fascination with language itself. *A Tale for the Time Being* is considered a response to the 3/11 disaster, but Ozeki demonstrates how one's initial resistance towards a heritage language presents cultural differences and an identity crisis. This mindset is not permanent. Nao's social isolation motivates her to understand her family history through her private writing, enabling the Japanese language and culture to achieve personal value and positive recognition for her.⁴

Ozeki illustrates Japan's cultural context about *kikokushijo* through Nao's trajectory, and scholarship on the term's significance must be acknowledged, given its place in the narrative.⁵ Before the 1970s, there was an unspoken emphasis on homogeneity and social harmony in Japan. This mentality emerged from Japan's isolation from the rest of the world, accompanied by a social "distinction between inside and outside (*uchi* and *soto*), which led to the exclusion of anything – such as *kikokushijo* – coming from outside unless it

could be properly incorporated" (Goodman 36-37). The 1970s observed a welcoming attitude towards repatriated Japanese, changing their impression of them from a "societal liability" now being "a valuable societal resource" because their lives overseas and foreign language proficiency made them highly employable (Kanno 363). The government became receptive towards them because their "enhanced horizons and strong personalities" were vital qualities for the Japanese workforce (Goodman 43). Their repatriated Japanese status did not risk their livelihoods in the country.

This new perception of *kikokushijo* overlooked social barriers that favour adherence to homogeneity over biculturalism. Kiyoko Sueda argues that although a native Japanese level offers *kikokushijo* a better opportunity to integrate, the country's "rhetoric of ... internationalization" cannot be ignored (53). Japan's internationalization often equates to "becoming westernized" given the English language's prestige in the workplace (53). There are high expectations for these individuals to maintain their heritage

³ *Ijime* is the Japanese concept of bullying within the country's school culture that is noted for its psychological emphasis yet also refers to a group who carries out this behavior (Yoneyama).

⁴ *Kikokushijo* and *ijime* will remain italicized. Naoko will be referred to as Nao like in the novel.

⁵ See #1 for the definition of *kikokushijo*.

language.⁶ However, the ideal *kikokushijo* must be “fluent in the language of their previous host country and retain [a] ‘Japaneseness’ [mentality]”, that is, the perspective that the Japanese are “different from the rest of the world” (54). Yasuko Kanno’s study focuses on four interviewees and their experiences as *kikokushijo* as they negotiate their bicultural identities. She emphasizes that individuals who identify with this term in Japan “often behave in ways ... at odds with the norms of their home culture,” such as speaking up in class or being assertive (362). Kanno opted for the “narrative inquiry” approach to gather direct anecdotes from her interviewees over two years to understand their lives as *kikokushijo* (364-65). The adolescents reacted to their Japanese heritage with either gradual acceptance or complete rejection.⁷ Her research attempts to personalize the *kikokushijo* experience for her contemporaries to stress that every individual realizes that a bicultural connection to Japan causes varying transformative results depending on their early attitude towards the Japanese language and culture, impacting heritage reception.

Ozeki undertakes a fictional autobiographical approach for Nao in *A Tale for the Time Being* and prioritizes her private contentions with her Japanese heritage, exemplifying how her parents and extended relatives contribute to her fate. Nao’s interactions with her family highlight Japanese cultural influence upon her self-identity. The Yasutani family immigrated to the U.S. when Nao was a baby for career opportunities, causing Nao to identify as an American and rely on the English language “like a fish out of water” (Ozeki 43). She is content living in an American “dreamland” until her father’s company goes bankrupt amid “the Dot-Com Bubble” (43) and interrupts her American pace of life. When her family relocates to Japan, Nao equates this event to misfortune. She feels disconnected from her parents because even though they lived in the U.S., “they identified as Japanese and still spoke the language fluently,” much to her resentment (43). On the other hand, Nao considers herself disadvantaged because her Japanese skills were rudimentary: “I identified as American, and even though we always spoke Japanese at home, my conversational skills were

⁶ A heritage language is a language other than English that is “an immigrant, indigenous or ancestral language that a speaker has a personal relevance and desire to (re)connect with” (Shin 204).

⁷ See Kanno’s article for more an in-depth overview of her study’s results (367-273).

limited to ... where's my allowance, and pass the jam, and Oh please don't make me leave Sunnyvale" (43). Additionally, her father's unemployment meant that Nao had to attend "a public junior high school ... to repeat half of eighth grade" instead of "a private catch-up school" for *kikokushijo* children (43).⁸ Her parents attempt to dissuade Nao's expectations until their marriage reveals disappointment.

Nao's American status makes her an outlier in Tokyo, but her father provides a sense of mutual understanding between them. Nao describes how she identified with her father's perception of her mother's "toxic vibe at that time in [their] lives" and likens their routine of walking through an "unreal" society in "terrible costumes" to being players "[within] a play that was guaranteed to tank, but [they] had to go out on stage anyways" (46-47). Despite their hesitance to participate in Tokyo life, Nao cultivates a love of Japanese temples and views them as "a core sample from another time" (46). Her father also reminds her of their visit before leaving Japan with her great-grandmother Jiko, a nun at a "temple on the mountainside," when she was a child (46-47). These peaceful

moments are short-lived when Nao's parents cannot hide the shortcomings of their marriage from their daughter. For instance, Nao's mother spends her days at the aquarium, "watching kurage through the glass" as a coping mechanism to alleviate her "stress levels" and to share said experience with other housewives (49). It is only when Nao's father starts working at a start-up that Nao comprehends the extent of her mother's stress. Career success gave the Yasutani family hope for better days ahead, especially Nao's mother who "stopped going to the aquarium and started fixing up [their] two-room apartment" while her father enjoyed his newfound wealth (49-50). Furthermore, Nao observes the family's first Christmas back in Japan as a physical manifestation of financial security considering their festive celebrations (50). They indulge in "Christmas presents, ... osechi, and ... [sitting] in front of the television" with their dinner as Nao's father recounts his start-up's potential for computers to understand humans (50). Despite their upbeat attitude, hope amounts to false pretensions. Nao's mother's wishes to manage the family's money while her father uses "[stacks] of ten-thousand-yen

⁸ In 1980s Japan, Kobayashi Tetsuya's study at the Educational Department of Kyoto University determined how to best help *kikokushijo* readapt into Japanese society upon their return (Goodman 38). A viable solution was to provide resources and funds to help *kikokushijo* attend select educational institutions that help with their resettlement (38). It was later found that these children excelled academically, entering "schools attached to the national universities" (39).

bills” to appease her (51). Eventually, Nao’s mother discovers gambling tickets in his clothes, and after a failed suicide attempt, Nao’s father confesses that his start-up was not an actual job (51-52). As a result, the Yasutani family fracture their dynamic and financial stability, driving Nao’s mother to commit suicide and her father to become a *hikikomori* (52).⁹ Nao’s solitude increases despite her father’s presence.

Aside from her private concerns about her education prospects and the tensions of family dynamics, Nao also experiments with the presentation of a perfect self-image and life. She curates her life online to foster a semblance of her old life in the U.S. for her “best friend in Sunnyvale, Kayla” (79). In the early weeks of Nao’s return to Japan, she writes a blog entitled “*The Future Is Nao!*” to keep in touch with her American peers and to prime herself for a “future in Japan ... to be one big American-style adventure” (125). She creates “cheerful ... postings” for her blog but later realizes that her audience is minimal since “only twelve people ... visited [her blog] for about a minute each” (125). Her solitude continues to grow even with her only close friend. Although Nao obliges Kayla with answers

concerning Japanese “manga, ... j-pop ... anime [,] and fashion trends,” she recognizes the superficiality of their correspondence (79). Nao convinces herself that Kayla believed she “was ... a pathetic loser and it wasn’t cool to be [her] friend anymore” (125). However, Kayla disassociates herself from Nao and disregards her well-being. When Nao sends a picture of her Japanese school uniform, Kayla wants a uniform for Halloween instead, revealing her ignorance towards their friendship (126). Furthermore, Nao finds it difficult to connect with Kayla because they lacked common topics to discuss such as “fashion, or the kids at school, or what teachers [they] liked or hated” (126). She lacks a comfortable space to admit the truth behind her unhappiness and her isolating encounters with *ijime* students (126-27).¹⁰ The fact that Kayla ignores her correspondence and admitted in an email “that she ... wasn’t interested in [Nao being] a whiner” signals their friendship’s demise. Nao’s intention to preserve her American friendship backfires because of her *kikokushijo* lifestyle. Consequently, Nao finds herself devoid of a stable family and same-age friends, but she diverts her attention elsewhere.

⁹ A *hikikomori* is the Japanese term for a “recluse” (Lee 33).

¹⁰ See #2 for the definition of *ijime*.

Nao decides to change her initial resistance to Japanese culture and admit its personal value as a heritage language thanks to Jiko, her great-grandmother. Jiko is a Buddhist nun and writer who aims to “save all beings” with Buddhist prayers before reaching enlightenment after hearing stories about women’s hardships in Tokyo (Ozeki 17-19).¹¹ Ozeki draws on her experience as a Zen Buddhist priest to define Jiko’s character as her work [investigates] ... the Buddhist principles [of] ... interdependence, impermanence, [and] interconnectedness” (qtd. in Ty and Ozeki 161-62; Gullander-Drollet 301-02). Jiko’s wisdom inspires Nao to share her story with readers and delve into her Japanese heritage. Her great-grandmother’s response to her question, “How do you search for lost time ...?” metaphorically compares “the time being” to nature and the “sense of wonder” they instigate within the observer (Ozeki 23).

Nao immediately remembers that the “time being” rhetoric belongs to a “Zen master named Dōgen Zenji [,] ... one of Jiko’s favorite authors” (24).¹² As Ozeki clarifies, Nao misinterprets the “time being”

“phrase ..., thinking that the time being [is] like a human being, ... a person or a thing, whereas ... Dōgen ... is ... more abstract” (qtd. in Ty and Ozeki 169). Hsiu-chuan Lee stipulates that the “time being emerges from “the Zen concept *uji* ... composed of two characters—*u-ji* (有-時) —which together mean both ‘time’ and ‘being time’ or ‘time being.’ The word thus makes ‘being’ inseparable from time; it is embedded in and manifested through time” (45-46). Dōgen equates the “time being” to “time, just as it is, is being, and being is all time” (qtd. in Lee 46). Time itself is not physical but evolutionary “through time and time is illustrated by the existence of beings” (46). In other words, time constitutes the world itself repeatedly (Lee 46). Ozeki’s use of Dōgen also emphasizes hybridity given that she observes language’s purpose through a hybrid lens (qtd. in Hanrahan 274). Language embodies the hybrid because “we all have to communicate —the lines between truth and fiction are blurred, problematic, yet ... constructive, always creating something new” (274).

¹¹One of Soto Zen Buddhism’s major components is *zazen* which is “sitting in meditation” over time to review the scriptures mindfully before reaching enlightenment (Earhart 109).

¹² Ozeki cites Dōgen’s “time being” phrase in the prelude to Part III of her novel: *To grasp this truly, every being that exists in the entire world is linked together as moments in time, and at the same time they exist as individual moments of time. Because all moments are the time being, they are your time being.*”

Nao's fascination with Jiko's life inspires her to delve into her familial roots, motivating her to learn about her uncle Haruki. In the narrative, Nao describes Jiko's admiration for anarchists such as Kanno Sugako and her son Haruki, a World War II kamikaze pilot (Ozeki 68-69). Jiko is the only person in the Yasutani family that Nao confides in because even "being in the same room with [her] ... can make [Nao] feel okay about [herself] and ... with everyone" (165). She also helps Nao practice zazen meditation to the point that she resolves "to enter time completely" and cultivate her "*SUPAPAWA!*" or a sense of personal security (181-83). Likewise, Jiko illustrates the past's relevance – its immortal aspect – through her discussions with Nao about her life, especially about the Yasutani's family history.

When she senses that Nao's anger originates from her return to Japan (169), Jiko takes the opportunity to introduce her son and foster Nao's curiosity for this relative. Claire Gullander-Drollet highlights Ozeki's illustration of how this global conflict "is memorialized along geographic, national, and linguistic lines" through its impact upon

Japan and the U.S. due to their respective roles as Axis and Allied powers (301). Nao explains that although the U.S. entered World War II after Pearl Harbour, Japan acted in response to the U.S.' "unreasonable sanctions ... and cutting off oil and food" given their status as an island nation-state (Ozeki 179). At nineteen, Haruki became a kamikaze pilot while he was a student majoring in "philosophy and French literature at Tokyo University" (179).¹³ When Nao discovers this information, she forges an empathetic connection with Haruki, deciding that his experience of being a kamikaze pilot mirrors her worries about her family and life dissatisfaction (179-80). She first encounters his ghost at home, and the situation alarms her, yet his appearance as "a young version of [her] dad" makes Nao conclude that he is her uncle Haruki (213). Nao permits Haruki's presence in her life and forges an imaginary friendship with his apparition because he is a metaphysical connection to her family's past. Haruki's ghost is now a vital source to her understanding of her Japanese heritage, and Nao realizes that she wondered about his individuality, his "interests and his hobbies" but most importantly, his wartime experience and suicide (213-15). A subsequent one-sided

13 A "kamikaze" is defined via a historic lens as "a participant in a suicide mission, esp. a suicide bomber" (*OED Online* def. 1b).

dialogue with his ghost manifests the novelty of the Yasutani family for Nao. During a visit with Jiko, Haruki's ghost reappears as Nao, signalling with his body language how the soldiers "[killed themselves with a pistol] rather than [be] ... taken prisoner by the Meriken" (240, original emphasis).¹⁴ Furthermore, he directs Nao's attention to "a box wrapped in white cloth" located next to his alter but she does not focus on the object until after Jiko's funeral.

Nao's personal interest cumulates in the material with Haruki's letters. The repository offers a glimpse into Haruki's inner thoughts, written to fulfill specific purposes. Ozeki emphasizes that the value of multilingual writing reflects authorial intent, "frequently [enabling] authors to elude the ... government" as seen in Haruki #1's attempts to tell his story sans political interference in Japanese and French (Gullander-Drollet 303). His writings convey different intentions as well. The Japanese letters are "censored for fear of governmental interception [and] use almost comically euphemistic language to describe the horrific environment at the army base" (303). On the other hand, French reflects Haruki's true thoughts that describe "the violence we might expect from [military

figureheads]" and how his superiors used violence to desensitize their soldiers from their own "acts of violence" against innocent Chinese civilians (303-04). Nao finds Haruki's last letter prompts the most personal reflection of Japan's wartime strategies: "Tomorrow I will tie a cloth around my forehead, branded with the Rising Sun, and take to the sky. Tomorrow I will die for my country" (Ozeki 217). Haruki humanizes the kamikaze pilot. Ozeki's narrative manages to "rescue [these pilots through Haruki] from oblivion and [provides] ... instances in which the complexity of his motivations attains a significance simultaneously true unto itself and healing to the pained circumstances of the protagonist" (McKay 8).

These experiences convince Nao to admit to Jiko that she witnessed Haruki's ghost tell her about his initiation into the military and suicide methods (Ozeki 241-43). Her confession and genuine curiosity enable her great-grandmother to reveal that contrary to the correlation of war participation with anti-American hatred, Haruki did not harbour murderous intentions: "He never hated Americans. He hated fascism" (244). Her admission that her son "was not the warrior type" because these young men believed

¹⁴ Ozeki translates "*Meriken*" as follows "134. Meriken (メリケン)–Americans" (240).

prime minister Tojo Hideki's rhetoric that their sacrifice was heroic (245), reflecting "the trauma of the war years" (McKay 16). Words carry intergenerational power. Haruki's literary endeavour successfully "transcends the boundaries of space, time, and death, ... [touches] down in the present era and [enacts] a transformative effect on his great-niece" (qtd. in Hanrahan 280). Nao finds her life purpose thanks to her family.

Nao's familial past constitutes a part of her Japanese identity regardless of her previous animosity. Instead, she continues to move forward and reduce her animosity towards her heritage at Jiko's funeral, primarily through language. For instance, she expresses her love towards her great-grandmother with her favorite food, "[slipping] some Melty Kisses into her hand" (Ozeki 364) and breaking the usual protocol for "Zen masters [to not] usually take chocolate with them to the Pure Land" (364). Ozeki preserves language in the narrative here through Nao's recovery of a box next to Haruki's altar that contains his French diary (366-67). This diary is a vehicle that conveys Nao's enthusiasm to understand her family history and even her father participates in this "project" (368) with his daughter. In addition, Haruki's diary reignites Nao's interest in the French language, specifically, a love for

Proust's compendium (390). She was initially under the impression that using Proust as her main subject for her diary was meaningless because, given her suicidal intentions, Nao "[wanted] to leave something worthwhile behind" (22). Nao then retracts her perspective. She now considers reading Proust's work in its original form a worthwhile investment of her time considering her realization that "[he] actually wrote seven [volumes]" of *À la recherche du temps perdu* (390). Furthermore, H.M Hanrahan considers a significant connection between Proust and Nao: "[Her diary is] a 'hacked' ... version of ... *In Search of Lost Time*, an old edition with the original pages removed and new, blank pages sown in. Thus readers encounter Ruth's version of Nao's story of her own life and ... her family ... in ... one of the classics of Western literature" (275). Accordingly, Ozeki redefines the power of language beyond her work's narrative form to highlight the diary's overarching importance.

This diary reflects the power of writing through the text's physical form, how linguistic terminology appears in the diary, and Nao's manifestation of postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha's third space which will be the paper's second major focus. Gullander-Drolet argues that Ozeki's novel

exercises this “framing of the translational *through* the practice of interlingual translation—... the novel’s translational form” (294, original emphasis). *A Tale of the Time Being* incorporates footnotes to reflect upon its “experimental approach” and invite the reader to study Nao’s story indirectly, “consulting the elaborate footnotes and appendices in the book, which provide crucial historical and cultural context for the narrative” (296). The footnotes “provide definitions of Japanese terms, ... [how] ... kanji does (or does not) translate into English. ... [The] text interpellates its reader into the position of a translator, requiring them to be attentive to the gaps and absences that underpin translations of history” (296-97). Yunte Huang identifies the translational use of footnotes as “counterpoetics” in which actively change “historical master narratives” through “imagination as a means to alter memory and invoke minority survival in the deadly space between competing national, imperial interests and between authoritative regimes of epistemology serving those interests” (qtd. in Gullandar Drollet 297). Counterpoetics is at the forefront of Ozeki’s text through “book fragments and journal articles to text messages, blog posts, and email correspondences” but the diary is significant because Ozeki accentuates “the

subversive potential that these personal and subjective forms of writing carry ... [with two] diaries ... —one ... from the 1940s, one written in the more recent past— and both work [together] to show the ... ways in which [World War II] ... shaped the experiences of subjects geographically and temporally removed from the historical ‘sites’ of this atrocity” (297).

Another feature to consider is how Ozeki connects language directly to Nao’s narrative through a specific part of Nao’s prose, referencing Japanese religion and even the metaphysical. As Nao reflects on her life in Sunnyvale, she reflects on the role of the Japanese language at home. For instance, she develops an obsession “with the word *now*,” arguing that the adverb parallels her linguistic disconnection from her parents (Ozeki 98, original emphasis). While her parents “spoke Japanese at home, ... everyone else spoke English, ... [leaving her] caught in between the two languages” and as a result, Nao found herself in a “strange and unreal” world because this adverb indicates a different meaning in Japanese via code-switching (98). In particular, Nao explains that Japanese words emphasize “kotodama, which are spirits that live inside a world and give it a special power” (98). Concerning “now,” Nao conjures the spirit imagery of a larger fish,

“NOW” that threatens “the little fish *Naoko*” from understanding the meaning of “now” or living in the present. Lee suggests a linguistic connection to quantum mechanics theory, postulating that the word choice “represents a moment of wave function in which many superposed worlds are possible” (45). Additionally, its similar pronunciation illustrates the diary’s purpose “to save both ‘Nao’ and ‘now’. ‘Now’ embodies ... the quantum/Zen moment of overflowing potentialities [and] also the time needed for the survival of a self. To lose ‘now’ is to lose one’s self—to give up one’s agency to ... representation” (Lee 45). In other words, Nao desires to ‘drop out of time,’ — ... ‘to commit suicide’ (45). However, when the diary reaches Ruth, although Nao’s physical self is ‘now’ gone, she [narrates] once again into the temporal productivity of ‘now’” (46).

Furthermore, Tokyo acts as the setting for Nao’s immersion into a cross-cultural life, one that allows her to experience the third space. Homi K. Bhabha’s third space addresses “the problematic claims to cultural purity and homogeneity, and embrace the hybridized nature of cultures” (Cuddon and Habib 723). When the third space is well-received, the acceptance “of culture’s *hybridity*” occurs as a result (723). In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha argues

that only certain individuals embody Fanon’s moving metaphor, embracing “revolutionary cultural change [and] are themselves the bearers of a hybrid identity” (Bhabha 55). However, when these people attempt to instill change, they are relegated to “translation and negotiation” (55). Nao’s decision to write a diary enacts Bhabha’s third space for her, in which these two primary spaces embody her pensive reflections as she alternates her focus between her family at home and *ijime* at school. The division of these spaces occurs when she reverses her opposition towards her Japanese heritage. She engages with cultural hybridity to establish a clear Japanese American self-identity regardless of her actual location.

Nao’s subjection to *ijime* causes her to experience a public identity crisis because of volatile social discrimination. However, she decides to reframe this aggression to feel secure within her mental space on her own terms. Otsuka intended to illustrate *ijime* as a problematic social issue via fiction (qtd. in Ty 164). In Japan, *ijime*’s equivalent is bullying and constitutes “violent physical assault[s],” money extortion, sexual harassment, and intentional ignorance even by an entire class of students (Yoneyama 160-61). The commonality between *ijime* conduct is that it is “*always* collective bullying” against one

individual (164-65, original emphasis). Its purpose is to “[stamp] out individuality,” ensure adherence to school rules, oust the victim as “egotistical,” or ensure students have dominant “classroom power” over their peers with aggressive behavior (169-72). The reasons that Nao is an *ijime* target connect to her life overseas. She is not from a well-established family, her appearance is “big” for Japanese standards, and, above all, she is a *kikokushijo* (Ozeki 44). Her beginner-level Japanese skills help her avoid being linguistically isolated, but her social status impedes her from settling into Japan well (Gullandar-Drollet 298). Likewise, a hyena metaphorically represents the peers who victimize her despite her father’s beliefs that she was “popular and everyone [made] an effort to be nice to [her]” (Ozeki 48). Instead, they always seek an opportunity to assault her verbally and physically, resulting in Nao’s collection of “scars and pinch-shaped bruises on [her] arms and legs” that she hides from her mother (70). These classmates target her, calling “her a gaijin (foreigner) [,] ... a bimbo (poor person) [,] and hurl insults at her using idiomatic English ... from rap videos” (Gullander-Drollet 298).

The *ijime* group at her school continues to harass her, and even her homeroom teacher participates in Nao’s ostracization when he pretends “to mark [her] absent” in class when she is there (Ozeki 77). However, Nao rationalizes that he acts this way because he is a “loser” in the eyes of the “popular students,” thereby conforming to an unspoken class hierarchy (77-78).¹⁵

Death becomes a prominent feature within Nao’s *ijime* experience, given her wish to end her life (22) as her peers challenge her resistance to Japanese social expectations. They treat her as though she is an “American disease” which eventually leads to “the idea for the funeral” (100). Everyone turns their back on Nao, acting “quiet and looking very sad” and even “passing [a] folded paper” (101). Nao becomes aware of their planned event after attacking Daisuke but decides to ignore their scheme (104). Consequently, she views her pretend funeral as a “beautiful and ... real” occasion where everyone left flowers at her desk and expressed their condolence to her portrait, complete with “black and white

¹⁵ Yoneyama states that in Japan, teachers feel unable to subvert the established presence of *ijime* at school because their punishment equates to scapegoating but “could also reflect [a genuine] unwillingness to do anything about *ijime*, outright negligence or even false denial” (176-77).

funeral ribbons” (107).¹⁶ The event is a catalyst for Nao to be “rendered ghostly ... because there is a gap—a kind of asymptotic (mis)alignment—between these imperatives for belonging and her ...American [value] system” (Gullander-Drollet 299). In a reversal of events, the next semester gives Nao a different school experience. Her peers ignore her, but she adopts a new strategy (Ozeki 265). She chooses to process this abnormal behavior using her great-grandmother’s Buddhist meditative “superpower” (181-83) and Uncle Haruki’s courage. These familial resources help Nao feel emotionally invincible even when her classmates implicate her in a sexual assault incident (276-77). This incident makes Nao consider herself incapable of escaping her peers even in death, so she decides to die. However, her original goal to use her “remaining time on earth ... to write old Jiko’s life” becomes intertwined with her Japanese heritage (332-33). She takes the initiative to understand her family, and a love for the French language discovered through Haruki saves her from giving up her future (22). In the end, Nao’s family is instrumental to her self-identity, and she learns to

appreciate her Japanese heritage given its role as a support system for her narrative.

Ozeki’s *A Tale for the Time Being* presents Nao as a young woman who rejects her Japanese heritage in light of her *kikokushijo* status and social prejudice. However, she finds solace in her diary. This notebook becomes the mechanism that helps her find her voice and comprehend her family history. She ultimately abandons her resistance to her self-identity to regard her Japanese culture as the answer to self-fulfillment.

¹⁶ Ozeki’s depiction of a false funeral can be found in real life. In 1986, Shikagawa Hirofumi committed suicide after experiencing *ijime* in his classroom following a notable incident in which “most of [his] class,” including “four teachers” held a mock funeral a few months prior to his passing (Yoneyama 157).

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A M U S A N I F E O L U W A M A R Y

ADAPTING TO LIFE IN AMERICA: CULTURAL LOSS IN THE THING AROUND YOUR NECK
BY CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE

Résumé

L'œuvre de Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie reflète la mondialisation et les séquelles de la colonisation, tant dans les anciennes colonies qu'auprès des populations coloniales fréquemment déplacées dans le monde. Sa fiction est souvent centrée sur la migration massive de Nigériens, mais aussi d'autres nationalités, vers les États-Unis d'Amérique. Cet article vise à élucider la description des cas de perte culturelle et les techniques d'adaptation employées par les immigrants nigériens pour faire face à la vie en Amérique et à son impératif d'assimilation culturelle.

Mots clés : perte culturelle, assimilation, transculturation, acculturation, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

In this paper, I propose to examine instances of cultural loss in Adichie's stories through the analysis of the portrayal of the characters' long struggle to integrate and become part of American society. Focusing on three short stories, namely "Imitation," "The Thing Around Your Neck" and "The Arrangers of Marriage" of the collection *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009), I employ the theoretical concepts of assimilation, acculturation, transculturation to elucidate the cultural negotiations that characters undergo in their efforts to adapt to the new country.

The selected stories for this study are representative of the author's phenomenal portrayal of the Nigerian lower

Abstract

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's work reflects on globalization and the aftereffects of colonization both in former colonies and colonial populations often displaced around the world. Her fiction frequently centres on the mass migration of Nigerians, as well as other nationalities, to the United States of America. This paper aims to elucidate the depiction of instances of cultural loss and the adaptive techniques employed by Nigerian immigrants to cope with life in America and its imperative of cultural assimilation.

Key words: cultural loss, assimilation, transculturation, acculturation, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

and middle-class population, who find themselves living in America in precarious conditions. The characters all experience initial shock as they are confronted with the stark differences between their original culture and the host culture, and thus have to transition beyond that initial stage of shock to an active negotiation with the dominant culture in a quest for survival.

I will examine the coping strategies these characters use as they adapt and integrate within the host culture in the face of cultural differences. Some choose to acculturate, having a utopic vision of becoming assimilated Americans, while others decide to hybridize culturally, subjecting their original culture to the

influences of the dominant one, which results in a transcultural identity. In both forms of adaptation, cultural loss is unavoidable and characters are plunged into a space of in-betweenness, which reveals how hard it is to retain one's entire home culture or to fully assimilate to the dominant one.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's upbringing and rich cultural heritage has contributed to her writing. She was born in 1977 in Enugu to academics: her father is the first professor of Statistics at the Nigerian University of Nsukka, Nigeria's first university, and her mother is the institution's first female registrar. Adichie left Nigeria at the age of nineteen to pursue a degree in Communications and Political Science at Drexel University in Philadelphia. It gave her a diasporic perspective that has shaped her literary creativity and career as a prolific writer. Her experience with culture shock in America, as recounted in an interview with Hope Reese, gave her insight into the meaning of assimilation, race-based stereotypes, and discrimination (Reese). This experience is the primary influence for her novel *Americanah* (2013). The impact of the transcultural identity she developed by dividing her time between Nigeria and America appears in many of her stories, which address Nigerian postcolonial society in relation to globalization. This

allows her to identify prevalent problems of race and identity from a local and global perspective (Murphy 96). Although the 12 short stories in *The Thing Around Your Neck* also touch on gender, stereotype and war, I have chosen the stories that particularly address her concerns of cultural loss, assimilation and the inevitable hybridity that leads to a transcultural identity for this study.

The first, "Imitation", is the story of a Nigerian, middle-class family who navigates between Nigeria and the United States of America. The story clearly portrays cultural loss and the different adaptive strategies of the husband and wife as each struggle to integrate into American culture. The characters in this story settle for hybridizing Nigerian culture with an American way of life in order to cope with cultural loss. The second story, with the same title as the collection, "The Thing Around Your Neck", portrays the experience of a young woman from a lower-class family in Lagos, Nigeria, who immigrates to the United States. After her arrival in America, she is quickly confronted with cultural differences, and numerous stereotypes directed at her, which she surmounts by making an effort to integrate into American lifestyle, while retaining memories from her home culture. The last selected story, "The Arrangers of Marriage", depicts cultural loss as seen

through the relationship between a lower class, Nigerian-born American resident doctor and his arranged bride, who is newly arrived in America. The doctor willingly chooses acculturation as the only means of integrating, and tries to impose this adaptive strategy on his new bride. She, on the other hand, after undergoing a number of difficult experiences, decides to retain some elements of her home culture while blending with her husband's American dream.

Understanding the concepts of cultural loss, acculturation and transculturation is particularly productive for the study of cultural negotiations in the selected stories. Cultural loss signifies the resultant effect of negotiating between an acquired dominant culture and an original one. As explained by L. Hall, it occurs "when a smaller group becomes [entangled] with a larger, more dominant culture" (44). This is the case when it comes to assimilation, especially in the American form which implies that immigrants' original culture suffers the loss of key elements, including their language and way of life as they integrate into American society. Assimilation is the natural consequence of a long process of transformation of the original culture through cultural loss and the progressive adoption of the host culture. The term acculturation describes the full acquisition

of the dominant culture at the expense of the original.

Fernando Ortiz's critical conception of acculturation is defined as the "transition from one culture to another culture, [having] manifold repercussions" (98). He argues that the concept does not sufficiently capture the transformation of the original culture in the face of a dominant one. In his perspective, the process does not simply entail the loss of one's culture in the process of adaptation to a new dominant one, but rather necessitates "the creation of a new cultural phenomenon" that retains traces of both cultures (102-03). Hence, his coining of the term "transculturation". Transculturation suggests that immigrants often resolve to blending aspects of the host culture into their original culture, thus generating a new, hybridized identity containing characteristics of both cultures (Welsch 198). Domínguez further elucidates the impossibility of being able to fully convert into the new culture as acculturation suggests. This gives rise to the notion of transculturation in which there exists no one-sided give and take between the cultures, but a mixture (64). True to his view, the process of adaptation tends to create in immigrants a state of identity crisis, resulting from the impossibility to totally discard their original cultural identity and exclusively identify with the culture of the host country. This space of in-

betweenness is effectively breached by the adoption of a transcultural identity which is able to integrate both cultures.

In Adichie's story, the characters who travel to America are faced with the necessity of adaptation in order to survive in the new country, but struggle with their cultural identity which for some, is seen as an impediment to their individual quest for better livelihood and living standards. Their engagement with American life becomes, to a great extent, an effort to develop coping strategies to adapt. This largely involves either aspiring to embrace American culture completely or retaining their Nigerian identity to some degree, a decision that involves cultural negotiation.

The corpus for the present study, composed of stories depicting realities of postcolonial Nigeria in relation to immigration and globalization, has not received close critical attention. Globalization is an ever-expanding phenomenon in our world characterized by the rise in migration, technological advancements, economic and political interrelations and communication (Amoko 140). Its objective is to make the world a global community where the aggregation and interaction of national and local cultures is possible. However, one of the factors that led to a globalized world is the colonial experience. Assimilation policies adopted by powerful Western nations

sought to mold their colonial territories – about 80% of the rest of the world— after Western modernism, creating a power imbalance which continues to impact ex-colonial territories after colonization (Amoko 136-37). The effect of the colonial period manifests in forms of economic inequality, political instability (Maitrayee and Shrivastava 186) and abject underdevelopment in the ex-colonies. As a result, the only recourse for many former colonial peoples is migration. The mass movement of the population of the weaker nations, mostly impoverished, into richer ones for better opportunities is a major component of globalization that was prompted by colonization.

Generally, globalization is a contemporary assimilative tool for the West. It is designed to induce the conformity and assimilation of the majority of the world's weaker nations and their cultures to the model of powerful, Western, ex-colonial rulers. This assimilation occurs through different aspects of globalization like technology, media and economic interactions (D. E. Hall 117). Likewise in migration, assimilation requirements of countries like the United States imply that an immigrant from a poorer nation must submit his identity and culture to the dominant ones of the nation he has immigrated to in order to survive. This is not altogether a simple, achievable feat.

Though an immigrant might readily, out of necessity, submit to the dominant culture, he is confronted with the disparity between the culture of his home-country and the new. This results in a struggle to detach from the cultural habits and practices of the original culture, which involves a degree of initial self-inflicted trauma necessary to survive in the host country. Eventually, the immigrant experiences some loss of their original culture, adopting or blending as much as is necessary for survival within the dominant culture.

In my view, the stories selected for this analysis are dramatic portrayals of cultural loss in the face of assimilation in the United States. Clark refers to assimilation as "a way of understanding the social dynamics of American society [and as] the process that occurs spontaneously and often unintended in the course of interaction between majority and minority groups" (Clark qtd. in Dasgupta 3). In this study, the minority group is the Nigerian immigrants, who, willingly or forcefully, understand and pattern their lifestyles to the demands of American society in order to survive and escape the hardship of their poverty-stricken postcolonial society.

In the first story, "Imitation," Nkem, in submission to her husband (as Nigerian culture demands), finds herself in America as the wife of one of the "Rich Nigerian Men Who Sent Their Wives to

America to Have Their Babies" (Adichie 21). She, without any agency, is subjected to adapting her existence to the demands of American society according to her husband's dictates. Nkem is uncomfortable with the mutual separation which exists between her family and her husband, Obiora, who is based in Nigeria and only visits intermittently. However, she succumbs to the arrangement because, as a survivor of economic and socio-political problems in Nigeria, living in the house that smells like green tea in the lovely American suburb and having her children attend school with the children of the American elites are a dream come true (21). The need to escape the poverty known to her lower-class family compels her to adopt the dream of many poor Nigerian girls: to be the wife of a successful man, who owns a house in America. Maitrayee and Shrivastava call her dislocation in America "a purposeful one, meant only for the realization of her dream space" (189). Securing the children's future is worth the sacrifice of having to cope with the shock of realizing that food items native to Nigeria are not available and the recipes have to be blended to suit the different, but available resources in America. Not having real African yams hinders her from achieving the traditional *ji Akwukwo* pottage. However, instead of discarding the dish for an American food, she hybridizes the rest of the recipe with the

“imitation yams, the American fibrous potatoes” (24-25). Though she would have preferred Uncle Ben’s rice, common to the Nigerian market for jollof rice, as a “translated being, with the need to translate the typical Nigerian dishes in order to adapt them to American ingredients,” she learns to tolerate the Basmati rice (Murphy 98).

Through the discussions with Amaechi, the help, they encounter the disparity between American and Nigerian culture. In the Nigerian custom, children are expected to speak reverently with an elder when voicing their opinion, but they discover that American children address elders as equals. Despite this evidence of loss of Nigerian culture manifested in Nkem’s children, the need for their integration into the dominant society makes such conduct acceptable for the parents. Obiora, for instance, is proud to make a show of the children to friends, referring to how their manner of speech makes them *Americanah*¹ (Adichie 28). Nkem attests to the fact that Obiora criticizes their neighbours, calling their way of life “plastic,” yet he secretly craves that his children become like them, “sniffing at the food that had fallen into the dirt calling it spoiled” (19). From her childhood experience, what is commonly seen in

Nigeria is a child picking up that kind of food and eating it. This is in part due to the lack that characterized her poor background. Maitrayee and Shrivastava claim that “she like Obiora has also learnt to cope with the culture of America and to an extent enjoys her partial assimilation in the new American cultural space, finding it rather safer than her past life in Nigeria...” (189). This is true because though she notices that her accent, which announces her foreignness, makes her seem helpless to her neighbours, she craves their lifestyle; she therefore adopts cultural elements like the Pilate class she attends with her neighbour twice a week (Adichie 28). To survive differently from her former wretched Nigerian lifestyle where urine-drenched weeds substitute for vegetables, she has to embrace as much as is required to blend into this new society in which one meal is large enough for three persons.

Obiora made living in America comfortable for his family by creating a hybridized environment where “acts of mimicry” (Maitrayee and Shrivastava 189) like the African arts and a Nigerian housemaid coexist with the American styled house, yet he prefers to spend most of his time in Nigeria. This is because culturally in a Nigerian setting, successful

¹The word “Americanah” is a Nigerian slang word used to address Nigerians trying to change their Nigerian identity or mimicking the American way of life in a quest for assimilation.

men like Obiora thrive on the worship of their ego. According to Nkem's acquaintance from Delaware, "America does not recognize Big Men. Nobody says 'Sir! Sir!' to them in America. Nobody rushes to dust their seats before they sit down" (Adichie 22). Obiora's strategy of coping with this cultural loss is to keep two homes: one in America where he visits occasionally and another in Nigeria, where Nkem and the children visit during Christmas. Physically, he dwells in a space between both cultures, with the ability to negotiate within both. As a person who passionately keeps elements of Nigerian culture, and criticizes, yet desires, the American way of life and aspires for his children to be fully assimilated, he can be said to have a transcultural identity born out of duality and the inability to acculturate in American society. Similarly, Nkem has effectively transitioned into a transcultural space, that is, "a place where identities are ever-changing, a place where new identities arise [...]" (Murphy 97). Though she did not opt for American foods despite the inadequacy in resources to make the Nigerian dishes, she has mastered baking cookies which is highly regarded in her children's American classes. She is able, at the same time, to adopt an egalitarian lifestyle with the housemaid (23): an unusual situation in a typical Nigerian society, forced on her by loneliness in

America. For Maitrayee and Shrivastava, instances of retaining the memories of her background and life in Nigeria make her nostalgic, and holding Obiora's stories about masks as cultural memories in her imagination signify periods of identity crisis (190). However, it also reveals how fluid she has become as a transcultural subject, who blends into the American cultural space and is able to journey into her home culture through her memories. They, as a couple, represent transcultural individuals, who exist in duality and have to lose much of their home culture to adopt an American lifestyle. Still, they are unable to completely detach from their home culture to fully acquire the dominant one.

"The Thing Around Your Neck", narrated in the second person, tells the story of Akunna, who wins the American Visa Lottery and arrives in America for the first time. Siccardi claims that "*le choix du pronom "you" met la jeune femme à distance, renforçant un isolement que son incapacité à écrire à sa famille intensifie. Il semble ainsi faire exister Akunna dans un "non-lieu", un à-côté, un vide existentiel*" (5). Her isolation and existence in a non-place are due to the initial feeling of invisibility resulting from her inability to fit into the unfamiliar American cultural space because of the cultural disparity and the distance from her Nigerian relatives and friends. If she had money for gifts, she

would have loved to write to them about the strangeness she observes in American culture: the openness of the Americans, the food wastage, the upset American child whose parents cajole, Americans who have tattered wears and the differing physique of the rich and poor Americans (Adichie 81). She finds this odd because in Nigeria, privy information is kept personal, not divulged to strangers; food is a treasure which must not be wasted; upset children are spanked or are scolded by their parents, which ends up settling them; only poor night watchmen in front of rich people's homes wear tattered clothes; and obesity is a symbol of wealth, while leanness represents poverty.

These differences, coupled with the stereotypes that she endures, upset her as she finds it difficult to initially conform to the system, which impedes her social interactions (Siccardi 6-7). However, for survival, she has to adapt to her new environment, according to her uncle's advice. While she is at his house, a "homely cultural space" (Maitrayee and Shrivastava 192), they eat *garri* for lunch and speak Igbo (Adichie 80). He tells her that the strategy for survival is to "understand America [as a place where] a lot is given to gain a lot" (79). This confirms Clark's definition of American assimilation policy as "a way of understanding the social dynamics of American society [...]" (qtd. in Dasgupta 3). In the months following her

arrival, Akunna embraces understanding America as her uncle had predicted. She discards her views on disclosing personal information and becomes openminded like the Americans in talking about her family with her boyfriend; and she slowly gets used to the differences and stereotypes she perceives. Despite adopting an American lifestyle by dating an American, working in a restaurant that serves Americans and visiting Chinese restaurants with her boyfriend, she still remembers home in Nigeria and cooks *Onugbu* soup and *garri* from the items she buys at the African store (Adichie 84). Akunna, unlike Nkem and Obiora, represents a dislocated individual who does not employ acts of imitation in adapting to American society (Maitrayee and Shrivastava 193). She, like her uncle's family, is unable to completely detach from the memories of the home culture, and simply creates, through a transcultural identity, a new space where both cultures serve the need for survival. Although she understands that American society demands that she loses some aspects of her home culture, she does not feel forced or make any attempt to fully embrace the new culture.

In "The Arrangers of Marriage", Chinaza Okafor, the arranged bride from Nigeria, has had to battle cultural disparity and loss at the immigration checkpoint while entering America. The customs

officer in charge of her luggage pokes at her Nigerian food items as if they were spiders and ends up confiscating some. However, her dilemma compounds when her hew, dictatorial husband, Ofodile, a resident doctor in America, strips her of her identity. He, having the utopic dream of becoming a fully assimilated American, changes her name from Chinaza Okafor or Udenwa to Agatha Bell (Adichie 118), and insists that only American English will be the form of communication inside and outside the house. At her disapproval, he tells her: “You don’t understand how it works in this country. If you want to get anywhere, you have to be as mainstream as possible. If not, you will be left by the roadside. You have to use your English name here” (117). For him, the only means of adapting to American society is to acculturate, stripping himself of anything that relates to Nigeria and mimicking American culture as much as is necessary. This is his “strategic tool for cultural assimilation” (Maitrayee and Shrivastava 191). He believes that people who retain their foreign identity in America will not progress and will be stuck in poverty, if they do not acculturate or “adapt” (Adichie 119), as he puts it. He not only bans the use of the traditional Igbo tongue, but also of British English common to Nigerians. The word “engaged” becomes “busy,” “biscuits” becomes “cookies” and “lift” replaces “elevator.” According to

Siccardi, this linguistic disparity also signifies “*une divergence culturelle*” (5). In his quest, Ofodile changes his name to Dave Bell, “a more appropriate name in the American context” (Murphy 97), and cancels the preparation of fragrant Nigerian dishes because he “does not want [them] to be known as the people who fill the building with smells of foreign food...” (Adichie 122). Also, he consciously masters American pronunciation and sneers, condemning any act foreign to American culture. Engaging in all these deliberate acts of cultural loss, however, cannot change his identity from being a typical, traditional Igbo man, who believes that wives are tools for pleasure and reproduction. Though America is an egalitarian society where men and women are treated as equals, it does not affect Ofodile’s attitude toward his wife. He imposes rules and regulations on her without her permission and abuses her verbally and sexually. As much as he seeks to wipe “any cultural trace of the language of his homeland” (Maitrayee and Shrivastava 191), his otherness is still obvious as Chinaza notices when he takes a sip of water without fully chewing his food (Adichie 125). Though desperately trying to completely rid himself of the Nigerian culture, he unconsciously finds himself as a transcultural individual.

Chinaza, on the other hand, chooses to deal with the cultural loss enforced upon her by her husband differently. Her dependence on him for survival in America makes her incapable of refuting his American dream. Although she speaks English as he instructs, cuts coupons like Americans, and learns to cook American dishes, she persistently preserves her cultural habits and practices while he is away for work, by, for example, cooking the Nigerian dishes that suit her taste. Also, as a way of resisting cultural loss, she speaks Igbo to herself while cooking in the kitchen, her “comfort zone” (Maitrayee and Shrivastava 191) and teaches Nia, the neighbour at apartment 2D, some Igbo words. Her reluctance to adapt to an American lifestyle is depicted as she makes up her mind to survive separately from her husband once she gets approval on her work permit. This is after she learns about her husband’s previous marriage to an American in order to obtain his Green Card and gets upset about his unapologetic manner in relating the issue to her. As much as Ofodile tries to acculturate by erasing his identity (Murphy 97), he ends up with a transcultural identity because his cultural background makes it impossible to evade Nigerian traditions and become fully assimilated into American society. Chinaza, understanding that her survival depends on adopting parts of American

culture, does not seek to erase her foreignness. Rather, she embraces it and merges what she learns of America with Nigerian culture.

In conclusion, my study of three of Adichie’s story in *The Thing Around Your Neck* reveals the degrees of cultural negotiation involved in the transition to life in the United States for Nigerian immigrants. All characters, regardless of their gender and their economic and cultural condition, experience an initial shock and respond differently to the cultural loss required in the process of adaptation to the new culture. It is impossible, as seen in Akunna’s case, to retain a one-sided cultural identity outside the boundaries of the home country no matter how hard the immigrant tries. In addition, the dream or desire of an immigrant to acculturate and become fully assimilated into the culture of the host country becomes shattered when the realization of the impossibility of that dream hits. Nkem and her husband, Obiora, in coping with cultural loss, crave a completely assimilated American life because of the opportunities it offers, but cultural memories in forms of art, cuisine and customs impede them to fully accommodate that life. Similarly, Ofodile is unable to fully become American as he wishes because his cultural background hinders him from that dream. Akunna and

Chinaza's way of dealing with cultural loss shows that transculturality, a creative mixing of cultures, remains one of the best ways to integrate into a new society. Moreover, as much as the other characters try to acculturate, they cannot not help but be transcultural. Consciously or unconsciously, elements from both cultures merge to reveal a new form – even if what is adopted from the dominant culture outweighs what is retained from the original culture – and thus a transcultural identity prevails.

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***Révolution culturelle et résistance
au Canada et au Québec***

***Cultural Revolution and Resistance
in Canada and Quebec***



DEREK FLANN

ÉTUDE DES ŒUVRES DE KENT MONKMAN DANS LE CONTEXTE DE LA RÉVOLUTION CULTURELLE CANADIENNE

Résumé

Malgré avoir commencé sa production artistique avant l'avènement de la période « officielle » de la réconciliation, par moyen de ses œuvres d'art, Kent Monkman offre une alternative à la réalité socio-politique des peuples autochtones au Canada contemporain. En recréant des scènes classiques de l'histoire politique canadienne, Monkman reprend l'agentivité des peuples autochtones en renversant les normes de la société néocoloniale canadienne. Ceci est réalisé grâce à son célèbre sens de l'humour et de l'absurde afin de créer des tableaux monumentaux qui étonnent leur auditoire et les font réfléchir à la place qu'ils occupent au sein de cette société. Cet article s'intéresse à trois de ses peintures : *The Triumph of Mischief*, *The Daddies* et *Hanky Panky* et la manière dont ils offrent une nouvelle perspective sur les politiques contemporaines et historiques face aux peuples autochtones ainsi que comment ils encouragent leur auditoire non-autochtone à repenser leur place au sein de la société canadienne contemporaine.

Mots clés : Canadiana, arts autochtones, réconciliation, Kent Monkman, politique canadienne

Introduction

Quelle place occupe la population non autochtone au Canada ? Ce vaste pays compte presque dix millions de kilomètres carrés, une population de 39 millions d'habitants, 6 fuseaux horaires, et un patrimoine naturel et historique qui le place parmi les pays les plus visités au monde. Celui-ci a été l'objet de plusieurs milliers

Abstract

Although he began his artistic production before the advent of the "official" period of reconciliation, through his artwork, Kent Monkman offers an alternative to the socio-political reality of Indigenous peoples in contemporary Canada. By recreating classic scenes from Canadian political history, Monkman reclaims the agency of Indigenous peoples by subverting the norms of Canadian neo-colonial society. This is achieved using his renown sense of humour and absurdity to create monumental works that take their audiences by surprise and make one think about one's place in this society. This essay examines three of his paintings: *The Triumph of Mischief*, *The Daddies* and *Hanky Panky* and how they offer a new perspective on contemporary and historical politics regarding Indigenous peoples and how they encourage their non-Indigenous audiences to rethink their place in contemporary Canadian society.

Key words: Canadiana, Indigenous art, reconciliation, Kent Monkman, Canadian politics

d'artistes qui, soient nés ici, ou venus d'ailleurs, sont tombés amoureux de ses paysages ainsi que de ceux qui appellent ce pays le leur. L'histoire du Canada, cependant, a été marquée par plusieurs événements tragiques et violents, plusieurs d'entre eux qui sont venus à prendre leur place dans l'imaginaire public au cours des dernières années. Au cours du 21^e siècle, nous voyons

une nouvelle vague d'artistes – dont, notamment, l'artiste autochtone Kent Monkman – qui se sont donné comme tâche de recréer l'imagerie nationale canadienne pour mieux représenter la vérité de tous Canadiens.

Monkman met de l'avant l'importance de l'identité canadienne et la question de la représentation des peuples autochtones au cœur de cette société. Avec la découverte des tombes anonymes à proximité des pensionnats fédéraux en été 2021, des questions qui, depuis longtemps, sont d'importance non négligeable ont été mises à l'avant dans l'imaginaire collectif et les préoccupations du public. Avec ses œuvres, Monkman fait réfléchir le public canadien sur la question de « l'autre », c'est-à-dire, les peuples autochtones, dans un contexte néocolonial, ainsi que de la place qu'ils occupent comme groupe principal (« *mainstream* ») dans la société canadienne.

Les voix « traditionnelles » qui représentaient la beauté du Canada sous forme artistique étaient, entre autres, le Groupe des Sept, Emily Carr, et le *Beaver Hall Group*, qui voulaient inventer un style d'art canadien, pour les Canadiens. Cependant, leurs créations demeuraient toujours fortement influencées par les styles

classiques européens. Aujourd'hui, nous sommes témoins d'une nouvelle vague d'art autochtone tentant à redécouvrir l'histoire du Canada, plus canonique aux événements qui ont réellement eu lieu sur ce territoire, pour assurer la représentation d'un peuple qui, pendant si longtemps, a été victime d'atrocités et d'injustices coloniales et qui, maintenant, reprend sa place dans l'imaginaire collectif. Ce mouvement inclut les artistes autochtones Alex Janvier et Bill Reid, qui tous deux ont des œuvres figurant dans le grand hall du Musée de l'histoire du Canada, ou encore Kent Monkman, qui, dans les dernières années, a heurté l'opinion publique par ses œuvres controversées et choquantes. En bref, dans cet essai, nous tentons d'examiner comment Kent Monkman fait réfléchir la société canadienne non autochtone sur la place qu'elle occupe, ainsi que comment Monkman, par moyen de ses œuvres, utilise des symboles traditionnels canadiens pour faire réfléchir à sa place au Canada et aux effets des actions du gouvernement fédéral sur les peuples autochtones.

Cette dissertation sera basée sur une analyse textuelle des peintures de Kent Monkman qui s'appuiera sur des entrevues antérieures avec l'artiste et des articles érudits à son sujet. De plus, je présenterai un

survol d'événements historiques et récents pour contextualiser le changement de la position des Canadiens sur leur identité et la place qu'occupent les peuples autochtones auprès de la population non autochtone. Je me baserai surtout sur les concepts de l'altérité et de la capacité d'agir (« *agency* »), ainsi que les thèmes de l'exceptionnalisme canadien et la réconciliation.

Afin de mieux comprendre les œuvres de Kent Monkman, leur impact sur la société artistique canadienne et leur réception par le public canadien, j'ai effectué un survol des différents articles écrits à son sujet. La majorité décrit des installations ou des expositions où il a été invité ou auxquelles il a participé. Cependant, il y a une sérieuse pénurie d'articles érudits écrits à son sujet. Ce fait n'est pas inattendu étant donné qu'il est un artiste relativement nouveau sur la scène nationale. *Art History Through the Lens of the Present* de Garald McMaster présente Monkman et sa peinture *The Academy* car il est un artiste contemporain ayant des œuvres d'exposées dans une galerie historique. Il commente le fait que Monkman utilise un style beaucoup plus ancien pour présenter des enjeux contemporains : « [...] *suddenly visitors are confronted with historical issues by a contemporary artist and connections are*

immediately made with the many disparate works around it » (McMaster 220).

Vignault décrit les œuvres et le processus artistique de Monkman comme étant une performance politique du regain de pouvoir des peuples autochtones au Canada. Elle explique qu'il « déboulonne la construction de l'histoire et met en valeur son précipité mythique, sa mémoire refoulée, son imaginaire dont le chantier toujours ouvert et en constante transformation renferme les décriés, les craintes et les ambitions des communautés, de même que des modèles d'action et des outils psychologiques » (Vignault 91). De plus, Vignault note l'importance que joue le personnage de Miss Chief dans ses peintures, qui incarne le processus de la réconciliation et qui est « [...] l'agent de la révélation des causes du désordre colonial et de ses effets toujours existants » (91-92)

Les arguments invoqués dans ces articles sont intégraux à la compréhension de Kent Monkman comme artiste et sont pris en compte dans l'analyse ci-présente, portant sur les concepts de l'altérité et des stéréotypes. Gilman explore l'idée et l'évolution des stéréotypes à l'intérieur des différentes cultures mondiales. Selon lui, depuis l'enfance, nous sommes appris à repérer les

différences et à former des perceptions du bien du mal. À l'aide de ces notions, l'enfant tente de découvrir la différence entre soi-même et les autres dans le monde. C'est ainsi que l'individu forme la base des stéréotypes : soit, notre jugement sur les autres, sans les connaître. Comme le dit Gilman :

Les stéréotypes reflètent un réseau grossier de représentations mentales du monde. Ce sont des palimpsestes sur lesquels les représentations bipolaires initiales se laissent encore vaguement déchiffrer. Leur structure en dyade, qui reflète ce stade premier où nous cherchions à refouler la rupture que nous ressentions dans le monde, offre l'illusion nécessaire de la dichotomie entre le moi et l'objet. (14)

Les stéréotypes sont un réflexe psychologique sur la présentation d'un autre que nous ne connaissons pas. Malgré le fait que la société moderne occidentale tente de se débarrasser de tels mouvements et réflexes, il est toujours présent ; de vouloir s'en débarrasser est un travail continu.

Monkman

Artiste crie *two-spirit* du Manitoba contemporain, venu du territoire du Traité-5 selon les traités numérotés entre les peuples

autochtones et le gouvernement fédéral canadien et ayant passé les premiers cinq ans de sa vie sur une réserve autochtone (Burshtein), Kent Monkman utilise son art pour redonner une voix aux peuples autochtones qui, pendant si longtemps, l'ont perdue aux influences colonisatrices et aux injustices commises contre divers groupes à travers du pays. Kent Monkman est un artiste polyvalent en plusieurs genres artistiques, dont la peinture, la sculpture, et la production performative et cinématique. Cette recherche s'intéresse surtout à ses peintures. Dans ses œuvres, qui souvent sont de taille monumentale, il utilise les styles romantiques et impressionnistes, des styles dits européens classiques, pour les réinterpréter dans le but de réclamer une voix perdue des peuples autochtones. Monkman, dans une entrevue avec le MET à New York, dit s'inspirer des anciens maîtres pour redonner un sens d'appartenance à ses œuvres de provenance autochtone dans l'histoire des beaux-arts (The MET). Il affirme que ses œuvres sont une continuité et non un *off-shoot* des courants artistiques mondiaux. Il montre des scènes tirées des peintures classiques, mais recréées avec des personnages autochtones et de plusieurs groupes marginalisés, dont la communauté LGBTQ. Il utilise un mélange d'images créées par les grands maîtres

artistiques et les peuples autochtones pour renverser l'attitude « romantique d'un peuple qui disparaît, pour montrer qu'ils sont toujours très présents » (The MET). Parmi ceux-ci, nous avons des exemples, dont une peinture qui lui a été commissionnée par le MET pour le grand hall, qui met à l'œuvre des personnages autochtones à la mission de retrouver leurs identités sur un bateau fabriqué en bois. Cette peinture a été fortement inspirée par la peinture américaine classique *Washington Crossing the Delaware*, une partie intégrale au mythe fondateur des États-Unis. Nous voyons un exemple de ce processus dans cet essai avec *The Daddies* (2016).

De plus, Monkman s'est créé un personnage *alter ego drag* qu'il a nommé Miss Chief Eagle Testickle (allusion aux mots anglais, *mischief*, ou espièglerie et *egotistical* ou égocentrique) (Madill), qu'il utilise pour présenter l'image des peuples autochtones et de leur redonner une voix et leur puissance. Monkman insère le personnage de Miss Chief dans ses peintures pour présenter la présence autochtone et les effets qui sont toujours présents sur la communauté autochtone par ce qui est présenté dans ses peintures. Monkman donne à Miss Chief un caractère plutôt humoristique

afin d'ajouter un élément d'absurdité dans ses œuvres (The MET).

Je présenterai trois peintures de Kent Monkman afin de montrer la puissance de ses tableaux et comment elles invitent la société canadienne non autochtone à réfléchir à sa place dans le pays. Celles-ci sont présentées dans l'ordre chronologique suivant : *The Triumph of Mischief*, *The Daddies* et, *Hanky Panky*.

The Triumph of Mischief (2007)

La première de ses peintures que j'ai vue personnellement était *The Triumph of Mischief* (voir fig. 1) au Musée des Beaux-Arts du Canada à Ottawa. Selon la description officielle du Musée, la peinture montre une scène de nature typique des œuvres romantiques du 18^e jusqu'au début du 20^e siècle pour démontrer la beauté naturelle du Canada (NGC). Au bas de la scène, nous retrouvons un groupe qui semble être des autochtones, mais, si nous observons l'œuvre de plus près, il y a une scène plutôt particulière composée d'une combinaison de personnages autochtones, de blancs habillés dans les styles vestimentaires du 17^e siècle, des créatures mythiques, dont quelques centaures, ainsi qu'un personnage qui ressemble à Picasso. Plusieurs de ces

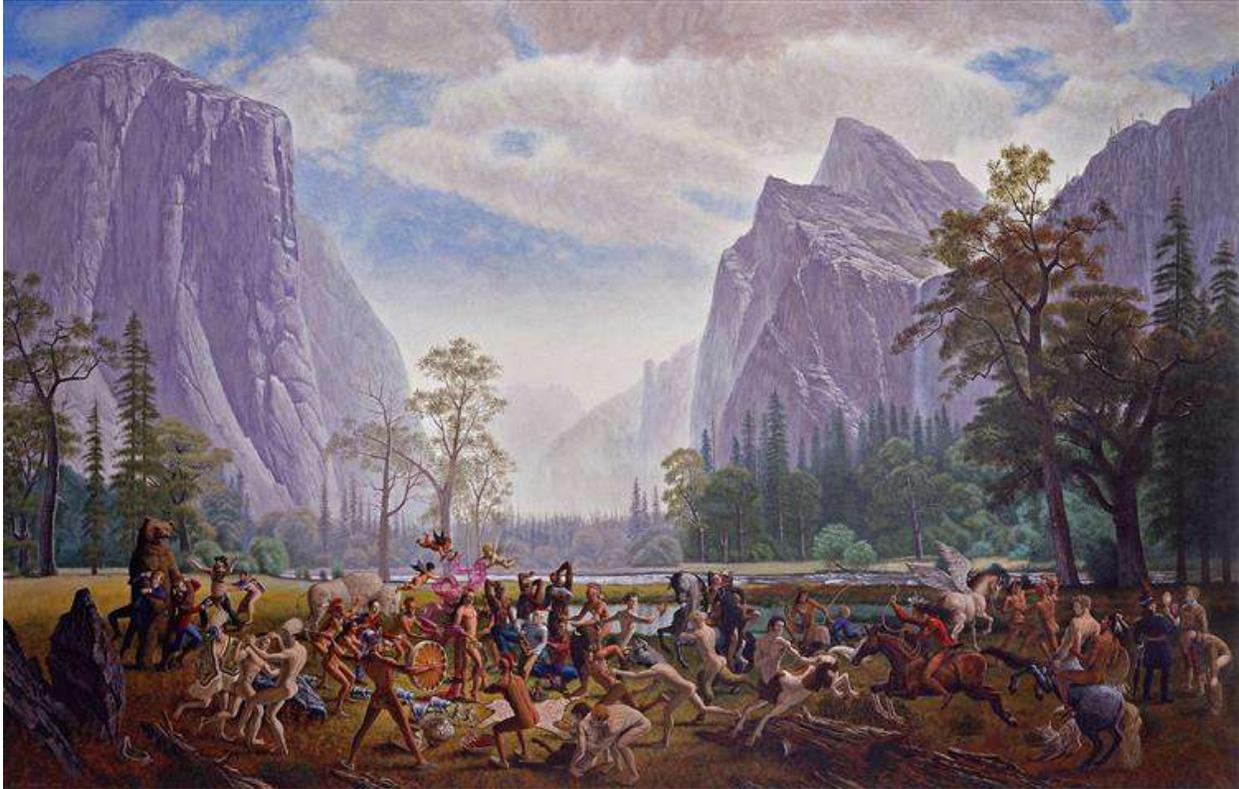


Fig. 1. *The Triumph of Mischief* (2007)

personnages participent à des actes sexuels et, au centre, nous retrouvons l'un des personnages centraux aux œuvres de Monkman – Miss Chief. Comme le décrit le Musée des Beaux-Arts :

Grâce à Miss Chief, Monkman propose une relecture allégorique où se [mêlent] fait et fiction, humour et inversion des rôles, ébranlant ainsi l'autorité de l'histoire officielle et provoquant une réflexion sur l'oppression coloniale, les vérités reçues et les subtilités de l'exploration identitaire. (NGC)

The Triumph of Mischief est une bonne introduction aux œuvres de Monkman avec la présence de plusieurs de ses thèmes dans la peinture, dont l'impact politique et son commentaire historique.

The Daddies (2016)

Avec *The Daddies* (voir fig. 2), Monkman vise plus spécifiquement l'histoire canadienne. Il offre une récréation de la peinture *Meeting of the Delegates of British North America* par Robert Harris avec, au centre, Miss Chief en plein costume drag¹,

¹ Le costume drag est particulièrement déshabillé.



Fig. 2. *The Daddies* (2016)

couchée sur une couverture. Dans la peinture originale, cette couverture est un simple beige, mais dans le cas présent, c'est une couverture iconique rayée de la Compagnie de la Baie d'Hudson. Ici, nous voyons plus spécifiquement une représentation des peuples autochtones au sein de la société canadienne, toujours en conservant la touche comique pour laquelle Monkman est connu. Autour de Miss Chief se trouve le groupe de 37 délégués de la Conférence de Québec de 1864 qui regardent Miss Chief avec des yeux bleus perçants, presque animaliers (Wikiart).

Hanky Panky (2020)

Produite en 2020, *Hanky Panky* (voir fig. 3) est l'une des œuvres les plus

controversées dans le portfolio de Monkman. Avec cette peinture, Monkman présente Miss Chief au centre d'un groupe de femmes autochtones avec le premier ministre actuel, Justin Trudeau, à quatre pattes devant Miss Chief, ses pantalons à ses genoux avec son derrière exposé. Un groupe d'anciens premiers ministres incluant Sir John A. Macdonald, Stephen Harper, Pierre Trudeau et Jean Chrétien observent l'acte « consensuel » qui aura lieu entre la main de Miss Chief et le derrière de Justin Trudeau. Le tout se passe dans un tipi et nous trouvons un agent de la GRC couché par terre, lui aussi avec son derrière exposé comme s'il avait été la victime des mêmes actes que vivra sous peu Justin Trudeau (Angeleti). Parmi les

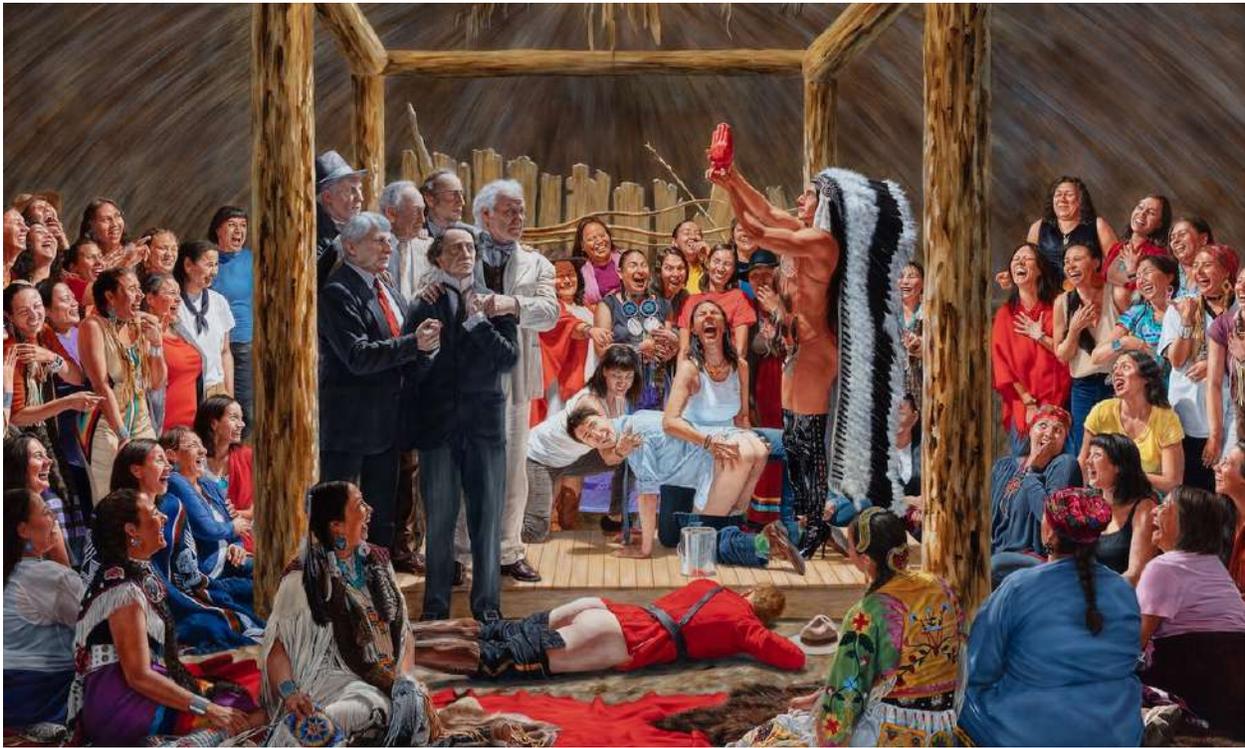


Fig. 3. *Hanky Panky* (2020)

oeuvres que j'ai choisies pour mon analyse, celle-ci est la plus choquante pour ses démonstrations d'un viol supposé, même si Monkman lui-même a décrit cette action ironiquement comme étant consensuelle. Il est toutefois difficile d'y voir du consentement, car, au centre de la peinture, une jeune femme tient les fesses de Justin Trudeau, qui, par son expression faciale paniquée, résiste à l'acte à venir. Ceci est jumelé avec l'image de plusieurs jeunes femmes autochtones qui encouragent Miss Chief par leurs rires, prétendument en accord avec l'action contre le premier ministre.

Analyse

Dans les trois peintures que nous avons à l'étude, Kent Monkman aborde plusieurs thèmes, dont, entre autres, ceux de l'histoire autochtone du Canada, la violence politique de la part du gouvernement fédéral contre les peuples autochtones, les relations entre les différentes communautés à l'intérieur du Canada (dont les autochtones et la communauté LGBTQ), et la réconciliation continue. Monkman présente deux courants majeurs dans sa production artistique, soit des œuvres basées plus sur l'aspect sérieux de la réconciliation, et son mouvement « comique ». Ce dernier est une collection

d'œuvres visant toujours l'histoire canadienne et le sujet de la réconciliation, mais en gardant une attitude « comique », qui illustre la parodie plutôt que de montrer une réalité dure.

Avant de discuter de ces œuvres, nous devons examiner un des concepts qui a affecté la perception du Canada des Canadiens non autochtones – l'exceptionnalisme canadien – et comment celui-ci explique la réaction des Canadiens aux œuvres de Monkman. L'exceptionnalisme canadien est la conviction que les mouvements culturels et politiques, ainsi que les événements ou changements économiques, ne peuvent pas avoir lieu au Canada. Les Canadiens seraient différents des autres par le simple fait qu'ils sont Canadiens (Marche). Si nous appliquons ce concept à l'analyse des peintures de Kent Monkman, nous retrouvons la facette qui dit que les Canadiens, comme peuple colonisateur, traitent bien les populations des premières nations, inuit, et métis, en comparaison aux États-Unis, qui, par exemple, ont eu des guerres contre leurs populations autochtones (Marche).

Cependant, la mise en lumière récente des décès des jeunes dans les pensionnats fédéraux encourage les Canadiens à réévaluer

cet exceptionnalisme canadien. Le Canada est en période de conscientisation et d'éducation au sujet des relations entre le fédéral et les peuples autochtones à travers les siècles dans le cadre du mouvement de réconciliation nationale (Moran). Kent Monkman en fait partie. Il utilise ses œuvres et son sens d'humour pour partager le message de la réconciliation continue du Canada non autochtone.

Les œuvres de Kent Monkman tentent d'utiliser les concepts des stéréotypes et de l'étranger familier, pour reprendre un élément d'humanité qui a été volé des peuples autochtones lors du processus colonial et le redonner à l'identité autochtone. Il utilise des images qui sont aussi colonisatrices qu'autochtones, aussi provocatrices qu'innocentes, pour faire réfléchir son auditoire.

Dès le premier tableau à l'étude, Monkman propose une redéfinition des rôles et de l'imagerie nationale canadienne par l'utilisation des stéréotypes et du bris de l'exceptionnalisme canadien. Les images qui nous sont si familières, par exemple les œuvres du Groupe des Sept, ont été transformées pour raconter une autre histoire. Les images « intouchables » des religieux et des colons, dont l'image presque sacralisée

dans la culture canadienne-française des coureurs des bois, ont été présentées sous la lentille de l'oppression des peuples autochtones, un bris clair de la tradition artistique canadienne où de tels personnages sont représentés avec révérence et mystique. Cependant, comme le dit la description officielle de l'œuvre présentée par le Musée, Monkman utilise de l'ironie pour alléger des thèmes et un sujet aussi lourd. En découvrant une telle peinture pour la première fois, l'absurdité d'une telle composition fait rire l'observateur (NGC).

Les thèmes de l'altérité ont été abordés dans cette peinture par la présence de Miss Chief et la représentation d'actes homosexuels entre les groupes présents. Même si son intention originale est de mettre de l'avant les injustices du passé et présent que vivent les peuples autochtones, Monkman représente d'autres groupes marginalisés, dont la communauté LGBTQ2+. L'histoire des peuples autochtones est remplie d'instances où les traditions et les célébrations traditionnelles ont été bannies, dont le *Pot Latch* (Bill Reid

Centre – SFU) ou la Danse du soleil (Gadacz). La libre démonstration de ses actes aujourd'hui est ainsi une célébration de l'autre.

Si nous continuons notre analyse des œuvres de Kent Monkman avec son tableau *The Daddies*, nous trouvons un regard plus critique, et plus direct, sur l'histoire coloniale du Canada avec l'inclusion de Miss Chief dans une des peintures les plus célèbres de la formation de la Confédération canadienne. Monkman utilise la peinture, *Meeting of the Delegates of British North America* de Robert Harris (UQAM), ayant été créée à l'image de la Conférence de Québec en 1864, lorsque la création de l'État moderne du Canada était en débat pour représenter l'impact sur les peuples autochtones de cette rencontre². Lors de cette conférence, les délégués de chacune des colonies britanniques en Amérique du Nord³ se sont décidés sur le plan de rédaction de l'Acte de l'Amérique du Nord britannique (1867) et son inclusion de l'adhésion de la souveraineté des peuples autochtones à l'autorité du gouvernement fédéral. Ce document a été l'un des facteurs principaux

²² La peinture originale *Meeting of the Delegates of North America* par Robert Harris a été détruite lors des incendies du 3 février 1916 avec l'Édifice du Centre original. La peinture de laquelle Kent Monkman s'est probablement inspirée est présentement dans le Parlement actuel et s'appelle *Fathers of Confederation* par Rex Woods. Comme l'œuvre de Monkman, la peinture de Woods compte 37 personnages tandis que la peinture originale n'en comptait que 34. De plus, Woods a inclus un portrait de Robert Harris dans sa version comme hommage à l'artiste original. Cette touche est présente dans l'œuvre de Kent Monkman.

³ Canada-Ouest, Canada-Est, Nouveau-Brunswick, Nouvelle-Écosse, l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard et Terre-Neuve.

pour expliquer la situation dans laquelle les peuples autochtones se retrouvent aujourd'hui, comme l'explique Gettler⁴.

Même avec l'histoire présente entre les peuples autochtones en Amérique du Nord et la société coloniale du Canada, ici nous avons la preuve définitive et codifiée de la place qu'occupent les autochtones au sein de la société canadienne. Le choix d'inclure Miss Chief au centre de cette rencontre, représentée comme l'objet de proie des « Pères de la Confédération », révèle l'intention de Kent Monkman de réclamer l'histoire des peuples autochtones pour eux-mêmes. Finalement, les personnages des « Pères de la Confédération » sont tous dotés de yeux bleus perçants avec les blancs d'œil colorés rouge perçant. Ils regardent Miss Chief avec un regard de nature presque prédateur. Ici, Martha Perkins rapporte que Monkman a fait ceci par exprès, montrant leur attitude envers les peuples autochtones. « *These white European men tried to subjugate the First Nations peoples who fought to protect Indigenous land and rights*

but, in this painting called The Daddies, Miss Chief is the one who dominates » (Perkins). Monkman démontre toujours le fait de redonner le pouvoir, ou l'agentivité « *l'agency* », aux peuples autochtones. Ils regagnent leur pouvoir et forcent la société coloniale de repenser sa place.

Selon un article rédigé par la Galerie de l'UQÀM, Monkman a choisi d'inclure Miss Chief dans cette peinture en particulier afin de redéfinir l'histoire coloniale canadienne, et « *by imposing an Indigenous presence on the origins of Confederation.* » (UQÀM). L'article mentionne aussi le fait que cette peinture a été créée au moment de l'avènement du 150^e anniversaire de la Confédération en 2017. Ce tableau, qui est souvent placé au centre des rencontres du cabinet fédéral, démontre la puissance des oeuvres de Monkman. Il renverse un objet si important à l'imagerie du gouvernement fédéral pour pousser ses buts artistiques et politiques à l'aide d'un personnage qui n'est pas présent dans la peinture originale, mais qui a été si affecté par les actions qui ont eu

⁴ *Infamously, the British North America Act only mentions, "Indians and lands reserved for the Indians" in a single sub-clause, assigning responsibility for both to the federal government. The "Fathers of Confederation" first adopted the phrase without debate at the Quebec Conference in 1864, adding "Indians" to the federal powers proposed by the Canadian Liberal-Conservatives in their aborted 1858 project of British North American Union, while replacing the less specific "Indian territories" with "lands reserved for Indians" (Gettler).*

lieu lors de la rencontre de Québec, que sa présence nous fait réévaluer l'histoire du Canada et les effets continuels du gouvernement fédéral envers les peuples autochtones.

Cependant, en nous tournant vers *Hanky Panky*, nous voyons comment les arts peuvent pousser les thèmes de provocation au-delà des limites établies par les valeurs collectives. Avec *Hanky Panky*, la légèreté des autres œuvres a été abandonnée afin de provoquer avec des images choquantes. Les thèmes de réconciliation dans cette peinture sont apparents avec le regain de pouvoir des forces « coloniales » par des actes violents / sexuels portés contre le premier ministre avec d'autres qui en tirent plaisir, devant plusieurs anciens chefs du Canada dont MacDonald, P.E. Trudeau, Chrétien et Harper. D'après le compte Instagram de Kent Monkman, il a créé cette peinture afin de raconter les injustices envers les femmes autochtones⁵.

Avec l'acte de « *fisting anal* » commis contre le Justin Trudeau, encouragé par les rires d'un groupe de femmes autochtones, Monkman tente de redonner le

pouvoir aux femmes qu'elles ont perdu au cours du régime canadien depuis l'arrivée des Européens au cours du 16^e siècle. La situation actuelle des femmes autochtones disparues et assassinées est un autre enjeu qui fait souffrir la communauté autochtone depuis plusieurs décennies. En 2014, il a été estimé que 1186 femmes ont disparu en 30 ans, selon Radio-Canada. De plus, les femmes autochtones sont 25% plus à risque de harcèlement et violence sexuelle (Thériault). Toutefois, l'image d'un tel acte commis contre le chef d'un État souverain, malgré les intentions derrière une telle représentation, reste un acte violent contre un peuple.

De plus, Monkman a choisi d'inclure un agent de la GRC déshabillé avec ses pantalons à ses chevilles et couché sur son ventre, impliquant qu'il a été « participant » aux actes qui se porteront contre le premier ministre. Le personnage de l'agent de la GRC, dans son uniforme iconique, est une source de division entre les peuples autochtones et non autochtones. Parmi la communauté non autochtone, l'uniforme rouge de la GRC représente un point de fierté

⁵ *Our women are strong. They are my heroes. In our Cree world, traditional law keepers were a council of women, the okihcitâwiskwêwak. It was the women who made the decisions about the land, not men. Stripped of their power by colonial politicians, they have transcended generations of colonial violence. With their strength, beauty, resilience and laughter, our women reclaim their power -- Miss Chief. (Monkman)*

d'identité canadienne, un des éléments emblématiques du Canada. Mais, dans d'autres œuvres de Monkman, leur image est une menace à l'identité autochtone, souvent centrale à la raflé des années soixante où plusieurs centaines d'enfants ont été enlevés à leurs parents et à leurs communautés par le gouvernement fédéral (SFU). Monkman utilise les agents de la GRC comme personnages « vilains » pour ses peintures, reflétant leur image chez les peuples autochtones.

À la suite de la production de cette peinture et la réaction populaire aux images et actions qu'elle propose, Kent Monkman s'est excusé pour l'absence de consentement clair aux actes illustrés (Angeleti). De plus, il a clarifié ne pas avoir l'intention de suggérer que les femmes, dont le conseil des femmes autochtones (*Okihcitâwiskwêwak*), approuveraient un tel geste (Angeleti; Bresge).

La peinture, *Hanky Panky*, reste toujours une œuvre provocatrice qui fait réfléchir les Canadiens non autochtones sur leur place, tout en abordant les thèmes de l'altérité. Les premiers ministres sont en position de vulnérabilité face au pouvoir, à l'agentivité des femmes autochtones. Ce tableau renverse le rapport de force entre les

peuples autochtones et le Canada colonial et s'inscrit dans le thème de la réconciliation. Cependant, la violence dans ce tableau, aussi controversée soit-elle, a attiré une importante couverture médiatique. Cela n'aurait peut-être pas été le cas si Monkman avait choisi d'être moins provocateur.

Les œuvres de Monkman abordent plusieurs facettes des relations entre le gouvernement fédéral et les peuples autochtones pouvant être analysés, soit les œuvres elles-mêmes, ainsi que les thèmes et les sujets entourant la création des œuvres. Monkman aborde le sujet de l'agentivité des peuples autochtones par le fait qu'il est libre de créer de telles peintures et par son inclusion des peuples autochtones dans des scènes historiques coloniales canadiennes.

Dans ses trois peintures que nous avons à l'étude, Monkman aborde les thèmes de stéréotypes et d'altérité en réappropriant les représentations stéréotypées des peuples autochtones dans l'histoire artistique canadienne – l'illustration du mythe du bon sauvage, ou simplement leur représentation en tant que l'Autre. La représentation des peuples autochtones de Monkman révèle la complexité humaine en demeurant dans un contexte de réconciliation. Il s'y prend en émulant les traditions artistiques des

mouvements romantiques⁶ de manière subversive. Monkman, par moyen de ses œuvres de style « comique », fait réfléchir en montrant une différente réalité des peuples autochtones tout en renversant l'image commune du récit de l'histoire canadienne. L'inclusion dans ses peintures des personnages autochtones stéréotypés dans des scènes de l'histoire canadienne défait l'image commune de l'histoire canadienne. Dans chacune de ses peintures à l'étude, les peuples autochtones portent des couronnes de plumes et des vestes garnies de billes, déconstruisant la doctrine des peuples autochtones comme l'Autre - un acte similaire aux groupes LGBTQ qui, au cours de la deuxième moitié du XX^e siècle, se sont réapproprié le terme « *queer* », autrefois péjoratif.

Conclusion

La Confédération canadienne a marqué ses 154 ans le 1^{er} juin 2021. Normalement, cette journée est l'occasion de plusieurs célébrations d'un océan à l'autre, mais l'année dernière, la journée a été marquée par des manifestations contre les actions du gouvernement fédéral au cours de

l'histoire des relations entre ce dernier et les peuples autochtones. De plus, l'année fut la première où la journée du chandail orange a été marquée officiellement. Celle-ci vise à soutenir les efforts de la réconciliation et à montrer son appui aux efforts de trouver les enfants perdus aux pensionnats. Le Canada est en pleine révolution identitaire.

Avec l'ensemble de la production artistique de Kent Monkman que nous avons vu lors de cette étude, les thèmes et les tableaux démontrent comment l'univers artistique créé par Monkman aide à faire réfléchir la population non autochtone à la place qu'elle occupe et la sensibilise aux injustices commises contre les peuples autochtones par le biais de l'humour. Il aborde les thèmes de l'agentivité, de l'exceptionnalisme canadien et de la réconciliation pour déconstruire l'image du grand récit de l'histoire canadienne chez son auditoire non autochtone.

L'intégration de l'histoire canadienne et des mouvements artistiques européens dans ses œuvres révolutionnaires force leur inclusion dans les courants artistiques contemporains et les discussions à leurs sujets. Monkman, par ses œuvres

⁶ Le romantisme se base sur les principes de l'individu, du subjectif, de l'imaginatif, du spontané et, de l'émotionnel (Encyclopedia Britannica).

provocateurs, anime les conversations nécessaires afin d'arriver à l'objectif final de la réconciliation.

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NATASHA TREMBLAY

LE REFUS DE L'INTERPELLATION COMME ACTE DE RÉSISTANCE CULTURELLE
DANS LE POÈME SPEAK WHITE DE MICHÈLE LALONDE

Résumé

Cet article porte sur le poème québécois *Speak White* de Michèle Lalonde, paru en 1968 lors d'une ère de changements culturels, sociaux et économiques au Québec surnommés la « Révolution tranquille ». L'analyse du poème est abordée dans une perspective postcoloniale proposant que Lalonde rejette l'hégémonie anglophone au Québec en refusant l'interpellation provenant de la classe dominante anglophone et en utilisant la force lyrique de la langue française comme contrepoids culturel et acte d'affirmation identitaire.

Mots clés : postcolonialisme, Québec, hégémonie, interpellation

Abstract

This article examines Michèle Lalonde's Quebec poem *Speak White*, which appeared in 1968 during an era of cultural, social, and economic change in Quebec known as the "Quiet Revolution". I analyze the poem from a postcolonial perspective, proposing that Lalonde rejects Anglophone hegemony in Quebec by refusing the interpellation of the Anglophone ruling class and using the lyrical force of the French language as a cultural counterweight and an act of identity affirmation.

Key words: postcolonialism, Quebec, hegemony, interpellation

Introduction

Depuis la Conquête de la Nouvelle-France par l'Empire britannique, une part importante du pouvoir économique de ce qui deviendra la province francophone du Québec se trouve entre les mains des anglophones. Encore aujourd'hui, plusieurs entreprises basées au Québec sont menées par des PDG unilingues anglophones qui ne peuvent communiquer avec leurs employés québécois francophones dans leur langue; c'est le cas notamment d'Air

Canada, de la Banque Laurentienne, d'Alimentation Couche-Tard (un des détaillants en alimentation les plus importants du pays), et du cabinet mondial d'ingénierie SNC-Lavalin (TVA Nouvelles). Le poème de 1968 *Speak White* de Michèle Lalonde, déplorant l'insulte éponyme qui était communément employée par les patrons anglophones à l'endroit des travailleurs francophones, est ainsi toujours d'actualité. En effet, en novembre 2021, le PDG d'Air Canada, Michael Rousseau, a provoqué une vague de réactions médiatiques après avoir prononcé un

discours entièrement en anglais à la Chambre de commerce de Montréal et avoir affirmé qu'il ne voyait pas l'utilité d'apprendre le français malgré son poste (Journet). Paul Journet, chroniqueur du média québécois *La Presse*, a rappelé que la fameuse expression évoque ainsi toujours une réalité que vivent plusieurs travailleurs francophones et a d'ailleurs révélé sur Twitter qu'il avait « quelques témoignages d'ex-employés d'Air Canada qui se sont déjà fait dire "*Speak White*" parce qu'ils se parlaient français entre eux ».

Revenons donc au poème de Lalonde qui pointe du doigt cette expression. Au Québec, les années 1960 ont été marquées par des changements socioéconomiques rapides, communément appelés la « Révolution tranquille ». Période souvent considérée comme l'entrée du Québec dans la modernité, elle est notamment caractérisée par « [une] classe moyenne émergente [qui] lutte pour avoir davantage de mainmise sur les ressources économiques du Québec, et [par des tentatives] de redéfinir le rôle et l'identité

de la société francophone du Canada » (Durocher). Concrètement, la nationalisation de l'hydroélectricité ainsi que le remplacement du rôle de l'Église catholique par le gouvernement provincial québécois au niveau institutionnel sont venus définir cette ère de réforme.

Mais la Révolution tranquille est peut-être d'abord et avant tout une construction littéraire de la part des intellectuels québécois de l'époque, cherchant à représenter le Québec comme étant une société libre de la mentalité colonisée du passé (Green 255). C'est dans cette optique que j'analyserai le poème *Speak White* de Michèle Lalonde, datant de 1968. Lalonde a rédigé l'œuvre pour une soirée-bénéfice en soutien à Pierre Vallières et à Charles Gagnon¹, arrêtés aux États-Unis et extradés au Québec (Girard). Le poème de Lalonde a été popularisé lorsque cette dernière l'a récité à la *Nuit de la poésie* le 27 mars 1970, et il est connu comme étant un acte de revendication contre la domination culturelle, littéraire et linguistique anglophone.

¹¹ Les deux hommes étaient des « felquistes », soit des membres du Front de libération du Québec, un organisme ayant comme conviction que le Québec devait se libérer de la domination anglophone et du capitalisme par la lutte armée (Laurendeau et McIntosh).

Dans cette recherche, je démontrerai comment le poème se sert de la force lyrique de la langue française pour refuser l'interpellation de la classe dominante anglophone et rejeter leur prétendue supériorité culturelle et littéraire. J'aborderai l'œuvre dans une perspective postcoloniale, en débutant avec une mise en contexte historique, socioéconomique et culturelle de sa rédaction et de sa performance.

J'enchaînerai la recherche avec le concept psychanalytique de l'interpellation selon Althusser et la résistance à celle-ci, et je démontrerai en quoi les outils lyriques et stylistiques de ce poème sont la manifestation du refus de l'interpellation comme acte d'affirmation identitaire. Enfin, la conclusion de cette recherche affirmera qu'afin de rejeter la domination culturelle anglophone, Lalonde s'attaque à l'interpellation dans son poème et utilise le lyrisme et la force de la langue française pour présenter une alternative culturelle au peuple québécois.

La « race » canadienne-française : un subalterne en Amérique

La Conquête de la Nouvelle-France par l'Empire britannique en 1763 a mené à la marginalisation des Canadiens français dans les décennies à suivre. À la suite d'une série de rébellions armées dans le Bas-Canada (l'actuel territoire du Québec) lors des années 1837-38, les autorités britanniques ont envoyé John George Lambton, 1^{er} comte de Durham, en Amérique du Nord britannique, afin d'enquêter sur les causes des rébellions. Dans son *Rapport sur les affaires de l'Amérique du Nord britannique*, ce dernier arrive à la conclusion que les conflits armés résultaient d'une guerre entre les « races » anglaises et françaises habitant la région (Buller *et al* 7).

Il fait état de la question du peuple canadien-français, soulignant notamment deux facteurs majeurs les empêchant d'être un peuple « éclairé » : le maintien des institutions françaises, dont le régime seigneurial (un système féodal) et l'Église catholique; ainsi que leur domination par une puissance étrangère. Sur les institutions françaises, Lord Durham affirme qu'à l'époque de la

colonisation du Canada, elles étaient peut-être plus que celles de toute autre nation européenne, destinées à réprimer l'intelligence et la liberté de la grande masse du peuple, et que celles-ci continuaient à réprimer le peuple canadien-français de son époque (11). Il explique que le colon canadien-français fut placé à la fois dans une vie de travail constant et invariable, de grand confort matériel, et de dépendance féodale, alors que l'autorité ecclésiastique à laquelle il avait été habitué établissait ses institutions autour de lui, et le prêtre continua à exercer sur lui son ancienne influence (12). C'est l'image d'un peuple vivant sous l'emprise d'un régime archaïque et répressif limitant leur potentiel.

Au niveau de leur domination depuis la Conquête de la Nouvelle-France par l'Empire britannique, Durham affirme que les Canadiens français sont un peuple sans histoire, ni littérature, car leur lien avec la France a été rompu après huit décennies d'assujettissement à une puissance étrangère (132). Il constate également que, malgré les efforts des Canadiens français de préserver leur nationalité distincte, leur assimilation vers l'anglais est inévitable comme c'est

la langue des riches et des employeurs (133). Ce portrait souligne l'aliénation des francophones en Amérique du Nord britannique depuis la Conquête, ainsi que leur lutte cherchant à protéger leur identité.

C'est également une image d'un peuple appauvri, ignorant et sans culture à préserver, et c'est pourquoi Lord Durham recommande d'unir la colonie du Bas-Canada avec celle du Haut-Canada – composée principalement d'une population anglaise et fidèle à l'Empire – afin de se servir du poids démographique des anglophones pour graduellement remplacer les institutions et la langue françaises par les institutions et la langue anglaises, qui seraient moins répressives et aliénantes (134-35). C'est pour les sortir de ce perçu état d'infériorité que Lord Durham dit désirer donner aux Canadiens français le caractère anglais (131). Tel que noté par Green, c'est un discours colonial faisant état d'une mission civilisatrice britannique typique du XIX siècle (252-53). Le rapport Durham fait état d'un peuple dépourvu de pouvoir politique et économique en raison de leur langue française et de leurs institutions répressives. Les Canadiens français sont donc le subalterne;

inférieurs, subordonnés, et à la merci du discours colonial anglais (Culler 118).

Plus d'un siècle après le rapport du Lord Durham (et de la mise en place de sa recommandation d'unir le Haut-Canada et le Bas-Canada), le felquiste Pierre Vallières, alors emprisonné à Manhattan, écrit son essai *Nègres blancs d'Amérique* (Lacombe). L'œuvre a fait l'objet d'une tentative de censure de la part du gouvernement canadien, accusant Vallières de « libelle séditieux », mais les poursuites ont été abandonnées en 1973 (Hébert *et al* 476-77). Tout comme Lord Durham, Vallières pointe du doigt les institutions françaises de l'époque de la colonisation, l'Église catholique, et la domination anglophone, comme étant des facteurs empêchant l'épanouissement du peuple canadien-français. Toutefois, contrairement au Lord Durham, qui emploie le langage des Lumières en exprimant son souhait de voir le peuple canadien-français devenir éclairé, Vallières a une vision socialiste du sort des Canadiens français – qu'il compare aux Noirs américains – et lie l'émancipation des francophones à la lutte pour leur libération de l'emprise du capitalisme et de la domination anglaise :

La lutte de libération entreprise par les Noirs américains n'en suscite pas moins un intérêt croissant parmi la population canadienne-française, car les travailleurs du Québec ont conscience de leur condition de nègres, d'exploités, de citoyens de seconde classe. Ne sont-ils pas, depuis l'établissement de la Nouvelle-France, au XVIIe siècle, les valets des impérialistes, les « nègres blancs d'Amérique » ? (791)

Dans l'introduction de son essai, Vallières fait un survol de l'histoire de l'Amérique française en tenant compte de la condition perpétuelle d'exploitation des travailleurs francophones par les classes fortunées. Vallières souligne le rôle des institutions coloniales françaises : le haut clergé est devenu « la véritable classe dirigeante » et le système seigneurial a mené à des terres insuffisantes, appauvries, moins productives et surpeuplées (874). Par ailleurs, Vallières lie l'oppression provenant du clergé à celle provenant de l'Empire britannique, rappelant que « les Anglais avaient toujours l'appui du clergé » au moment des rébellions de 1837-38, et que l'Église « se mettait à prêcher l'obéissance à l'autorité établie »

(908). La fondation du Canada en 1867, selon Vallières, n'était qu'une « vaste transaction financière opérée par la bourgeoisie sur le dos des travailleurs du pays, particulièrement les travailleurs du Québec », qui a ensuite été enrobée d'un discours sentimentaliste sur l'unité des deux « races fondatrices » (967). Un siècle après la fondation du Canada, il affirme que l'élite politique québécoise n'a toujours pas pu améliorer le sort des ouvriers canadiens-français :

Les travailleurs du Québec sont écœurés des discours, des drapeaux, des hymnes et des défilés. Ils veulent des industries à eux, le contrôle de la vente et de la consommation de leurs produits, le pouvoir politique et la sécurité économique, le privilège d'étudier et de participer aux découvertes de la science, etc. (1012)

Effectivement, un nouveau facteur opprimant les Canadiens français, selon Vallières, résulte de la fondation du Canada : le transfert progressif de l'hégémonie financière canadienne de l'Empire britannique vers les financiers américains (1024).

Il considère la Révolution tranquille comme étant largement insuffisante au niveau des réformes institutionnelles et

que les travailleurs ne profitent pas de l'argent public d'investi (1256). L'introduction de l'essai conclut avec le constat que les Canadiens français, race inférieure en Amérique, se révolteront :

[Les] nègres blancs d'Amérique sont déterminés à briser une fois pour toutes le joug de l'esclavage et à prendre en main le contrôle de leur propre destinée. Après trois siècles de muette et inutile soumission de tout un peuple à vos intérêts d'exploiteurs, [...] il ne faudra pas vous attendre à ce que la révolte populaire en gestation se préoccupe, messieurs les bourgeois et messieurs les évêques, de ce qu'il adviendra de vos privilèges, lorsqu'elle éclatera, impitoyable et inévitable aboutissement du système d'exploitation et d'asservissement que vous avez vous-même mis en place et développé. (1319)

Autant Vallières que Lord Durham font état d'une « race » canadienne-française qui serait, à part une certaine élite instruite, principalement composée de travailleurs dépourvus de pouvoir politique et économique en raison à la fois de la domination anglophone et de leurs propres institutions désuètes.

Ils sont le subalterne au Canada, et c'est précisément la perspective qui est évoquée dans le poème *Speak White* de Michèle Lalonde, écrit en hommage à Vallières. L'expression « speak white » est un ordre de parler la langue du maître, l'anglais; le français est la langue du mineur, de l'esclave, du nègre (Maïsetti 177). L'expression fort répandue au XIX^e siècle était communément entendue sur les chantiers ou dans les usines où les patrons anglophones « imposaient leurs lois jusque dans la parole » et elle était également employée dans la Chambre des communes du Canada (177-78). Bien que l'expression tombât en désuétude dans les années 1960, Maïsetti suggère que Lalonde s'en ressaisit pour la réactiver dans le contexte de la Révolution tranquille (178). L'utilisation d'une expression plutôt obsolète dans le poème, à mon avis, est un moyen d'évoquer le long passé de l'altérité des Canadiens français. Dès la deuxième strophe, Lalonde juxtapose l'infériorité perçue des francophones à la supériorité des anglophones : « nous sommes un peuple inculte et bègue / mais nous ne sommes pas sourds au génie d'une langue / [...] / speak white ». Le poème vise autant les Britanniques que les Américains, ce qui

rappelle la transition d'un maître, l'Empire britannique, vers un autre, les financiers américains, chez Vallières :

nous sommes un peuple peu brillant
 mais fort capable d'apprécier
 toute l'importance des crumpets
 ou du Boston Tea Party

La manière dont elle passe d'un maître anglophone à l'autre évoque l'universalité de la soumission des Canadiens français, « de Westminster à Washington » (Lalonde). Qu'ils soient dominés par des patrons britanniques ou américains, ils sont un peuple dominé, un subalterne. Lalonde fait d'ailleurs illusion aux dures conditions de travail des ouvriers francophones : « nous sommes un peu durs d'oreille / nous vivons trop près des machines ». L'anglais est la langue des patrons, utilisée pour s'adresser aux travailleurs : « oui quelle admirable langue / pour embaucher / donner des ordres ». Tel qu'affirmé par Lord Durham plus d'un siècle avant la rédaction du poème, Lalonde illustre l'anglais comme étant la langue de l'argent, la langue des riches, mais elle est également la langue de l'exploitation :

parlez-nous production profits et
 pourcentages
 speak white

c'est une langue riche
 pour acheter
 mais pour se vendre
 mais pour se vendre à perte d'âme
 mais pour se vendre

Le poème représente les Canadiens français comme un peuple d'une race jugée inférieure aux anglophones – autant les Anglais que les Américains – et qui est exploitée chez elle : « speak white and loud / qu'on vous entende / de Saint-Henri à Saint-Domingue ». Même dans les quartiers ouvriers francophones, il est impossible de s'échapper, au Québec, de la domination culturelle anglophone.

L'interpellation anglophone

La section précédente fait état de l'aliénation des Canadiens français dans une société dominée par la culture anglophone les entourant. Pour mieux comprendre cette réalité, je définirai cette aliénation en fonction du cadre théorique de la psychanalyse. Selon Lacan, les structures sociales et les lois incarnées dans le langage relèvent d'un ordre symbolique, selon lequel chaque signe est composé de deux parties : le signifiant, qui est le porteur de sens, et le signifié, qui est le sens produit (Lapsley 80). Le

sens découle de la relation entre différents signifiants, et l'ajout de signifiants à la chaîne des éléments signifiants peut changer le sens produit (80). Le problème du langage, selon Lacan, est l'absence de l'Autre, car les signifiants qui permettraient à un sujet de s'exprimer sont absents; il est toujours pris entre différents signifiants (81). Un des résultats de l'absence de l'Autre est l'aliénation; sans signifiants, il n'y a pas d'identité, mais simplement de l'identification (81). L'être humain doit s'identifier à des signifiants, mais il ne peut les choisir; son identité lui est assignée par interpellation, soit, l'idéal que l'on souhaite qu'il incarne (81). Bien qu'il n'y ait pas de soi antérieur à la constitution du sujet dans la chaîne des éléments signifiants, le sujet ressent que son vrai soi a été en quelque sorte perdu et trahi; c'est de là que découle le sentiment d'aliénation (81). L'interpellation provient de toutes les institutions d'une société, que ce soient les écoles, les milieux de travail, l'état, les tribunaux, etc., et tant que cette interpellation est réussie, ces institutions maintiennent leur autorité (82). Selon le théoricien marxiste Althusser, les idéologies dominantes dépendent du bon

fonctionnement des mécanismes d'interpellation afin de maintenir leur pouvoir (83).

Lalonde imite l'interpellation provenant du groupe dominant anglophone dans *Speak White*. L'histoire, la culture, et la littérature anglaises évoquées dans le poème sont associées à une perception de grandeur et de supériorité :

Speak white
il est si beau de vous entendre
parler de Paradise Lost
ou du profil gracieux et anonyme qui
tremble
dans les sonnets de Shakespeare

La première strophe du poème évoque certaines des plus grandes œuvres de la littérature anglaise et la valeur que la société les attribue. La culture littéraire canadienne-française, quant à elle, serait perçue comme étant nettement inférieure : « [...] pardonnez-nous de n'avoir pour réponse / que les chants rauques de nos ancêtres » (Lalonde). Les Canadiens français sont interpellés; leur culture littéraire est incomparable à celle des anglophones, et il est dans leur intérêt de s'intéresser à la culture du maître et de « speak white ». Les Canadiens français, qui n'ont comme histoire celle d'un

« peuple-concierge », contrairement aux anglophones, avec leur « Grande Charte » et leur « monument à Lincoln » (Lalonde). Il est d'ailleurs clair dans le poème qu'il s'agit d'une interpellation provenant du groupe dominant; le locuteur propageant cette conception de la supériorité de la culture anglophone, est l'anglophone lui-même, qui « parle » aux Canadiens français :

pour parler du gracious living
et parler du standard de vie
et de la Grande Société
un peu plus fort alors speak white
haussez vos voix de contremaîtres

Le poème démontre ainsi l'interpellation que subissent les Canadiens français; le groupe dominant les interpelle avec une chaîne d'éléments signifiants qui ont comme sens la supériorité de la culture anglophone. Ce serait aux Canadiens français de délaissé leur culture inférieure, et d'accepter de « speak white », car l'anglais serait « une langue universelle / nous sommes nés pour la comprendre » (Lalonde). Cette interpellation tente de solidifier la suprématie de la langue et de la culture anglaises.

Cela dit, selon Althusser, si un individu ne reconnaît pas l'identité qui lui

est assignée comme étant sa véritable identité, il n'acceptera pas l'idéologie qui l'interpelle (Lapsley 83). Comme le sujet ne coïncide jamais avec le signifiant, la résistance est possible et l'interpellation peut être refusée (83). Selon Homi Bhabha, l'instabilité de l'identité et du sens est ainsi une occasion pour les peuples postcoloniaux d'explorer et de forger une identité très différente de celle qui les a été assignée (83). Ce refus de l'interpellation se trouve dans *Speak White*. Lalonde utilise l'ironie pour souligner le contraste entre l'interpellation voulant l'infériorité littéraire des Québécois et son propre poème, riche de vocabulaire, et présenté avec clarté et éloquence lors de la *Nuit de la Poésie*. Son poème rejette l'identification de la « parlure pas très propre » des Canadiens français par la force de sa propre maîtrise de la langue française (Lalonde). En effet, d'autres auteurs de la Révolution tranquille, dont Gaston Miron et Jacques Godbout, ont également traduit l'identité linguistico-culturelle québécoise avec une juxtaposition similaire « des tournures proches de la langue parlée à des formules très soignées, éloquentes » (Jeanmaire 196). Ce poème démontre que

la langue des Canadiens français n'est pas « une langue à jurons » ne valant rien (Lalonde). La langue française des Québécois, par son style unique et sa force lyrique, est marqueur d'une identité d'un peuple résilient qui ne se soumettra pas à l'interpellation anglophone.

En effet, la poésie est « une arme capable de produire une saisie du québécois en langue parlée par un peuple, maître et possesseur de son histoire : déjà une défense et illustration de la langue québécoise – un geste politique en acte et en mots » (Maïsetti 178). Le poème manifeste le rejet de l'interpellation de la culture dominante anglophone et se réapproprie l'identité des Québécois. Lalonde évoque d'ailleurs la riche culture littéraire canadienne-française en notant « le chagrin de Nelligan », un grand poète canadien-français. Elle rejette la prétendue grandeur de la langue anglaise, « avec ses mots lacrymogènes / avec ses mots matraques ». La langue anglaise en serait une de violence et de domination, plutôt que la langue commune et universelle.

C'est d'ailleurs à travers la culture de langue française que l'identité québécoise s'est solidifiée. La Révolution tranquille a donné naissance à une

effervescence célébrant la langue française et l'identité canadienne-française – qui deviendra québécoise – et ce mouvement culturel s'est exprimé à travers la performance. La poésie, la chanson, et le théâtre étaient des forces majeures menant à l'affirmation culturelle québécoise et la quête pour une plus grande autonomie politique (Ruschiensky 67). *Speak White* a ainsi une fin politique; elle est un véhicule servant à refuser l'interpellation du groupe dominant anglophone. Maïsetti considère que le poème est devenu un symbole, « à la fois lieu de formulation d'une identité et preuve de cette identité » (180). En tant que symbole refusant l'interpellation, *Speak White* cherche à déstabiliser les institutions du groupe dominant.

Conclusion

Speak White fait état d'un peuple dominé, soumis, exploité, et dépourvu de pouvoir politique et culturel. Souffrant sous le régime français et réduit au statut de race inférieure sans histoire ni culture à la suite de la Conquête britannique, l'histoire des Québécois francophones, autant selon le Rapport Durham que dans

Nègres blancs d'Amérique, en est une de labeur, de survie et de résistance. C'est à cet esprit de résistance que Lalonde fait appel dans *Speak White*. Contrairement au Lord Durham, qui voit l'assimilation des Canadiens français aux institutions anglaises jugées supérieures comme la solution pour mettre fin à leur état aliéné et appauvri, Lalonde rejette cette interpellation de la classe dominante et démontre comment la langue et l'identité des Québécois sont riches; c'est la force et le lyrisme de la langue française qui peut élever la population et la sortir de sa misère, et non la prétendue supériorité de la langue et de la culture anglaises.

De plus, contrairement à Vallières, qui voit une lutte des classes comme l'inévitable moyen pour les Canadiens français de se libérer de leur sort, Lalonde utilise la poésie comme arme politique ayant le pouvoir de déstabiliser les institutions du groupe dominant en remettant en question la validité de son idéologie. En prouvant, par la performance de son poème, qu'il est possible pour les Québécois de défendre leur langue, d'affirmer leur identité et de ne pas se résigner à leur statut d'infériorité, Lalonde refuse l'interpellation sur laquelle repose le

groupe dominant pour préserver la crédibilité de son autorité.

Et le poème de Lalonde n'est pas une œuvre politico-culturelle unique, mais bien un exemple d'une vague culturelle au Québec qui provoquera des changements identitaires majeurs dans les décennies à venir. En effet, *Speak White* termine en faisant illusion à la quantité de Canadiens français qui commencent à refuser l'interpellation anglophone et qui affirment leur identité québécoise :

et comprenez notre parler de
circonstance
quand vous nous demandez poliment
how do you do
et nous entendez vous répondre
we're doing all right
we're doing fine
We are not alone
nous savons
que nous ne sommes pas seuls.

C'est par le biais d'une lecture postcoloniale de cette œuvre phare de la Révolution qu'il devient possible de saisir adéquatement la lutte perpétuelle des Québécois francophones exprimée dans le poème, qui existe par ailleurs toujours aujourd'hui : la volonté de vivre pleinement en français en Amérique; de protéger leur langue et leur culture

distinctes dans le monde; de gérer leurs propres institutions; et de pouvoir participer à la vie économique; malgré l'océan anglophone qui les entoure.

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Genre et nation

Gender and Nation



A M A N D A A Z Z I

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS AND OPPRESSION IN MARGE PIERCY'S UTOPIA

Résumé

Depuis les années 1900, les sociétés patriarcales contrôlent les droits reproductifs et imposent la ségrégation raciale pour affirmer leur pouvoir et leur domination sur les corps marginalisés, principalement par le biais de législations discriminatoires qui éliminent la liberté de choix des personnes concernées. Cependant, dans un monde qui garantit l'autonomie des groupes marginalisés, en éradiquant l'assujettissement des femmes et les préjugés raciaux, on peut se retrouver dans une utopie. Cet article évalue les façons dont les romans *Utopia* par Thomas More (1516), *Herland* par Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1915) et *Woman on the Edge of Time* par Marge Piercy (1976), présentent des utopies différentes favorisant la liberté des femmes et du secteur marginalisé. J'analyse comment le roman de Piercy supprime l'enchaînement biologique de la maternité et impose l'égalité par le biais du mélange racial dans son monde futuriste de Mattapoissett. Le fait de rendre les hommes et les femmes « mères » et de briser les liens génétiques et culturels offre la possibilité de perturber les hiérarchies postcoloniales. Si le roman de Piercy semble présenter un monde utopique féministe décolonial, je soutiens que les caractéristiques dystopiques flagrantes de Mattapoissett - notamment la suppression de l'autonomie corporelle et la préservation de la race - créent une utopie imparfaite.

Mots clés : utopie, dystopie, droits reproductifs, mélange racial

Oppression comes in many forms, but more commonly against marginalized groups—women, people of colour, persons with disabilities—through colonial oppression imposed by patriarchal society. Humankind's

Abstract

Since the 1900s, patriarchal societies have controlled reproductive rights and even imposed racial segregation to assert power and dominance over marginalized bodies, primarily through discriminatory legislation that eliminates the freedom of choice of those affected. However, in a world that ensures marginalized groups' autonomy, by eradicating women's subjugation and racial prejudice, one can find themselves in a utopia. This paper explores the ways in which Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915) and Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) present different utopias favouring women and the marginalized sector's freedom. I analyze how Piercy's novel removes motherhood's biological enchainment and mandates equality through racial mixing in her futuristic world of Mattapoissett. Making both men and women 'mothers' and breaking genetic and cultural bonds provides the opportunity to disrupt postcolonial hierarchies. While Piercy's novel appears to present a feminist decolonial utopian world, I argue that Mattapoissett's glaring dystopian features—including the removal of bodily autonomy and racial preservation—create a flawed utopia.

Key words: utopia, dystopia, reproductive rights, racial mixing

most recent history is replete with examples of patriarchal societies controlling reproductive rights and imposing racial segregation to assert power and dominance over marginalized bodies, primarily through

discriminatory legislation.¹ These legislations are major public health issues and violations of human rights, eliminating the freedom of choice of those affected. In this way, a world that ensures marginalized groups' autonomy by eradicating women's material subjugation, as well as racial prejudice, is a utopia. This paper will explore the ways in which Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915) and Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) present utopias that theoretically favour women and marginalized groups as they possess absolute freedom. I will then analyze how Piercy's novel goes one step further by removing the biological enchainment of motherhood and mandating racial mixing to create equality within her futuristic world of Mattapoissett. Making everyone—including men—mothers and breaking the bonds between genes and culture provides the opportunity to disrupt all patriarchal and postcolonial hierarchies. However, Mattapoissett's control over these bodies and reproductive systems removes

women's and racialized groups' rights. Although Piercy's novel appears to present a feminist decolonial utopian world, glaring dystopian aspects ultimately create a flawed utopia. Mattapoissett adopts dystopian ideas against women and their reproductive rights by enforcing racial mixing, and therefore, controlling bodily autonomy, in an effort to eliminate racism. I argue that Mattapoissett illustrates these flaws by analyzing women's sacrifice of their power to reproduce by indirectly sterilizing them and stripping them of their choice to bear children. Moreover, I will highlight how racial mixing does not necessarily eliminate racism and may even encourage assimilation.

Many scholars find it challenging to define utopia as its content, form, or function becomes too broad or too narrow. Ruth Levitas believes that they approach these elements of utopia differently “because they are asking different questions” (179). As “[t]he essence of utopia seems to be ... the desire for a different, better way of being” (Levitas 181), it is ultimately unfeasible to

¹Oppressive medical legislations against marginalized groups, more specifically women of colour, exist all over North America. For instance, in 2021, a Human Rights report from the Senate Committee, entitled “Forced and Coerced Sterilization of Persons in Canada,” found that Indigenous women have been and still are subjected to forced and coerced sterilization by medical intervention, even though it is required to obtain informed consent. Additionally, Native Americans accused the Indian Health Service (IHS) of forcibly sterilizing approximately 25% of Native American women, between the ages of fifteen and forty-four throughout the 1970s. The allegations included: “failure to provide women with necessary information regarding sterilization; use of coercion to get signatures on the consent forms; improper consent forms; and lack of an appropriate waiting period (at least seventy-two hours) between the signing of a consent form and the surgical procedure” (Lawrence 400).

meet everyone's needs. Moreover, Lyman Tower Sargent states that “[t]he word *utopia* or *outopia* simply means *no* or *not place*” (5). Therefore, creating or attaining a utopia is virtually impossible because it is a “non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space” (Sargent 9). In this way, while *Mattapoissett* meets a specific criterion of better living conditions for all, the genre's limitations trap Piercy into writing a utopia that holds dystopian² aspects as a denunciation of patriarchy and colonialism because utopia is an impulse “grounded in the human capacity, and need, for fantasy” (Levitas 181). Additionally, Levitas states that “utopia is intrinsically both oppositional and transformative” (183), which further demonstrates how *Mattapoissett*'s transformation of women's subjugation and racial mixing—though positive in many ways—does not necessarily eliminate the issue of control over their bodies and reproductive systems. In this respect, a group must determine their definition of utopia, even if it includes evil utopias or utopias that possess dystopian traits for an Other. In *Mattapoissett*, we find women who wish to bear children and marginalized groups who

do not want to endure a process of racial mixing or assimilation. Of course, one cannot truly know Piercy's intention with *Mattapoissett*, and it may be a way to present the shortcomings of such a utopia.

In its original form, Thomas More, who coined the term 'utopia' when he published *Utopia* in 1516, presents an idealistic island ruled by an elected monarchy, though still broadly patriarchal and imperial. In the novel, women “prefer a married state to a single one; and as they do not deny themselves the pleasure of it, so they think the begetting of children is a debt which they owe to human nature and to their country” (More 101). Consequently, married women wish to bear children and take on domestic roles, or they remain chaste—though both options ultimately do not give them control over their bodies. As More places this utopia in the New World, the Indigenous peoples of this land cohabitate “if they are willing to live with [the] [settlers]” (More 51). However, “if the [N]atives refuse to conform themselves to their laws, they drive them out of those bounds which they mark out for themselves, and use force if they resist” (More 52). Conquest over racialized groups—in this case, Native peoples—along

² In his book, *Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction*, Tower Sargent refers to dystopia as “meaning [a] bad place” (22).

with the treatment of women, present dystopian flaws within this utopia, similarly to that of Mattapoissett. Although More creates a liberal utopia for his time, marginalized groups remain subordinate because they serve within a patriarchal colony. As a template for future utopias, authors have either similarly adhered to or entirely subverted More's story's expectations of these marginalized groups, specifically regarding the control over their bodies and reproductive rights.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's feminist utopian novel *Herland* (1915) radically shifts the concept of reproduction by excluding men from the process and putting forth a place that erases the necessity of male presence.³ *Herland* illustrates a utopia composed of "only women and girl children" (Gilman 2), and they reproduce through "parthenogenesis... that means virgin birth" (Gilman 30); as a result, they live in an ideal world free of war, conflict or male domination. However, as per utopia's definition as a non-existent place, even *Herland* holds immeasurable dystopian behaviours. On the one hand, the text establishes a racially 'pure' female nation and calls upon women "to secure the borders of

the home, to sanitize and preserve this space for the future citizens... [while] maintaining the 'boundaries' of whiteness" (Egan 77). Therefore, *Herland* perpetuates white feminism and disregards the issues of women of colour or marginalized groups at large, "displaying the text's belief in racial superiority" (Egan 81). The neglect of racialized women is crucial; it aligns with the real-world realities that Connie, from Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, attempts to escape, as she endures discrimination for being Mexican American. On the other hand, *Herland's* utopia equally asks the 'undesirable' or 'unfit' women "to submit to the will of the community, and they do so by taking control over their thoughts in order to control their bodies" (Egan 80). As a result, these women are not allowed to bear children, and they cannot bear the idea of "[destroying] the unborn" (Gilman 46), so they deny marginalized women's reproductive rights and their access to abortion.

Both More's *Utopia* and Gilman's *Herland* address women's subjugation and the control of reproductive rights, similarly to Piercy's utopia, by eliminating women's agency and autonomy and stripping them of

³ Perkins Gilman's novel was published in 1915, during the first wave of feminism. Their objectives focused on providing opportunities for women, with a focus on suffrage.

a biological right. These tensions were key elements of 1970s second-wave feminism, aligning with *Woman on the Edge of Time's* publication in 1976. It is critical to acknowledge that these utopias are, in fact, written to teach readers about their contemporary society. That is why, in the name of social cohesion, these utopias limit maternity and reproductive rights as well as promote the assimilation of racialized groups. These limits are a challenge that are found in Piercy's novel as well. However, its measures to decolonize racial discrimination and depatriarchalize motherhood and reproductive rights fall into the second-wave feminist movement of the 1970s.

The women's movement was a significant influence in feminist utopian novels, as it was for Piercy's creation of *Mattapoisett*. Second-wave feminism was crucial as it "emerged in the wake of the May 1968 student uprisings and took its cue from Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, focused mostly on the body and reproductive rights" (Chetcuti-Osorovitz and Sanos 65).^{4 5} Feminists fought for "the right of women to control their own bodies and campaigned for

the legalization of contraception and abortion as well as equality within the family and [labour] force... [t]hose concerns shaped most of the 1970s and 1980s activism" (Chetcuti-Osorovitz and Sanos 65). The pill had been created in the 1950s, but only became more accessible in the 1960s, leading up to the movement. However, some "were concerned to make birth control information available to the poor" (Staggenborg 17), which consisted of predominantly racialized groups from then until now. In these circumstances, second-wave feminism was controversial because it left out women of colour. Piercy acknowledges this disparity within the movement and makes her protagonist a single, poor, ageing Mexican American to demonstrate the importance of including a marginalized woman within the narrative. In this way, feminist utopias begin "by showing how women are profoundly alienated and limited by patriarchal society... they then go on to acquaint the reader with an alternative society in which women could feel at home and manifest their potential" (Michael 111-112). *Mattapoisett* presents a world in which both men and women can

⁴ The student protests of May 1968 aligned with the "MLF," an acronym for the political movement entitled le Mouvement de libération des femmes (or Women's Liberation Front). They brought together various Marxist and other feminist collectives, organizations, and committees that had mobilized from 1967 to 1970.

⁵ Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* is regarded as a major contribution to feminist philosophy and even a starting point for second-wave feminist movement. More broadly, the book discusses the mistreatment of women throughout history in two volumes: *Facts and Myths* and *Lived Experience*.

reach their full potential as they, primarily women, no longer need to adhere to society's pressures, especially within the patriarchal narrative of motherhood. However, this utopia does not allow them to decide how to fulfill their purpose in the world. The superimposition of a patriarchal world compared to the feminist utopia illustrates how easy it is to forget how, for many women, their agency comes from pregnancy and motherhood, which is biologically void in Mattapoisett. Piercy depicts a constructive change by decolonizing patriarchal systems within the novel, but her focus on subverting the societal discourse of maternity and discouraging violence against women does not bode well for every woman either.

In the novel, Connie and her niece, Dolly (Dolores), endure several forms of violence and abuse in the real world, making Mattapoisett look like a true utopia—especially since they would no longer be victims due to their gender, race, and class. Michael expresses how “the novel goes beyond pointing out inequalities in its incisive analysis of a society in which those in power—white, bourgeois males—remain in control through their victimization of those they regard as marginal to society, as *Other*” (114). Therefore, Connie is “unable to escape the role of victim and the cycle of

victimizations in which she is caught” (Michael 115). As the novel was written during the second-wave feminist movement, many women would jump at the opportunity to live in a utopia like Mattapoisett. However, Connie believes that the future's removal of an integral aspect of womanhood—reproduction—is a dehumanizing experience, even if it proves to generate gender equality. The story begins with the first of many instances when a man controls a woman's body. Dolly is seeking help from her aunt as Geraldo, Dolly's pimp and boyfriend, beats her and “[brings] a doctor to fix [her]” (Piercy 8) because she is carrying his child. Dolly “tried to get pregnant, believing Geraldo would let her quit whoring” (Piercy 8), but to no avail. The narrator chooses the word 'let' here wisely, because it indicates how Geraldo has control over Dolly's body—whether that means carrying his child or continuing as a sex worker for him. He commands them with “loud masculine order[s]” (Piercy 9). This toxic hegemonic masculinity sets a precedent for the society in which Connie originally finds herself, especially in the case of men or patriarchal systems forcing women to keep their babies, or in this case, enforcing an abortion. These impositions impede a woman's freedom of choice, similar to how

women cannot choose to bear children in their utopia. Both worlds possess a dystopian element as women are forced to bear children or sacrifice this right for equality, ultimately leaving them with no choice.

Reproductive rights, such as access to contraception and abortion, have been the subject of controversy worldwide for decades despite being largely protected by the American Constitution. Suzanne Staggenborg posits that the Supreme Court's ruling in *Roe v. Wade*⁶ was "a powerful stimulus for the anti-abortion countermovement, which grew enormously after 1973" (4). Consequently, pro-life activists tried to regain power but were most successful in recent history. Some "[anti-abortion] states are racing one another to ban abortion earlier and earlier in pregnancy—Missouri at eight weeks; Georgia, Kentucky, Ohio, and Mississippi at six weeks; and Alabama at conception" (Cohen and Joffe 8-9). These laws protect the fetus, but they do not protect the woman's rights. For many women, unintended pregnancy "has a major impact on numerous social, economic, and cultural aspects of modern life" (Institution of Medicine 50) especially as it pertains to the unaffordability of raising children or lack of

readiness. Piercy presents this critical perspective, as well as Geraldo's control over Dolly's body, to expose the impediment to women's reproductive rights and the privileged men who make these decisions. Luciente, Connie's friend from Mattapoissett, explains that the hegemonic masculinity causing reproductive rights issues is one of the woman's movement's motivations to remove women's bodies from the equation:

It was part of women's long revolution. When we were breaking all the old hierarchies. Finally, there was the one thing we had to give up too, the only power we ever had, in return for no more power for anyone. The original production: the power to give birth. Cause as long as we were biologically enchained, we'd never be equal. And males never would be humanized to be loving and tender. So, we all become mothers. Every child has three. To break the nuclear bonding. (Piercy 110)

Dohal presents Piercy as a social critic "by separating sexuality from production in the future society" (5) because women solely gain equality by sacrificing their only 'power' over men. As babies are made in a brooder, Piercy emphasizes how "the male mothers

⁶ In 1973, *Roe v. Wade* was a U.S. Supreme Court decision which ruled that the Constitution of the United States must protect a pregnant woman's liberty to choose to have an abortion without excessive government intervention.

reflect changes signaling the end of gender roles" (Dohal 5) and encourage the humanization of men, benefitting them in the long run. However, women no longer possess the capacity to bear children, their human right.

Connie's perspective challenges this institutional decision because, on the one hand, she wants to keep this right, but, on the other hand, she understands that giving up their power to create life ultimately achieves the gender equality women desire. As a marginalized woman, Connie endures the prejudice "of motherhood and inferiority" (Dohal 5), as her current society expects women to give birth and breastfeed without question. The idea of motherhood traps them. In this respect, the future utopia reduces this pressure on women, but Connie initially believes that the removal of this biological bond violates her right as a woman and mother:

Angelina, child of my sore and bleeding body... But you fit right. The nurse said I would have to show you, but you reached right for my breast. You suckled right away. I remember how you grabbed with your small pursed mouth at my breast and started drawing milk from me, how sweet it felt. How could anyone know what being a mother means who has never

carried a child nine months heavy under her heart, who has never borne a baby in blood and pain, who has never suckled a child. Who got that child out of a machine the way that couple, white and rich, got my flesh and blood. All made up already, a canned child, just add money. What do they know of motherhood? (Piercy 111)

Connie's internal conflict offers an empowering perspective for women who genuinely wish to give birth and experience the connection between mother and newborn. Although women and men may all be equal in "education, work, sexual expression, and even parenting" (Dohal 5) within Mattapoissett, the physical sacrifice is a loss to women. Latimer posits, "[r]eproduction politics continue to be popularly framed through ideologies of individual 'choices' and 'rights'" (5); consequently, women only ask for the right to bodily autonomy. In addition, it removes the right of both women and men to have biological children because "[t]here's no genetic bond—or if there is, [they] don't keep track of it" (Piercy 109). They simply "mix the genes well through the population" (Piercy 108). As Luciente explains, they are "kidbinder[s], meaning [they] mother everybody's kids" (Piercy 75). In Mattapoissett, they provide both men and women with the option to be a mother—

“comothers” (76 Piercy)—so they are ultimately equal, but at the cost of women's rights.

Piercy's challenge while creating her utopia is redefining women's agency by eliminating their material subjugation; however, Mattapoissett arguably removes a critical right that leaves them with less freedom of choice than before. Tatjana Alvadj defines choice for women through Becker, which stands for “autonomy, independence, and freedom of will, signifying women's sense of themselves as having an influence on the process in which they are engaged” (42). It is empowering to possess an “enhanced individual power in [the] [decision-making] process within the family and community and openness for new knowledge and change” (Alvadj 43). The freedom of choice is also crucial because Connie already possesses very few choices. As a marginalized woman, “it was a crime to be born poor as it was a crime to be born brown” (Piercy 62). This discrimination makes it difficult for her to become and stay a mother to her daughter, Angelina, because Child Services remove her. She finds herself trapped in the current world's systemic racism⁷ that prevents her growth in society.

Connie needs to find a space where biological motherhood neither cages her nor gets stripped from her. However great Mattapoissett may be, Piercy creates a space for short-term fulfillment as the maternal space is regulated within this utopia. Luciente explains to Connie that they “each have [their] space... [o]nly babies share space” (Piercy 73). They leave during adolescence. Luciente and her people live a life of solitude to “meditate, think, compose songs, sleep, study” (Piercy 73), and decide their fate, whether it means being a mother or not. She compares the choice of becoming a ‘mother’ to becoming a war soldier. Luciente adds that “[i]t's like being a mother ... [s]ome never mother, some never go to defend” (Piercy 105), and some do both. However, they make a choice based on their sense of agency. Luciente emphasizes that “[i]f [a] person didn't want to be mother and you were a baby, you might not be loved enough to grow up loving and strong ... [so this] [p]erson must not do what [they] cannot do...” (Piercy 105). As Piercy provides options to these people to pursue different roles in their lives, it also assesses how we determine and meet individual or societal wants and needs.

⁷ Systemic racism, or institutional racism, is a central and enduring social structure which upholds the privilege of predominantly white racialized groups in modern societies, namely North American and Western societies.

Although Connie understands that being a mother is a want more than a need for herself and other women, it becomes difficult to establish whether this is a determinant within Piercy's utopia. Ruth Levitas quotes William Leiss to address this debate:

[T]here is no aspect of our physiological requirements (the famous basic needs for food, shelter, and so forth) that has not always been firmly embedded in a rich tapestry of symbolic mediations. Likewise what are called the higher needs – love, esteem, the pursuit of knowledge and spiritual perfection – also arise within a holistic interpretation of needs and are not separated from the material aspects of existence. (182)

Leiss's mention of love as a need is essential to Connie because she wants to experience this feeling again—both romantically and maternally. However, according to Luciente, love no longer plays the same role in Mattapoisett. Even if Connie wishes to define her identity and be part of the decision-making process as both a woman and mother, it is impossible. Luciente exclaims to Connie: “[birth is] all you can dream about... [but] [their] dignity comes from work... [e]veryone raises the kids... [r]omance, sex, birth, children—that’s what you fasten on... yet that isn’t women’s business anymore...

[i]t’s everybody’s [business]” (Piercy 274). Luciente almost shames Connie for wanting autonomy over these aspects of her life. Everything Connie wants—both in her world and Mattapoisett—seems wrong. However, Levitas believes that “all needs, once concretely expressed, are in a sense artificial in that they are socially constructed, but they remain real needs” (183). Therefore, whether Connie’s needs are socially constructed, they are important and valid. Her fulfillment as a woman comes from motherhood and intimate relationships. One may agree that this is Connie's choice, but these needs are socially constructed, as previously mentioned. Others may take it one step further by highlighting how these socially constructed ideas stem from the patriarchal narrative of motherhood or womanhood at large, in addition to the inherent shame of women who do not or cannot bear children.

Within Connie’s patriarchal society, men measure a woman's value based on their ability to bear children or rather lack thereof. Connie's mother, Mariana’s, last baby was stillborn. Mariana's husband and Connie's father, Jesús, claims that “[t]hey took her womb in the hospital... [and] [Mariana] [was] no longer a woman ... [a]n empty shell” (Piercy 44). Her inability to give life in this singular moment, even though she did it

five times beforehand with Connie and her siblings, defines her worth and agency as a woman. A woman without a child appears to be empty and purposeless. Connie also experiences this sexist dehumanization because "[doctors] had taken out her womb ... when she had come in bleeding after [an] abortion and [a] beating from Eddie, [her] [ex-husband]" (Piercy 44). They also "[u]nnecessarily... [completed] [a] hysterectomy because the residents wanted practice... [s]he would never again fear a swollen belly; and never again hope for a child" (Piercy 44). Piercy's insertion of this forced sterilization indicates how governments assert their power over women like Connie, as a woman of colour, because they do not wish for them to procreate. These procedures "have often been justified by medical personnel as necessary for public health" (Patel 2), even though "recent cases of forced and coerced sterilization target women living with HIV, women who are ethnic and racial minorities, women with disabilities, and poor women, among others" (Patel 2). Patriarchal societies impose the idea that women are child-bearers and housemakers; therefore, if women cannot bear children, their value lowers, and they lose their purpose. For certain women, childbearing is a privilege considering rising

infertility issues, and Connie is one of those women. In this way, disallowing or sacrificing women's rights to give birth is like forced sterilization, so Connie rejects Mattapoissett's regulation. While they depatriarchalize motherhood, these changes remove women's choice to bear children and even allow the state to determine how they mix races, which is the other dystopian aspect of Piercy's utopia.

Piercy presents how racial inequality is prevalent in Connie's modern-day society and believes the way to fix it in Mattapoissett is by racially mixing all the newborns. As a Mexican American, Connie endures various forms of racism. Outside of being forcibly sterilized, she lives in poverty due to employment insecurity and lack of education. However, her daughter, Angelina, will not face the same issues because she is white-passing and, therefore, possesses white privilege through her appearance. Even as Child Services discuss with Connie about placing Angelina in another home, they say, "[i]t won't be hard to place her, even at four, ... [because] [s]he doesn't look – I mean she could be anything" (Piercy 61). Angelina's ability to 'pass' as white is a common theme within racialized groups as they look for the opportunity to avoid colonial oppression. Connie emphasizes how "[t]hey kept saying

what a pretty child Angelina was, and Connie guessed that partly they were expressing surprise that her child was so light" (Piercy 61). White privilege is also a common theme throughout the novel because Connie explains how Lewis (Luis), "[her] brother the Anglo" (Piercy 31), anglicizes his name to fit into affluent, white communities. Despite his marginalization, he has become successful within their world and forces his sister to call him Lewis to continue passing as white. Fanon explicitly focuses on this element of the colonized/colonizer dynamic and believes "it's true there is not one colonized subject who at least once a day does not dream of taking the place of the colonist" (5). However, Fanon does not fault the colonized or racialized individual with this reality because "[t]he gaze that the colonized subject casts at the colonist's sector is a look of lust, a look of envy... [for] [d]reams of possession" (5). Fanon also believes, "[t]he thing colonized becomes a man through the very process of liberation" (2). Lewis successfully gains his freedom, but Connie detests and envies her brother's success because she cannot liberate herself.

Connie equally seeks liberation from her constant hunger for love, intimacy, and food. This hunger is a theory that Fanon expands on as "[t]he colonized's sector is a

famished sector, hungry for bread, meat, shoes, coal and light" (4). When Connie visits her brother's home, she has "[a] terrible desire to eat and eat and eat [that] seized her throat" (Piercy 383). She spends an entire page explaining the food she sees in Lewis's home—in the kitchen, refrigerator, and freezer. Piercy emphasizes Lewis's 'colonizer' position through his weight as well. Fanon states that "[t]he colonist's sector is a sated, sluggish sector, its belly is permanently full of good things" (4). This fullness is crucial because Connie says her brother, a "middle-aged overweight businessman" (Piercy 384), often possesses materials in excess, including the food he consumes. The novel denotes Connie's challenges and attempts to solve them in Mattapoissett.

Connie's oppression becomes non-existent when she enters Mattapoissett because most people look like her—darker. This inclusion is a reality because:

Decisions were made forty years back to breed a high proportion of darker-skinned people and to mix the genes well through the population. At the same time, we decided to hold on to separate cultural identities. But we broke the bond between genes and culture, broke it forever. We want there to be no chance of racism

again. But we don't want the melting pot where everybody ends up with thin gruel. We want diversity, for strangeness breeds richness. (Piercy 108-109)

Although Connie does fit in better here because she is no longer a marginalized individual, she questions this racial mixing: "[i]t's so... invented... [a]rtificial... [a]re there black Irishmen and black Jews and black Italians and black Chinese?" (Piercy 109). This racial mixing may 'fix' racism on the surface, but the novel presents Mattapoisett's way of eliminating white supremacy and racial inequality as the absolute solution to racial prejudice. However, it does not ensure the decolonization of a person's mind—they can still possess the same prejudice. Even if there is an element of cultural preservation within their governing system, monoracial ideas go entirely out the door for an appearance of utopianism. Greg Carter explains that "[m]any minorities strive for stabilization or consolidation under a monoracial label, rather than negotiating a mixed-race experience" (8) because it allows them to identify themselves better within society instead of hiding or passing in their hybrid, assimilated or multiracial state. There is no one way better than the other, but once again, possessing the choice allows for their own

people's preservation. If a nation were to unlearn its racial superiority complex or discourage eugenics in some form, it would not force this idea of racial mixing as the only solution.

Racial mixing has equally been a widely negative part of American history. Mutcherson says, "[d]uring chattel slavery in the United States, slaveowners denied black women and men the most basic forms of dignity – subjecting enslaved black women to sexual abuse and rape... [so] they could own human beings as property" (1), thus began forcible racial mixing to not only dehumanize Black people but equally begin assimilation into white culture. The parents of these mixed-race children could not ensure that their race would be preserved. While it may not be inherently wrong to wish for cultural or racial preservation, some equate these efforts to racial purity and colorism. Carter posits, "the projection of racial purity has been central in U.S. history; for many racial projects around property, labor, and access, 'white racial purity'... was the objective" (8). Although white racial purity was the goal in many parts of the U.S., the creation of black racial purity as a countermovement was equally prominent. In this way, racial preservation does not only go in favour of whiteness but also of Blackness. Their goal

was to preserve their race since pre-, during and post-slavery. In the 1960s, African Americans “discouraged mixing to promote unity, cultural pride, and mass action toward civil rights” (Carter 8). Other umbrella ethnicities—namely Asian Americans and Latinx Americans—equally began to define their own racial and cultural preservation efforts. Moreover, although this racial purity has proven to encourage a sense of unity among people of colour, it also causes issues of colorism. Colorism “refers to a form of skin tone bias that generally favors light skin over dark skin... [c]ommonly... a social hierarchy in which the level of acceptance of an individual is derived from the social meanings attributed to skin color” (Knight 547). Luciente states, as previously quoted above, that Mattapoissett seeks “diversity, for strangeness breeds richness” (Piercy 109); however, this diversity does not “allow all racial groups and identities to flourish together” (Carter 66) independently because it is ordered by the state. Once again, racial mixing is not materializing organically, and this governance even causes hierarchy issues due to blood quantum for the Other.

Within Indigenous communities throughout Canada and the U.S., blood quantum laws, as one of the consequences of colonialism, have severed the ties between

many peoples and the land. According to Carter, “Native Americans have faced removal and marginalization since first contact and now operate under a system of blood quantum that requires minimum fractions of Indian parentage to claim membership and resources” (9). These laws, as a result of assimilative racial mixing, dehumanized Indigenous identities and reduced them to “[m]easuring descent by halves, quarters, and eighths” (Carter 82). Mattapoissett does not do this because “Wamponaug Indians are the source of [their] culture... [and] [their] past” (Piercy 108). They identify with these people regardless of their mixed race. However, the issue of racial mixing causes dystopian developments within Mattapoissett because “[w]hen you grow up, you can stick to the culture you were raised with or you can fuse into another” (Piercy 109). The opportunity to fuse into other groups can easily cause individuals to revert to old racial superiority and white supremacist ways. Typically, the culture or nation in which they are raised possesses a significant meaning. However, as they are mixed race, there is always the possibility of reverting to former oppressive practices and aligning their chosen identity with one of racial superiority. While this is a potential threat, Mattapoissett’s governing power

attempts to invalidate any opportunity for a racially superior and patriarchal society.

Utopias can act as deterrents to colonial oppression and racism. Connie even wonders whether Mattapoissett is a “[p]aradise on earth, [where] all God's children are equal” (Piercy 109). As another effort of decolonization and depatriarchalization, Luciente responds that “[d]ifferent tribes have different rites, but god is a patriarchal concept” (Piercy 109). This brief mention of God in the novel is critical in the subtle dystopian aspects of Mattapoissett. Their integration of the machine brooder of children and racial mixing is equivalent to the governing state playing God—they 'control' everything. As a result, there are inherently patriarchal perceptions within this place. Although these changes ultimately help their society, Levitas wonders if the appearance of a “good society [is] more than a matter of personal preference” (183). Luciente and her people believe their decolonizing and depatriarchalizing efforts are necessary to maintain a good society; however, this idea derives from the rejection of a neo-conservative utopia⁸, as “it emphasizes... the

individual and freedom, [instead] [of]... nation, authority, tradition and loyalty” (Levitas 187). These ideas of respecting the individual and their freedom are crucial to Mattapoissett's values, but as a utopia still cannot exist in reality, ensuring one's freedom of choice—namely for women and marginalized groups—is impossible.

Connie and other marginalized groups understand how colonial and patriarchal oppression challenge them by violating major public health concerns and human rights. They continue to fight for their freedom of choice against the systems that control their autonomy. Their goal is to reach a place—arguably a utopia—that encourages decolonization and depatriarchalization. Marge Piercy's novel *Woman on the Edge of Time* challenges these notions of freedom. The story redefines the idea of utopia by eliminating motherhood's biological enchainment and mandating racial mixing to create equality within the fictional world of Mattapoissett. Piercy disrupts patriarchal and postcolonial hierarchies to comment on how utopias will never meet everyone's wants and needs as well as the overall challenges of creating such a utopia. This reality is crucial

⁸A neo-conservative utopia highlights free-market capitalist ideologies and interventionist foreign policies. In opposition to a future-oriented neo-liberal utopia, a neo-conservative utopia concerns itself with the past. It purposefully maintains existing inequalities and commands those who seek reformation.

because Mattapoissett still takes away the rights to control their bodies and reproductive systems, despite providing a partially safe space for Connie. Although Piercy's novel attempts to present a feminist decolonized world free of oppression, some glaring dystopian aspects create an intrinsically flawed utopia and reject the possibility of achieving said utopianism. By challenging the patriarchal narrative of motherhood and decolonizing the idea of racial mixing, this paper highlights how hierarchical systems strip women and marginalized groups of their rights in all places—even utopias. Such issues require maternal empowerment, reproductive justice, and the elimination of racial mixing as a solution to racism. The necessary efforts to mend these violations involve the human right to maintain bodily autonomy, and cultural and racial preservation.

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K A R A C Y B A N S K I

PERFORMING THE IMAGINED NATION THROUGH FEMALE BODIES IN THE CIRCUS
(1936)

Résumé

Cet essai explorera le film de 1936 de Grigori Aleksandrov, *The Circus*, produit originellement en russe sous le nom de *Tsirk*, prouvant qu'au lieu d'être une comédie romantique légère, il s'agit en fait d'une production visant à contrôler non seulement le corps des femmes, mais aussi la perception de l'Union soviétique en tant que nation sur la scène mondiale. En analysant le gouvernement totalitaire stalinien et les rôles de genre qu'il confère à travers le cinéma, cet essai démontrera que le corps féminin, contrôlé par des attentes patriarcales primordiales, est analogue au contrôle de la nation sur son peuple.

Mots clés : nation, maternité, *The Circus*, *Tsirk*, Grigori Aleksandrov, femme

From maple leaves to croissants, from pyramids to chopsticks, countries' national symbols are recognized across the world. While some are constructed from stereotypes, many depend on how the nation chooses to represent itself. Eastern Europe, often forgotten on the world stage, is nevertheless no different. Russia's turbulent socio-political status in the 20th century resulted in a cinematic history rife with images of national identity and implicit political agendas. Grigori Aleksandrov's 1936 film *The Circus*, originally produced in Russian as

Abstract

This paper will explore Grigori Aleksandrov's 1936 film *The Circus*, originally produced in Russian as *Tsirk*, proving that in lieu of being a light-hearted romantic comedy, it is in fact a production intent on controlling not only women's bodies but also the perception of the Soviet nation on a world stage. By analysing the totalitarian Stalinist government and the gender roles it imparts through cinema, this paper will demonstrate that the female body, controlled by overarching patriarchal ideals, is analogous to the nation's control of its people.

Key words: nation, motherhood, *The Circus*, *Tsirk*, Grigori Aleksandrov, woman

Tsirk, explores the inner working of show business, complete with animal acts, clowns, and tightrope walkers. Through the stories of two female performers, the Soviet circus director's daughter Rayechka and the American Marion Dixon, *The Circus* proposes the *right* way to perform within a totalitarian nationhood. Both Rayechka and Marion, while participating in the circus as human cannonballs in semi-revealing outfits, face obstacles in their careers and romantic encounters. It is only when the spiralling situation is remedied by the male characters that the women's suffering ends. This essay

will prove that *The Circus*, in lieu of being a light-hearted romantic comedy, is in fact a production intent on controlling not only women's bodies but also the perception of the Soviet nation on a world stage. First, we will analyse the Stalinist government that spearheaded the nation during the film's production and connect its ideologies to a larger political movement: totalitarianism. Then, we will demonstrate that the female body, controlled by overarching patriarchal ideals, is analogous to the nation's control of its people, highlighting how the film subtly encourages these regulations within the microcosmic circus. Finally, this paper will consider how the body of the mother changes gender roles in Soviet cinema, specifically in Marion's case. Her racialized son, a source of shame in her home country, is celebrated in the USSR—again signalling the director's manipulation of his nation's image.

Those having grown up in the Occident may not have been exposed to much Russian history beyond the name Joseph Stalin (1878-1953), communist leader of the Soviet Union from 1927 to 1953 and, notably, during the Second World War. How did Stalin rise to power? Which political movement best defines his style of government? Into what national image did he fashion his people? This paper will begin by answering these questions in order to situate

the reader in *The Circus*'s context of production. After the death of Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924), who ruled the USSR from 1917 to 1924 with a variant of Marxism called Leninism, Stalin quickly seized power and began his so-called socialist project for improving the nation. James Ryan and Susan Grant introduce Stalin by identifying the "personality cult" that formed around his leadership: "Stalin had come to personify Soviet power, its supposed benevolence, achievements and promises. He was, after all, the father-figure that had inspired Soviet victory over the terrifying Nazi war machine" (1). For this reason, posterior critiques of the "one-party dictatorship" were risky—in spite of his despotic tendencies, the leader made significant advances in agriculture, industrialization, and political party unity (2). Of course, the brutality of the regime cannot be ignored, for "it was under Stalin that the Soviet Union became the most violent state in peacetime modern European history. Many millions of Soviet citizens and inhabitants were arrested, deported, executed, starved, or suffered from neglect as a direct or unintended consequence of the actions of the Stalinist state, often at Stalin's command" (3). This 'benevolent' communist dictator "held out promises of stability in order to hide [his] intention of creating a state of permanent instability" and systematically

purged the political party to cleanse it, according to Hannah Arendt (“Totalitarianism” 390-391). Meanwhile, Stalin engaged in international relations, especially in the 1940s and 50s. In fact, “the foremost legacy of Stalinism in global affairs was the Soviet Union’s contribution to the Cold War” (James & Grant 4), which impacted the nation’s outward appearance and Stalin’s own heroic image, especially as Stalinism—Stalin’s policies inspired by his understanding of Marxism and Leninism—crossed the USSR’s borders. Stalin’s take on communism as a “superior civilization” and his curation of artistic works in his own honour also contributed to his popularity (6). Regardless of Stalin’s enthusiastic following and the few benefits his leadership brought to term, his government was undoubtedly totalitarian. Arendt proposes the following: “If lawfulness is the essence of non-tyrannical government and lawlessness is the essence of tyranny, then terror is the essence of totalitarian domination” (“Ideology” 464). Indeed, Stalin’s time in power proves that a terrified people is easier to control; terror was (and perhaps still is) at the heart of the nation,

making cheerful depictions of the country like in *The Circus* that much more telling.

The ideal nation under Stalin was, like for many dictatorships across history, one under control—the allegory for which is the family, with the patriarch governing the household and Stalin governing the USSR.¹ Aleksandrov’s film, produced and distributed in the early days of Stalinism, is a prime example of the patriarchal authority and the measured public image that characterized Stalin’s Soviet Union. In fact, Ekaterina N. Shapinskaya begins by stating that films of the 40s and 50s “demonstrate how gender roles are constructed on the basis of dominant ideological values” (150). These values were indeed imparted on the society as the film saw incredible box office success, a return to popularity in the 1990s (151), and again seventy years after the original release; the female leads are the personification of these values.² The ideal woman in Soviet Russia had a dual identity, one that combined the public and domestic spheres. Shapinskaya traces the woman’s double identity trope to 19th century Russian literature and follows the creation of the double-role (feminine and

¹ This notion is comparable to the fascist dictatorship in Spain lasting from 1939 to 1975. Under Francisco Franco’s rule, the home became a microcosm of the nation and emphasized the dictator’s values: patriarchal authority, traditional gender roles, and Catholic morality.

² “Seventy years after its release, Aleksandrov’s *Circus* continues to captivate domestic viewers and to attract scholars’ attention precisely because the director found a magic narrative formula for the key myths of Stalinist culture: the positive hero, the “Great Family” of nations, and the ideological clash between Soviet ‘us’ and capitalist ‘them’ as a dominant principle of totalitarian culture” (Prokhorov 2).

masculine) into the Soviet era (150). This woman is, on the one hand, man's equal in the public, active sphere—but on the other hand, she takes on the extra responsibility of mother and homemaker in the patriarchal conception of family. Alexander Prokhorov identifies “the contradictions and instabilities of the myth of Soviet gender equality” (4) in the film, leading to a better understanding of the USSR's ‘progressive’ stance on women in the workplace. While women contribute to the industrialization and modernization of the country, they also maintain the perfect home and family—it is a lot to balance, but for characters in *The Circus*, this is not difficult, especially under a male authority. The two female leads, Marion and Rayechka, promote the Stalinist social order by participating in the circus; Rayechka actually begs her father to join so she can be a part of the act rather than sit on the sidelines. Shapinskaya proposes that the woman in the totalitarian ideology has “equal participation in the process of constructing of a new social order” but must uphold “the image of woman as a wife and mother” (150). This holds true in the

film as Marion and Rayechka are equally concerned with their careers and their love lives—a woman's eligibility for marriage is discussed on several occasions, for example the comical interactions between Rayechka, her suitor, and her father.³ This highlights the double standard in totalitarian films, where the mythical dual woman is pure (i.e. saving her sexual desire for the future) and actively participating in communal labour while maintaining her beauty (Shapinskaya 151).⁴ This beauty is crucial but must also be limited since “[b]eauty is necessary for the marriage, but love to work is always even more important” (qtd. in Gradskova 147). Both Marion and Rayechka are beautiful, but are not so preoccupied with their appearances that they fail to contribute to society or, in Marion's case, to care for her son. Yulia Gradskova underlines that in Soviet cinema, “Usually, it was the women who were considered too attractive or too occupied with appearance who were presented in publications in the role of the spy or traitor, saboteur or simply a person useless to Soviet society” (147). This ideology is not, however,

³ Rimgaila Salys quotes Aleksandrov himself describing the purpose of the film: “to reflect...a significant idea of racial equality and international solidarity ... *Circus* is not a comedy, but a melodrama with comic scenes” (128). An “eccentric comedy” would not have accommodated necessary social contexts (128), but the melodrama does by having only certain scenes with light-hearted jokes and foolish conflicts, such as the manager has with a dog-owner intent on having his pet perform in the circus—the dog only says three French words, but was apparently a hit in other circuses. The manager, however, continuously casts the owner and his dog out of his studio with comical exaggeration.

⁴ Yulia Gradskova refers to this duality as the “traditional universal dualism of male expectations: showing her virtue and, at the same time, being seductive” (147).

unique to Stalinism; parallels can be made to Muslim or Christian Orthodox notions of womanhood (147). The control of the female body and the imposition of impossible standards of femininity are universal.

Female bodies are controlled in many ways in this film. While Marion suffers gender-based violence at the hands of her American manager who blackmails, hits, and emotionally manipulates her, the daughter of the Russian circus manager is told by her own father that she is not allowed to eat and must maintain her figure for the sake of the circus act she must perform (28:50). Even half a kilo would, according to the circus manager, put the other performers running the cannon in danger. However, the American man—himself a cannon designer—assures her that a slice of cake won't hurt the act, suggesting that her father's decree is more about her appearance than circus safety. Gradskova's thesis includes interviews with Russian women who explain this same "fear of excessive weight: 'Everybody in my family is rather corpulent and when I studied at the university, I never ate a roll or a cake. I was afraid of getting fat'" (254). Rayechka adamantly refuses a cake in *The Circus* until a *man* convinces her in a condescending tone that it will not do any harm (see *fig. 1*). The social pressure to maintain a perfect figure extends beyond the USSR, as we see in



Fig. 1. The American manager convinces Rayechka that she can in fact eat cake.

Marion's struggles with her appearance. Gradskova explains the focus on the aesthetic appeal of fashion and body: "Feminine forms and a good slender figure is contrasted to a figure with 'deviations'" (70). Soviet women should dress in good taste and make choices based on their figure, refusing the "rotten fashion from the West" (70-71). While Rayechka dresses modestly when not performing, the human cannonball act requires form-fitting garments, decorated as part of the performance—Marion is often in tight, sparkly outfits that are nevertheless not too revealing, encouraging the Soviet woman to be modest while still being attractive (see footnote 4 and *fig. 2*). In fact, "attractiveness was viewed as [an] important female characteristic" even though "all Soviet citizens had to dress in an aesthetically and culturally appropriate manner" (Gradskova 147). The 30s and 40s saw less feminine and



Figure 2. Marion's costume is reserved yet appealing to the circus's and the film's audience.

frivolous clothing for women in the working world, but the circus is different in its inherently performative state. Of course, “Soviet politics of physical culture is well-known for organising mass displays of athletic female bodies, primarily through propaganda posters, pictures and films of the 1930s and 40s ... one can assume that these obsessive images played an important role for male voyeuristic visual pleasure in a period when depictions of the female body were censored” (121). The two female cannonballs are fit, shown performing long acts, swinging from trapezes, and bursting out of cannons. These women are “illustrative of the social role woman was supposed to undertake in society and of the aesthetic construction of female figures on the screen” (Shapinskaya 151), therein performing Stalinist ideals of womanhood and female aesthetics.

Moreover, the body politics in the film play with notions of identity and performance. Salys Rimgalia gives the example of Marion being thrown to the ground by her abusive manager and then lifted up by Martynov, her romantic interest (167). Rimgalia connects this motion to the circus numbers that mirror the upward flight, namely Marion's trapeze performance and the final dramatic circus scene of the film in which Jimmy is saved from the American by the Soviet people, who lift him up to safety (168). Meanwhile, in the second finale of the film, the ‘Great Family’ marches cheerily, as if in a commercial, with balloons rising overhead. This recapitulates “the dynamic vertical axis of the film as balloons rise up from the documentary footage of marching crowds and then descend to the ground as parachutes emblazoned with the letter spelling out ‘The End’” (168). The continual upward motion recreated in the film—both by characters and by cinematography—is especially compelling when compared to the American man's ultimate failure at the lowest physical point of the scene. In other words, the capitalist West is by all means inferior to the successful, joyous Soviet family.

In addition, Soviet constructions of the female body would see women in their “natural” beauty, not too fat or too thin; of course, this carefree look was not easily

obtained, and women made significant efforts to recreate the ideal image of femininity, especially in regards to their face and hairstyle (Gradskova 183). Now that woman had joined the workforce, she should look neat, kind, and feminine in public spaces (184). While “natural, healthy skin and hair was a sign of good looks and signalled sexual attraction and healthy offspring”, using too much makeup at a young age implied sexual deviation (185). The ideal was a young, natural woman—while young women played up their natural beauty, older women took advantage of beauty products and fashion styles that concealed the marks of age (186). Soviet women were caught between being “too much” and “too little”, too fat or too thin, too young or too old, too made up or too unkempt. Who established these norms? Who decided what made a woman attractive? The quick response is men, while the more in-depth response is the patriarchal system that valued the youthful and the pure and influenced fashion trends accordingly. The opposition of the natural Soviet female and the hypersexualized Western woman “is illustrated [in the film] through a visual contrast of the heroine’s performance as a sexual symbol illustrative of the bourgeois world and the desexualized (but not de-aestheticized) image of a Soviet woman participating as an equal in a man’s world”

(Shapinskaya 151-152). This aesthetic is key in the projected image of Soviet women: they are pleasant to see without risking their virtue (like Western women do). Shapinskaya traces the transformation Marion undergoes as she joins the Soviet family:

When featured as belonging to the Western world, she is presented as a typical object of exploiting male gaze, transforming herself into this object reluctantly but with a feeling of inevitability vis à vis such subjugation. When she changes her allegiance, however, and finds warmth and love in the socialist world, she is depicted as an equal, a comrade and therefore as a participant in technological progress, which will transform fairy-tale to reality. Both man and woman in that reality are devoid of any sexual characteristics. (152)

These Soviet bodies are “pure cosmic beauty, aesthetic beings” that represent the future of the USSR built through socialism (152). Again, we see the notion of aesthetic as more important than the sex appeal that characterizes Hollywood performers, proving the Eastern superiority Stalin so adeptly prescribes. Martynov guides Marion into the safe, Soviet aesthetic of natural beauty and equality, while Rayechka’s father and fiancé help her live fully within that same

Eastern sphere. Indeed, *The Circus* depicts a controlled female body that flourishes under male authority. This parallels the nation's development under Stalin—or, at least, signifies what Stalin wanted to show his country and the world about the strength and propriety of the USSR. The families in *The Circus*, namely Raychecka's (her father, her fiancé) and Marion's (her son, her new lover), are an allegory for the nation. The adult men in both families are in control and foster success and improvement, much like Stalin saw himself doing for the Soviet Union. Aleksandrov's film reproduces the patriarchal authority that drives the family (and the nation) onward.

Furthermore, Marion's unique position as a mother allows the filmmaker to further comment on the Soviet woman and her body—in this case, a body capable of reproducing. The USSR's focus on social contributions meant that “State support of motherhood, according to [Bolshevik feminist Alexandra Kollontai], would not only make society more prosperous, but would also liberate mothers from a ‘burden of motherhood’ that prevented them from being more socially active” (Gradskova 73). Post-

revolution Russia saw a plethora of notions concerning motherhood and collective childcare. Gradskova highlights that “The ideas varied from the fully Utopian vision of collective upbringing of children in orphanages, nurseries and boarding schools (limiting the function of mothers to pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding) to a very moderate type of state intervention in family life” (75-76) and that “Soviet social motherhood discourse was based on an assumption of childbearing as an inherent characteristic of the female sex” (76).⁵ While the 1920s idealized the stay-at-home *ángel del hogar* [angel of the hearth] mother, in the 1940s and 50s emerged the working mother, who saw some pushback from more traditional Soviet citizens (80).⁶ Nevertheless, the mother occupied a fundamental space in the USSR—this prompts Gradskova to present the state as the mother (i.e. the motherland) rather than the father (84). Although this seems to contradict this paper's claim that the state is the father of the national family, Gradskova explains that in its repression of its citizens, the state is the father, while in regards to their care, it serves as the mother (84). This reinforces the

⁵ The simplification of mothers' functions to “pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding” is echoed in the contemporary body politics discourses that frame bodies with uteri as mere vessels for procreation.

⁶ The *ángel del hogar* is a trope discussed in Bridget Aldaraca's work on Spanish definitions of gender roles and domesticity. This perfect wife and mother would silently care for the children, manage the household, and cook wonderful meals—all from her rightful place in the hearth.

traditional gender roles and ideals of domesticity prescribed by many dictatorships; it also contributes to the domestic side of the Soviet woman's dual identity.

In addition to her role as a mother, Marion's situation becomes more complicated when taking into account racial tensions in her homeland. Marion's son Jimmy, the only BIPOC character in the film, is the cause of most of Marion's turmoil.^{7,8} Having a mixed-race child, especially as an unmarried woman, would have brought unimaginable hardships in the United States. Marion's American manager uses her child to shame her and manipulate her, telling her she will never be loved by a White man because nobody can overlook her past "transgressions". Since *The Circus* fits into the Soviet media's effort to show the USSR in a different, more compassionate light, it shows the American system as regressive when compared to the Soviet conceptions of gender equality and racial relations. The American man criticizes Marion's son's appearance: "the stinking hair, the flat nose, these teeth" (38:07). Endowed with his country's racist ideologies, he believes this

child will be the end of her career and of her search for love. At the end of the film, the spectators prove him wrong and unite against his misconceptions about their country, singing and protecting the Black child. The circus manager even says that in the USSR, you can have "a child of any colour" including polka-dotted (1:25:01) without consequence—in the film, at least, this holds true. Stalin's insistence that the Soviet Union was superior to the capitalist west is supported by this racial equality; unlike the U.S., the USSR welcomes people of colour and even celebrates them. Marion's son is not an obstacle to her finding her place in Soviet Russia, nor does it keep her from a loving relationship with the Russian performer and sharp-shooter Martynov. In fact, as Shapinskaya notes, in "*The Circus*, the basic aesthetic opposition is that of the image of Soviet womanhood and motherhood versus the external world of alien sexualized femininity" (151). Again, Aleksandrov contrasts Soviet morals with the overtly sexual, racist, sexist, capitalist West to prove the USSR's overarching superiority. Prokhorov's introduction argues for the pivotal role of *The Circus* in Soviet culture:

⁷ BIPOC refers to Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour.

⁸ Jimmy is played by James Lloydovich Patterson, who was just three years old at the time. Patterson is the son of a Russian theatre designer and an African American man who immigrated to the USSR looking for work as an actor. (Rosenberg)

While Western musicals offered Utopian solutions to domestic social ills, *Circus* inaugurated a Stalinist final solution to the social ills of capitalism while cunningly deflecting attention from the contradictions and issues of Stalinist society: *Circus* “offer[s] strictly Soviet-based solutions to the Western social inadequacies that Western entertainment abets or represses.” Holmgren investigates how the filmmaker exploits a tale of gender and racial emancipation to naturalize Soviet communal identity, including gender, ethnic, and racial hierarchies as an integral part of that identity. (1)

Aleksandrov contributes to the ‘us versus them’ rhetoric that characterizes most nationalism, including the USSR’s under Stalin. The goal is to *not* be the Other, or even to be better than the Other. The U.S.-Russia competitiveness began well before *The Circus* was produced and continues even today. Part of Stalin’s national construction was to *not* be like the U.S., and Aleksandrov’s film clearly demonstrates why the Soviet Union is the superior society. Prokhorov argues that *The Circus* is

a propaganda film designed to frame a political event of major mythological significance, with music carrying much of the ‘message’ and simultaneously

rendering that message palatable. ... *Circus* was designed to bring visual coherence and narrative stability/legitimacy to the myth of the Soviet Union as a society living according to the rule of socialist law. (3)

Indeed, a major box office success, especially a fun melodrama filled with animals, costumes, dancing, and music, is the perfect vessel for subtly emphasizing Stalinist values and Soviet nationalism while also rejecting Western influences. Prokhorov concludes that, “Having won the ideological war and technological race with the West, Aleksandrov’s victorious Soviet entertainers take as booty Westerners’ women and children: both the American protagonist and her black child choose to stay in ‘Our Motherland’ with the Soviet white man” (5). Marion and Jimmy find their place in the USSR with Martynov, who accepts them into his family just like the nation accepts immigrants into their Stalinist family.

After exploring Stalin’s rise to totalitarian power and his projected national image, this paper explored how the controlled female body serves as an allegory to the USSR’s control of its citizens and its international image as is represented in the 1936 film *The Circus*. While the two women whose narratives were told on screen come

from opposite ideological spectrums, both find happiness in the Soviet Union where they can contribute to society. Marion, in addition, is freed from the shackles of American racism by staying in the USSR with her mixed-race son under the protective wing of Martynov and Stalin. Aleksandrov's depictions of East versus West also establish the USSR as superior to the capitalist

Occidental superpowers. With its happy-go-lucky characters finding success and love in the Soviet Union, the film takes on a propaganda-esque style of showing only the best parts of the country. Although colour TV was still a few years away from taking the nation by storm, *The Circus* proves to be anything but black and white.

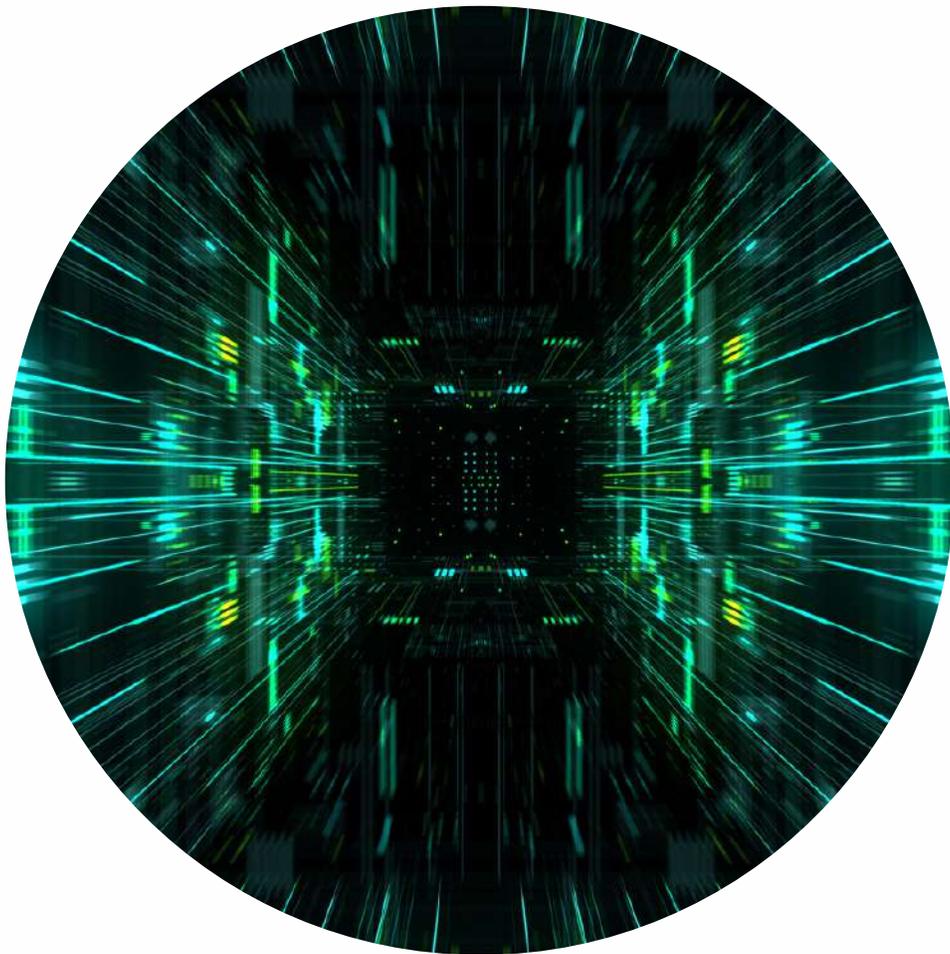
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⁹ Some information is missing from this citation since the author did not have access to the full article, only an extract (which did not list date of publication or page numbers).

*Art contemporain et la question
posthumaine*

*Contemporary Art and the Posthuman
Question*



JANINE RAMLOCHAN

BIOLOGY WAFTS: HETEROTOPIC SPACE AND THE POSTHUMAN IN ANICKA YI'S WORKS

Résumé

Anicka Yi est une artiste conceptuelle contemporaine sud-coréenne-américaine dont le travail mêle biologie, paysages olfactifs et technologie. Son ascension dans le monde de l'art international au cours de la dernière décennie s'est faite à un rythme impressionnant, et elle semble avoir largement contourné le circuit des biennales - les tremplins contemporains vers les lieux d'exposition de haut niveau. Cet article explore les approches structurelles et conceptuelles d'éléments spécifiques de deux expositions : "In Love With the World", présentée en 2021 et 2022 au Turbine Hall de la Tate (Londres), et "Life is Cheap", une exposition présentée en 2017 au Guggenheim (New York), en utilisant la théorie posthumaniste et les notions d'hétérotopie pour déconstruire le travail de Yi et les écosystèmes artistiques mondiaux du cube blanc. Je m'attarde également sur le processus de développement des paysages olfactifs de Yi, sur le rôle que joue l'art olfactif dans le déplacement de la hiérarchie visuelle typique des espaces des galeries d'art, et sur la fusion de la biologie et de la technologie par Yi. L'objectif principal est de montrer comment la créativité de Yi s'attache à réarticuler la coexistence de l'homme avec les autres (humains, autres espèces, machines, environnement) afin de concevoir des formes de cohabitation plus harmonieuses dans notre monde post-humain.

Mots clés : Anicka Yi, In Love With The World, Life is Cheap, paysage olfactif, cube blanc, hétérotopie, posthumanisme, cohabitation

South Korean-American contemporary conceptual artist Anicka Yi has rapidly risen in the international art world over the last decade through her groundbreaking work melding biology, scentscapes and technology. The Guggenheim and the Tate Modern have both

Abstract

Anicka Yi is a South Korean-American contemporary conceptual artist whose work melds biology, scentscapes and technology. Her rise in the international art world over the last decade came at a dizzying pace, and she appears to have largely circumvented the biennale circuit — the contemporary stepping stones to high profile exhibition venues. This paper explores structural and conceptual approaches to specific elements of two exhibitions: "In Love With the World," on display in 2021 and -2022 at the Tate's Turbine Hall (London), and "Life is Cheap," a 2017 exhibition at the Guggenheim (New York), using posthumanist theory and notions of heterotopia to deconstruct Yi's work and 'white cube' global art ecosystems. I also elaborate on Yi's process of developing scentscapes, the role olfactory art plays in shifting the typical visual hierarchy of art gallery spaces, and Yi's fusing of biology and technology. The main objective is to show how Yi's creativity is concerned with a re-articulation of human co-existence with others (humans, other species, machines, the environment) in order to conceive more harmonious forms of cohabitation in our post-human world.

Key words: Anicka Yi, In Love With The World, Life is Cheap, scentscapes, white cube, heterotopias, posthumanism, cohabitation

hosted Yi's exhibitions within the last five years, demonstrating how she has largely circumvented the biennale circuit – that is, the contemporary steppingstones to such high-profile venues. My primary objective is to argue that Yi's work, which explores issues of

intersectionality, while offering perspectives on human co-existence (with others and machines), proposes a vision of a contemporary posthuman moment which fuses biology and technology. For my secondary objective, the focus on deconstructing aspects of Yi's exhibitions is to comprehend these works experientially, in their respective venues, for the purpose of juxtaposing, contrasting and drawing experiential asymmetries to the biennale circuit. This allows for a better understanding of how she managed to circumvent them so early in her art career. Although Anicka Yi's works defy the traditional parameters of the 'white cube' museum gallery norms with works that historically would be viewed as a risk to the institutions themselves (potentially unleashing Pandora's box into their art collections), these institutions have nevertheless chosen to exhibit her work, due to the way she explores timely geopolitical issues— using unusual media (scents + bacteria) and approaches (ephemeral, conceptual art) used by very few artists.

This essay will explore structural and conceptual approaches to specific elements of two exhibitions: "In Love With the World," on display in 2021-22 at the Tate's Turbine Hall (London), and "Life is Cheap," a 2017 exhibition hosted by the Guggenheim (New York). Each exhibit involves a trilogy of works

which combine experientially— a scentscape, a sealed environment with conditions created for bacteria (or living organisms) to aesthetically run amok, and the use of technology. My focus will be on the scentscape of the "Life is Cheap" exhibition entitled "Immigrant Caucus" and the living organisms (referred to throughout as "biologized machines" or "aerobes") from the "In Love With the World" exhibit.

In two New York Times articles, entitled "Anicka Yi is Inventing a New Kind of Conceptual Art" and "The Artistic Aromas of Anicka Yi," her work is characterized as slyly autobiographical feminist subversions, far-ranging in social critique (institutional sexism and racism, cultural obsessions of cleanliness, art world power structures, etc.), with the use of unusual material— notably science and scent (Gregory, Thackara). As a conceptual artist, her body of work explores issues of intersectionality; a theoretical concept exploring connections between domination and subordination across race, ethnicity, gender and social class, often used to critique communication in its messaging, production and reception as vectors of power (Fischer 846-847, Hekman 101-102). Emerging in the 60s in reaction to an increasingly commercialized art world, the socio-political critique of conceptual artists subverted art world norms by

emphasizing process and production methods as the primary value of the work. Conceptual art is characterized by its use of varied media, invisible systems, structures and processes, everyday materials and “ready-made” objects (“Conceptual Art”). What is perhaps most captivating about Yi’s work is how she augments her elaborate, sometimes ephemeral, science experiment exhibitions (air-sealed for public safety) with scentscapes— each an individual work in its own right, specifically formulated to add a conceptual layer of meaning to her installations. Scents Yi created previously include “Shigenobu Twilight,” inspired by heroine Fusako Shigenobu, presumed leader of the Japanese Red Army, and “Aliens & Alzheimers,” which explored ideas of forgetting for a divorce themed exhibit (Gregory 69, Jeffries).

For her Guggenheim exhibition, “Life is Cheap,” Yi collaborated with a perfumer, an olfactory artist and a forensic scientist to create a hybrid scent of an Asian-American woman and a carpenter ant. Carpenter ants are notable for their matriarchy, industry and sense of smell allowing recognition of caste rungs within the ant colony. Yi’s scentscape had 3 parts: fragrance (vegetal and floral, notes of cedar, hay, cumin and cellophane), ant (citrusy, meaty), and a set of scents evolved from compounds identified in human sweat and ant

tissue. Combined, these created the scent “Immigrant Caucus,” which she describes as “sweaty and herbacious, until the garlicky note of the ant kicks in” (“How I Solve It”). The scentscape was piped into the entranceway and exhibit space through canisters, activated when people entered. Within the physical exhibit itself, one of two dioramas (“Lifestyle Wars”), depicted a giant circuit board (‘motherboard’) housing tunnels which held a colony of twenty thousand live ants, reflected infinitely in a series of mirrors; the scent was pumped into the ant tunnels to parallel the audience experience. The second diorama (“Force Majeure”), was a sealed environment evoking a bathroom vanity, created for bacteria to colourfully, aesthetically run amok for the duration of the exhibit. Bacteria samples were sourced from Manhattan’s Chinatown and Koreatown neighbourhoods; the work was intended to call out depictions of the Asian community as an “ethnically invasive life-force overrunning their environment.” Yi says the “Life is Cheap” exhibition was, in-part, a reaction to the divisive climate of intolerance towards visible minorities incited by the Trump administration throughout the year (Lee 705-707). The invisible process by which Yi developed the scent and the socio-political connotations involved is indicative of conceptual art practices. I propose that the manner in which

Yi layers them with other spatial-sculptural-living conceptual works and the multi-sensory aspects of the exhibition are a contemporary articulation of conceptual art.

The “In Love With The World” exhibition at the Tate’s Turbine Hall (see fig. 1 and 2) is more uplifting and future-forward, while being lighter on socio-political critique. The installation combines aeronautics, drone technology and scents in “aerobes” and “biologized machines” floating throughout the space, which are spatially aware in response to humans. These are facilitated by an artificial life simulation to provide real-time contextual

information to inform the “aerobes” inner motivations and individual traits (Airstage). Yi’s “aerobes” (tentacular, bulbous creatures based on ocean life forms and mushrooms) individually respond unpredictably to the air they are enveloped by through programming that activates their own set of behaviours. Heat sensors throughout the space enable them to detect the presence of visitors and uniquely respond to them. Yi says she hoped to return machines to nature, allowing them to manifest and represent “the intelligence of diverse life forms, not just human intelligence” (Thackara). She also uses a range of scentscapes (released

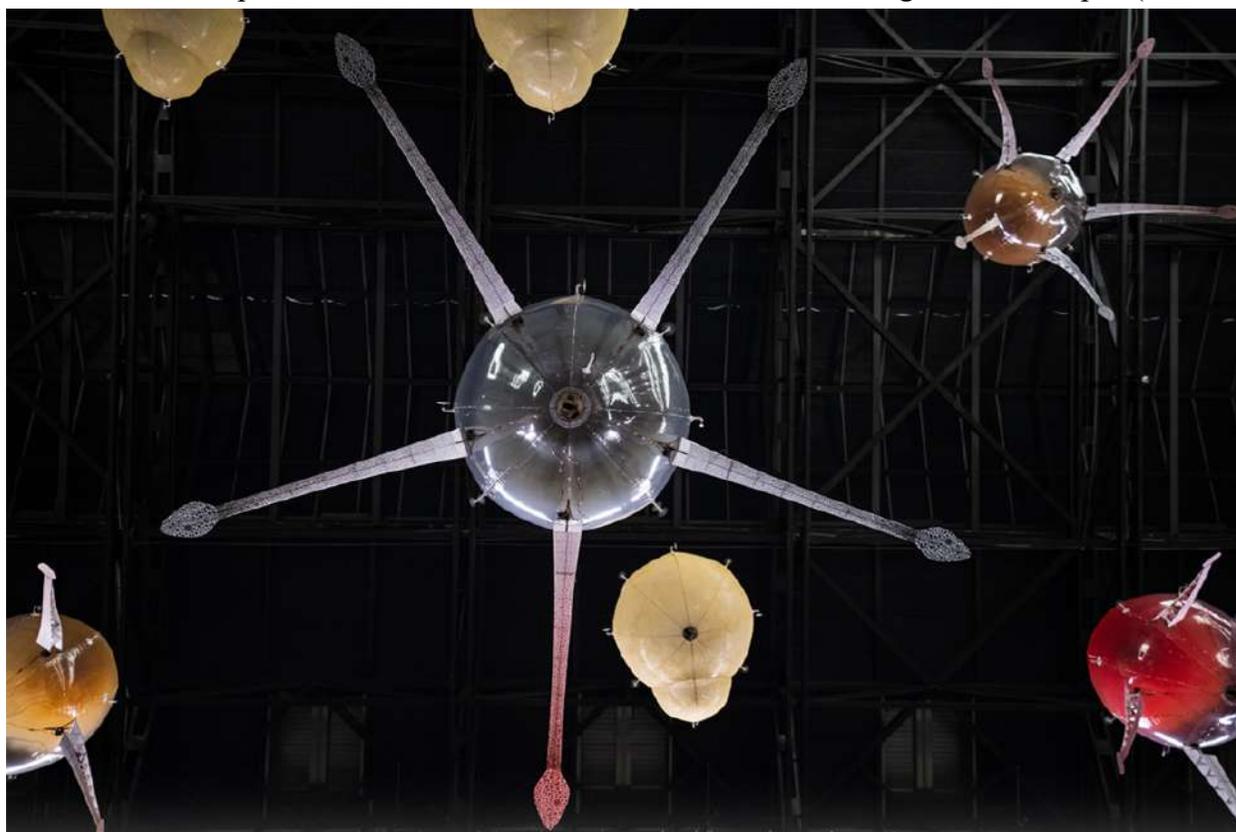


Fig. 1. “In Love with the World,” Tate Modern, Turbine Hall, London (2021-2022)

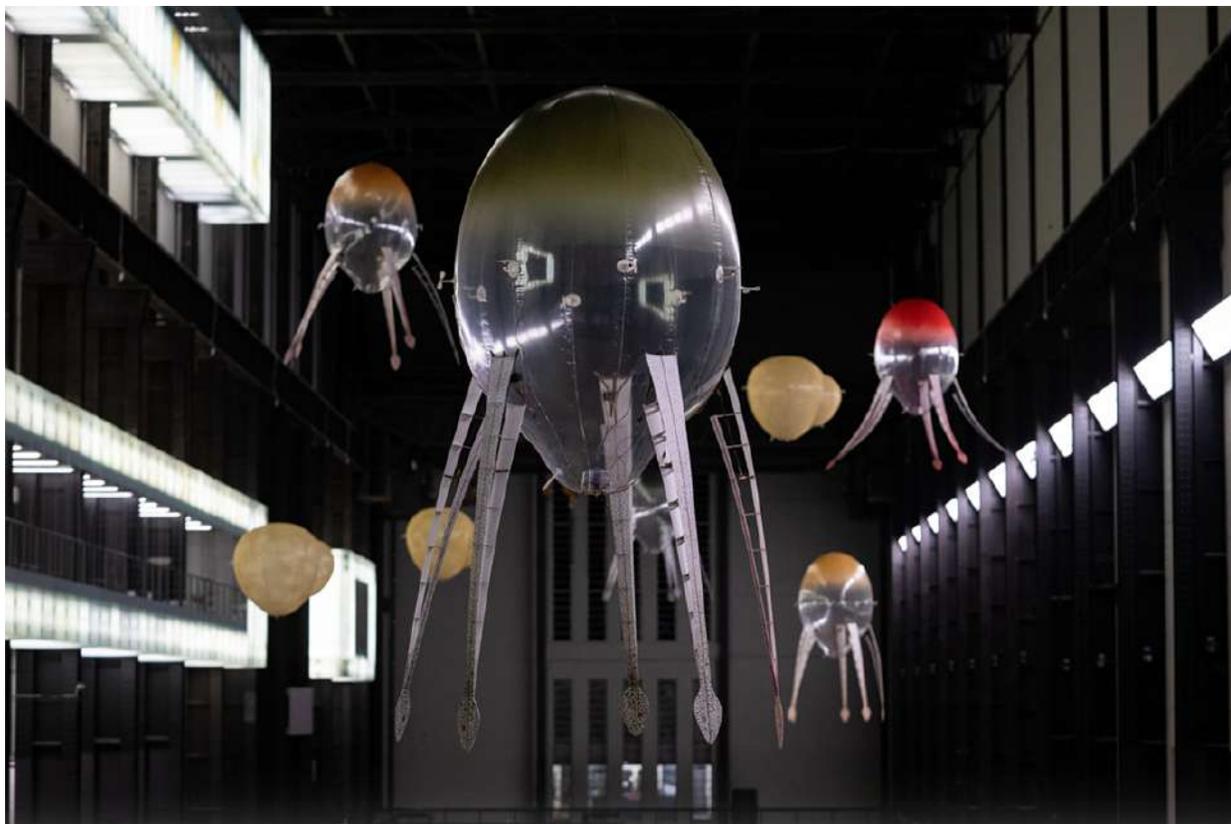


Fig. 2. “In Love with the World,” Tate Modern, Turbine Hall, London (2021-2022)

weekly) to conjure the “fragrant socio-political history” of the area around the museum, one of which evokes cholera (Art:LIVE, Compton, Rea, Thackara, “Hyundai”). The intent behind the exhibition was to re-envision a manifestation of artificial intelligence and propose a new picture of machine design, rather than being predominantly anthropomorphically-driven. The exhibition proposes air as a sculpture we all inhabit and alternative approaches to how intelligent machines can interact with us, themselves and their environment (the inferred parallel, an equilibrium in human interactivity in a shared

environment).

In order to examine Yi’s work within related global art ecosystems, I employ the concept of heterotopia and posthumanist theory. I further reflect on the definition of conceptual art and Yi’s contemporary interpretation of it, elaborating on her process of developing scentscapes, the role olfactory art plays in shifting the typical visual hierarchy of art exhibition spaces, and her fusing of biology and technology. For the analysis of elements of both exhibitions (scentscapes and “aerobes”), I use posthumanist theory due to its focus on the dissolution of barriers between

biology, technology and human interactions with the environment. Posthumanism is described as the mediation of human experience through computer-coded language, a theory analyzing the collapse/dissolving of technology into the biological, social, political and ecological (Callus 145-150). I also apply the concept of heterotopia, as proposed by Foucault, to my interpretation of international art ecosystems. My contention is that the contemporary art institutions and ecosystems should be interpreted as heterotopias of our posthuman moment. Heterotopia is a theoretical concept useful to describe “disciplinary” or “liminal” interconnected spaces, where society or institutions are able to continuously transform their nature and purpose to suit their needs. Heterotopias are: first, of a defined specificity; second, amenable to transformation, reinvention and refreshing; third, able to juxtapose in a single physical place multiple experiences which are logically incompatible; fourth, experientially characterized by ruptures or breaks in time; fifth, both open and closed, isolated yet penetrable; and sixth, transformative in a manner which catalyzes our relation with the physical space, often employing a sense of surrealism (Buchanan).

My focus on examining Yi’s work (how she explores issues of intersectionality and

posthumanism in her conceptual artworks) to understand how she found her place within the broader contemporary art ecosystems (heterotopias) is a significant departure from the critical studies of Lee, Godfrey and Hsu. Rachel Lee in “Metabolic aesthetics: on the feminist scentscapes of Anicka Yi,” describes the “Life is Cheap” exhibit (fig. 3 and 4) as a critique of globalized Marxist practices — the exploitation of Asian workers and what offshore production processes (ie. Foxconn) enable in terms of western consumption and convenience (705-707). Mark Godfrey in “The Politics of Air,” ties the “Life is Cheap” exhibit to the US domestic issues of the day, particularly concepts of racialism and intrinsic racism: Trump’s divisive immigration policies, Mexican border migrant detention and growing anti-Asian sentiment. His focus was on analyzing the “Force Majeure” and “Immigrant Caucus” works which he says, “render visible the source of discomfort, anxieties and intolerance” towards Asian and other immigrant communities in the US (69-71). Hsuan L. Hsu in “Olfactory Art, Transcorporeality and the Museum Environment,” does not analyze either of the two exhibitions I have focused on, but notes in Yi’s prior works, how she questions our “tendency to stigmatize environmental risk factors by emphasizing the vital links between

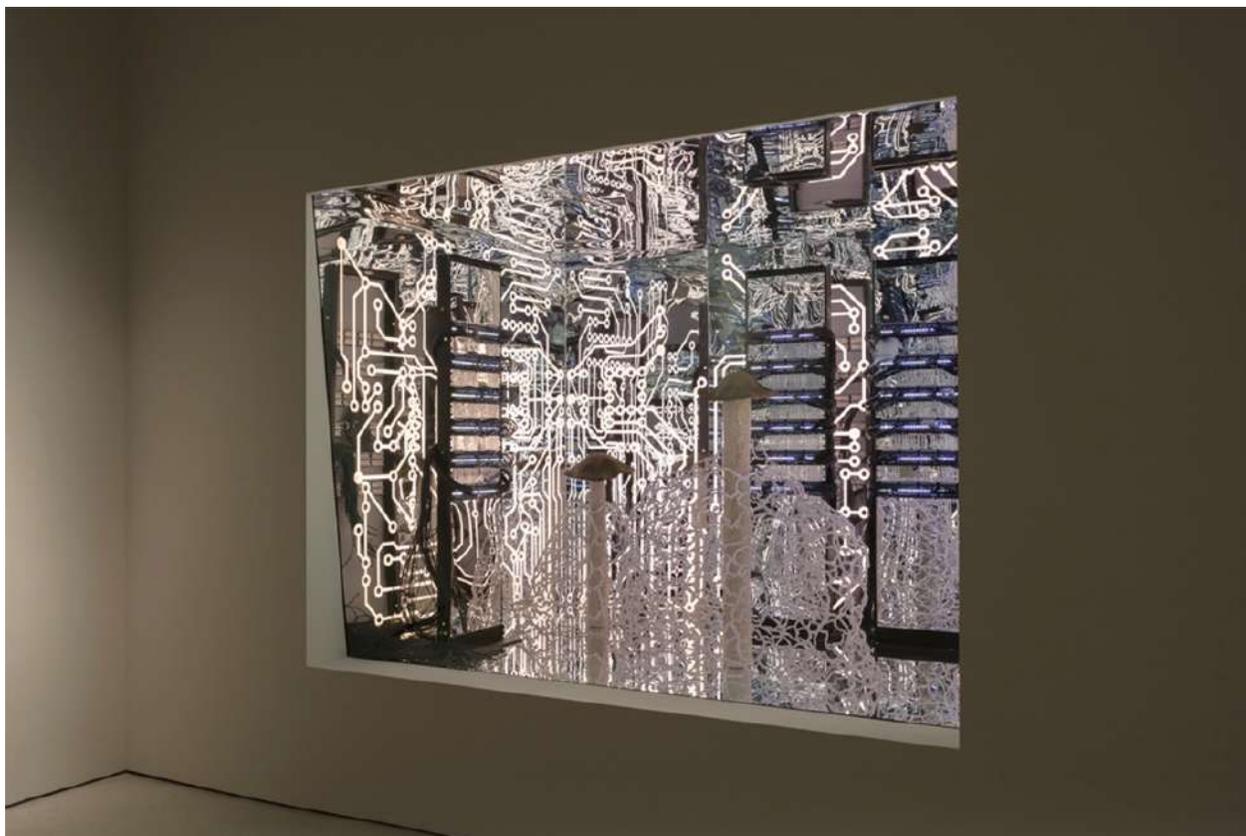


Fig. 3. "Lifestyle Wars," "Life is Cheap," Guggenheim New York (2017)

bacterial proliferation and human 'culture.'" Hsu's stance was to apply an olfactory scientific hermeneutic lens to concepts of racialism and extrinsic racism in analyzing Yi's works. Hsu uses the theoretical concept "toposmia"; a field of inquiry concerned with spatial odours and the associations between smell and place (Hsu 3-4, 9, 13-15).

Yi's exhibitions engage with the geopolitical climate of Donald Trump's presidency. In 2016, Trump launched an election platform based on drastically limiting immigration, proven to be an enduring stance for animating his base and securing his

presidency. His policies immediately disrupted circulation at US entry points for those with connections to several countries across the Middle East, Africa and Central America, among others. In "A Review of Trump's Immigration Policy," Anderson quantifies the rate at which highly skilled foreign-born workers, refugees and asylum seekers have been denied/blocked entry, and how legal immigration to the US was almost halved during his term in office without much change to US immigration law. Trump's approach to immigration was novel; much of it was media-amplified rhetoric, while policy changes were

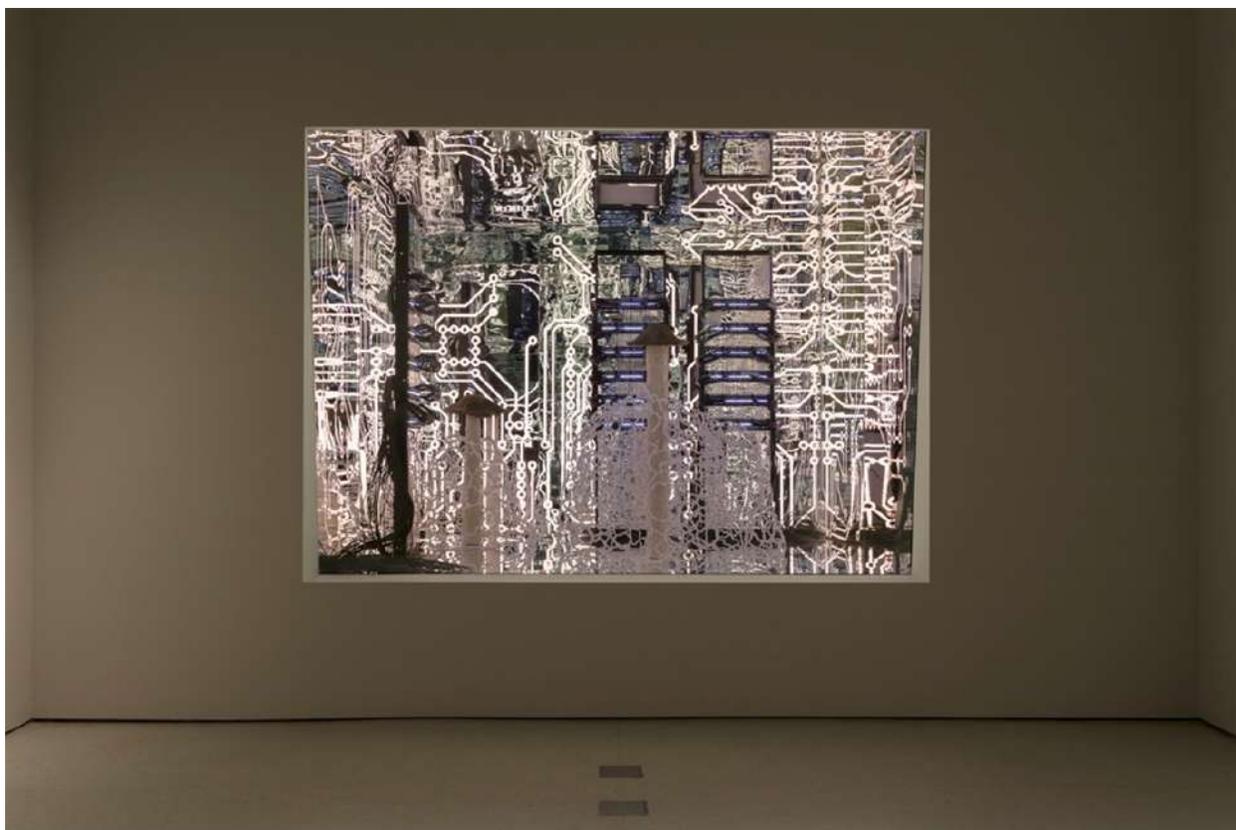


Fig. 4. “Lifestyle Wars,” “Life is Cheap,” Guggenheim New York (2017)

small, incremental, and mostly unnoticeable. This allowed his Republican supporters to deny the impact of his rhetoric. Nearly all reforms were designed to make immigrating to the US more difficult and to reduce the number of immigrants arriving (Shear). According to the “Immigration Policy Tracking Project,” a database tracking changes made to the US immigration system throughout Trump’s presidency:

... the project documents 1059 separate immigration-related changes made by the Trump administration ... [including] 163 changes to forms and

information collection; 106 official rule changes; 416 agency directives; 57 presidential orders; 301 changes in practice by agencies and their employees; 16 program terminations; 40 modifications to data and reports; 29 formal changes to the way immigration law is adjudicated; and six legislative proposals. (Guttentag, Shear)

It is throughout this time that visible minorities and immigrant communities were increasingly confronted by an invisible wall of administrative barriers amidst Trump’s media-amplified rhetoric that brought long-

suppressed racialism and extrinsic racism to the surface, and gave license for those attitudes to further proliferate across much of the western world. In 2020, the focus shifted towards the Asian community with the onset of the pandemic and Trump's confrontational stance toward China. Despite the coronavirus shifting Americans' priorities to healthcare and the economy in the last year of Trump's presidency, his rhetoric on immigration and policy shifts continued throughout 2020 (Hesson, Shear). These were felt further afield when, not only were Western countries struggling with the onset of the pandemic, but Europe and Australia also had well-entrenched immigration controversies of their own (the Mediterranean migrant crisis and Australia's immigrant detention centres), which Trump's rhetoric further endorsed. In my view, it is this geopolitical atmosphere that Yi addresses in both exhibitions.

White cubes, site-specificity and olfactory intervention

The Guggenheim (New York), as a modern art museum, houses an expanding collection of impressionist to contemporary artworks, whereas The Tate Modern (London) houses the UK's national and international collection of modern and contemporary art.

The Turbine Hall (a former home for electricity generators), is the Tate Modern's exhibition space for ephemeral large-scale art commissions, typically running annually for six months of the year. I will refer to these two institutions as 'white cube' museum gallery spaces with their own set of requirements as heterotopias (separate to those of biennale art ecosystem heterotopias). By contrast, the scale of a typical biennale, the volume of works, breadth of venues and emphasis towards entertainment bordering on spectacle, has stretched the boundaries of what an exhibition space could be, relative to 'white cube' museum gallery spaces whose boundaries remain relatively static. Large-scale biennale exhibitions create more room: rich ground for curatorial experimentation, expanded possibilities in artistic practice, etc. (Sassatelli 106-108, Niemojewski, ch. 1). The Guggenheim (New York) most closely emulates the traditional modernist 'white cube' (despite evading spatial conformity parameters the term 'white cube' implies), while the site-specificity of the Turbine Hall venue creates distance from the Tate Modern, making the space more flexible than the Tate Modern name suggests. Yet, delving into these 'white cube' institutions exhibiting Yi's works, seems to raise more questions (in terms of questionable risks) than answers.

Hsu's analysis of 'white cube' spaces reveals the level of risk associated with museum galleries exhibiting works like Yi's. In "Olfactory Art, Transcorporeality and the Museum Environment," Hsu contextualizes how contemporary olfactory art intervenes in the traditional visual order of museum galleries, how scent artists' experimentation with concepts, installations, media and materials challenge the modernist ideal of the 'white cube,' and how careful control of air quality in these spaces was an issue traditionally driven by prioritizing the conservation of works. "Because air threatens to contaminate, deteriorate or otherwise destabilize artworks, it is a crucial element in museums' conservation efforts" (1-3). Despite ambitions to transcend their 'white cube' legacies, the conservation of works (the collections they are responsible for preserving), are unlikely to be deprioritized within these institutions. This became self-evident in the development of the "Life is Cheap" exhibition at the Guggenheim, where the "Force Majeure" diorama (housing the bacterial growth) caused upset among the museum employees early in the project due to the smell, necessitating the exhibit to be housed externally (Lee 705). This was partly a risk-reduction measure and partly due to protocols. Standards in museum temperature, humidity and particulates were

established in the mid-twentieth century by a range of organizations — UNESCO, ICOM (International Council of Museums) and IIC (International Institute for the Conservation of Museum Objects). These collectively worked to elevate the conditions for preservation of museum collections, which both these 'white cube' institutions are unlikely to deviate far from. It is this contradiction inherent in the risk of scent which makes Yi's exhibitions within these institutions intriguing. Yi's work takes this risk several steps further in the "Life is Cheap" exhibition at the Guggenheim with the proliferation of bacteria and housing a colony of ants. 'White cube' institutions as heterotopias clearly have a unique set of entrenched constraints which Yi's installations have recently made malleable. Hosting the exhibition offsite is one solution, yet logistically bringing to life an exhibit which is intrinsically counterintuitive to their institutional ethos is arguably another consideration altogether.

The Anthropocene, a term coined by ecologist Eugene Stoermer in the 80s, denotes the human epoch, when human activity has significantly transformed the earth's geology and ecosystems. The Anthropocene "at once centres and decentres the human"—centre of attention, holding sway over non-humans (mute, malleable, merely human-controlled

elements), in an epoch connoting the proliferation of anthropocentric worldviews (Stalpaert 1-2). Posthumanist theory attempts to disentangle human worldviews from anthropocentric privilege, by challenging them, re-articulating what the human is, and dissolving barriers between human biology, non-human species and our environment, often through re-imagining/ re-envisioning aspects of our worldviews with the use of technology (Stalpaert 2, Callus 146). Yi's work calls out barriers specific to biology, gender and space in alignment with posthumanist theory in her works, proposing a dissolution of those barriers through experiences mediated by technology. The "In Love With the World" exhibition reimagines an ecosystem with more equitable interactivity amongst life forms on earth—machine or otherwise. Through her "aerobes," Yi questions the trajectory of AI development and anthropomorphism in autonomous machines as a default aspiration.

The exhibit's programme thus describes the aerobes: "The hairy, bulbous aerobes are planulae. The aerobes with tentacles are xenojellies ('xenos' is Greek for 'foreigner' or 'stranger'). Combining forms of aquatic and terrestrial life, Yi's aerobes signal new possibilities of a hybrid machine species" (Hyundai). There are 18 "aerobes" in circulation throughout the space, all

characteristically foreign to each other, possessing individually unique senses and using high-frequency radio waves to communicate with each other, to map out the space and to use thermal imaging to sense visitors. With AI embedded, the behaviours of the aerobes individually and collectively evolve over time in response to changing elements in the ecosystem: people, scents, heat, movement, other aerobes, etc. (Airstage, Yi "Hyundai"). I posit that Yi's work suggests there is a parallel in terms of equilibrium/more equitable co-habitation within the space, with themselves and with humans. Yi also proposes machine self-determination and evolution as a potential independent life form on earth. Their unpredictability—mostly self-determined flight paths, behaviours between themselves, humans and their responsiveness to atmospheric conditions, changes, and movements in the space—offers a more utopian narrative of co-existence than perhaps we have become accustomed, while immersed in a largely dystopian COVID pandemic. This dovetails with Yi's scentscapes, designed to evoke various aspects/eras in the site's history: marine, coal, manufacturing, vegetation, spices believed to counter the Black Death, etc. ("Hyundai"). According to Hsu, "[w]e can voluntarily shut our eyes or ears, [however], life's dependence on breath makes it

impossible to shut out smells for more than a span of a breath” (7). Yi comments on her use of air in the Turbine Hall space: “The scents ‘sculpt’ the air ... the space is not empty but filled with the air we all share, and on which we depend” (“Hyundai”). There is thus a sense of harmoniousness within the “In Love With The World” installation. The atmospheric conditions of the Turbine Hall space are central to the “aerobes” means of managing co-existence, of regulating their behaviours and interactions with their ‘others.’ Throughout this installation, Yi implies that a shift in perspective, from shared space to shared air, can lead to shifts in behavioural norms in a more equitable direction as well. Humans can consciously re-evaluate their approaches to co-existence and learn how to live more harmoniously together, with other beings, machines and with our surroundings.

In conclusion, despite defying traditional parameters of ‘white cube’ museum gallery norms, with works exploring media/materials typically considered risky for the institutions themselves, these institutions have, nonetheless, chosen to exhibit Yi’s work due to the manner in which she explores timely geopolitical issues, using scents, bacteria and approaches, including ephemeral and conceptual art, few artists use. The interwoven issues Yi touches on are the zeitgeists of our

time, the geopolitical issues of mainstream concern, using technology, human reversals versus universals, arguably building resonance with audiences that transcend national boundaries. Of particular note is how she addressed the racial divisiveness of the Trump administration, the ongoing immigration barriers erected during his term and the tensions exacerbated by the pandemic. These are appealing to corporate sponsors (Hyundai and Hugo Boss were affiliated with the exhibitions analyzed), who are keen to create associations and garner the halo effects on their global brands.

While ‘white cube’ museum galleries, as heterotopias, have well-entrenched environmental constraints around the preservation of their collections, Yi’s exhibitions show that the parameters have become malleable where her works were concerned, particularly with her 2017 Guggenheim exhibition, “Life is Cheap” (scentscape interventions, bacterial growth and ant colonies). In her “In Love With The World” exhibition at the Tate’s Turbine Hall, Yi proposes a vision of a contemporary posthuman moment which fuses biology and technology. Through her “aerobes” she questions the trajectory of AI development and anthropomorphism in autonomous machines as a default aspiration. Yet, Yi’s use of technology

to remediate a re-articulation of human co-existence (with others, other species, machines and our environment), creates a more harmonious picture of what co-habitation could be like. In proposing air as a sculpture we all inhabit, a timely and central concern to

everyone globally during a pandemic which we continue to grapple with, Yi posits a paradigm shift that could lead to a much needed behavioural shift in how to live more harmoniously, rather than anthropocentrically.

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