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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
RIVERSIDE

The Savage Screen:  
Horror, Indigeneity, and Settler Cartographies of Being

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

by

Kali Christen Simmons

June 2021

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Michelle Raheja, Chairperson

Dr. Katherine Kinney

Dr. Mark Minch-de Leon

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2021

The Dissertation of Kali Christen Simmons is approved:

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Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

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I want to begin by respectfully acknowledging that this work was written on the traditional lands of the Cahuilla, Luiseno, Serrano, and Tongva peoples. Thank you to the land and to those ancestors and descendants past, present, and future who live in relation with this place.

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Finally, I must note that a portion of this dissertation comes from published work. Parts of Chapter 1 appear in an article titled "'The Environment is Us': Settler Cartographies of Indigeneity and Blackness in *Prophecy* (1979)" which will be published in *Science Fiction Film and Television*.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Jan Simmons. Thank you for teaching me how to read and how to love fiercely. Wopilia.



## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Savage Screen:  
Horror, Indigeneity, and Settler Cartographies of Being

by

Kali Christen Simmons

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in English  
University of California, Riverside, June 2021  
Dr. Michelle Raheja, Chairperson

*The Savage Screen: Horror, Indigeneity, and Settler Cartographies of Being*, critically analyzes the representation of Indigenous peoples in post-1970s North American mainstream horror media, arguing that despite their surface-level sympathy towards Native peoples, these narratives frequently instrumentalize the image of “the Indian” in ways which reify colonial, white supremacist gender and racial hierarchies. Each of the films I examine uses overlapping aesthetic and rhetorical strategies which position settler subjects as innocent victims of vengeful Native violence, a narrative strategy I have termed the “resistance-as-revenge” narrative. By producing geographic and temporal distance or by figuring Indigeneity as a total absence, these works position white settler subjects as technologically, ethically, epistemologically, and ontologically superior to Indigenous peoples, thus reaffirming the very colonial hierarchies which these narratives purport to critique.

While *The Savage Screen* places emphasis on contemporary representations of Indigenous peoples in horror, I connect the narrative strategies of these recent genre

works to early colonial texts and captivity narratives. My argument is that the recurring representational strategies that are used in contemporary mainstream horror reveal that the settler-colonial imaginary of North America is still deeply haunted by the restrictive notions of the human upon which the project of the nation-state has been premised.

Turning towards Indigenous authored texts, I show that Indigenous horror encodes and performs a *different* set of relations with people, land, and other-than-human kin than those offered by colonial humanisms. Works by Indigenous writers and filmmakers speak back to the settler-colonial worldviews which seek to justify and normalize violence against Indigenous people, offer a different set of ontological and social relations, and invite audiences to remember that Indigenous storytelling practices are key tools in helping to dismantle the constrained colonial ontologies that all beings have been figured into. Works discussed include *Prophecy*, *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, *The Ghost Dance*, *The Hills Have Eyes* (both the 1977 and 2006 versions), *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*, and *The Only Good Indians*.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Chapter 1. “The Environment is Us”: Settler Colonial Cartographies of Land and Bodies	22
Chapter 2. The Ones Who Did Not Die: Captivity Narratives and Final Girls	51
Chapter 3. Projecting the Savage Screen: The Self-Reflexive Horror of <i>The Hills Have Eyes</i>	90
Chapter 4. No Easy Way Out: Indigenous Women, Horror, and Refusal	129
Bibliography	165

## Introduction

“At this stage it is necessary to offer a simple and obvious basic formula for the horror film: normality is threatened by the Monster...The very simplicity of this formula has a number of advantages...it suggests the possibility for extension into other genres: substitute for ‘Monster’ the term ‘Indians,’ for example, and one has the formula for a large number of classical Westerns.”

- Robin Wood, “An Introduction to the American Horror Film”

“Don’t be afraid of what you can’t see.”

- Oingo Boingo, “Dead Man’s Party”

The seed of this project was first planted in the year 2016, the same year the first protests of the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline took place. Plans for the pipeline were officially approved in the summer of 2016, despite ongoing concerns about the potential ecological and cultural impacts the line would have on the Standing Rock Sioux peoples. An earlier possible route for the pipeline which would have avoided Indigenous sacred sites was rejected, according to an article published by the Bismarck Tribune, because its proximity to the town of Bismarck posed a “...potential threat to Bismarck’s water supply” (Dalrymple). This omission betrays the investments of settler colonialism – the protection of the ‘normal’ lifeways of white settler citizenry over all others. Rather than disturb the lives of the citizens of the settlement of Bismarck, the Army Corps of Engineers chose to disregard the concerns of the tribe and proceed with the construction, prompting tribal members and allies to join together in acts of protest and resistance.

One way to interpret the state’s response to the protests at Standing Rock is that the settler state felt the actions of water protectors were a threat to normality. The

Očhéthi Šakówiŋ rejected the settler state's manifest claims to ownerships of Indigenous lands, waters, cultures, peoples, and bodies. Implicit in the Standing Rock Sioux Nation's protests is also a threat to the Army Corps of Engineers normative modes of seeing and mapping. The Army Corps viewed the lands upon which they wished to construct the pipeline as empty, seizable property while the Standing Rock Sioux understood them as sacred sources of knowledge which held not only *Inyan* (stones) of deep intellectual and spiritual significance, but also the very bodies of the ancestors who had brought this spiritual knowledge to the people. The Standing Rock Peoples also re-inscribed the image of the pipeline itself through the Dakota prophetic tradition: no longer an innocent piece of infrastructure, DAPL was instead a ferocious, insatiable black snake which had arisen to spread sickness and destruction across Indigenous lands. In response to these acts of resistance and re-inscription, the Army Corps of Engineers would deploy escalating violent force against water protectors, pepper spraying and teargassing them, shooting them with rubber bullets, spraying them with cold water during freezing temperatures, utilizing flash bang grenades, and attacking them with police dogs. When settler society perceived a threat to normalcy - a fantasy of violence - it responded with the real thing.

The protests at Standing Rock are not the only instance of collective Očhéthi Šakówiŋ resistance to colonialism, and they will not be the last. In 1890, Indigenous peoples on the Pine Ridge Reservation gathered, fueled by feelings of growing unrest in response to the implementation of the Dawes Act, a piece of colonial legislation designed to disaggregate communally held lands and impose western notions of land ownership and tenancy upon Indigenous peoples. Along with these feelings of unrest came the

Ghost Dance, itself a hybridic practice that brought together Paiute and Očhéthi Šakówiŋ epistemologies. Such acts of adaptation and change have always been the norm for Indigenous peoples; However, the imposition of settler-colonialism mean that these changes occurred more rapidly and sometimes without the consultation and/or active consent of the Očhéthi Šakówiŋ. Colonial military forces saw this collaboration and adaptation as a threat, reading the practice of the Ghost Dance ceremony as an omen of war. Such readings, from a Critical Indigenous orientation, betray a projection of settler guilt. What else could these Natives want other than violent revenge, their settler captors wondered? Rather than letting the flow of colonial power run its course uninterrupted, the Očhéthi Šakówiŋ again re-inscribed colonial histories through their own prophetic terms. They posited that through collective dreaming they could make settler rule come to an end – colonists would simply disappear if they all wished it to be so. Reading this act of re-inscription as a threat of violence, US military forces moved in on the community, holding Lakota and Dakota people captive, seizing their property, and searching their persons. Then, suddenly, shots broke out. In the end, an estimated 259 Očhéthi Šakówiŋ men, women, and children were left dead in the snow. An editorial published by *The Word Carrier* shortly after the Wounded Knee Massacre proclaimed that resistance leaders Red Cloud and Sitting Bull “deserved” death, and “others like them” were “intensely bitter and hostile to civilization and Christianity” (“Causes of This Indian Outbreak”). This perceived Indigenous hostility, and the threat to settler normalcy that it presupposed, justified the mass murder of Indigenous people. And so, it seems that, for

over five hundred years, when settler imaginaries run wild, it is Indigenous peoples who must pay the price.

These instances of violence against Indigenous peoples provoke many questions: Why is it that stories about Indigenous peoples can so easily be cast as stories of monstrous otherness? What is it about Indigenous peoples' resistance to colonialism, and even sometimes just our *persistent physical presence*, that the colonial imaginary finds so deeply unsettling to its sense of normalcy? What roles do the stories that settler culture tells about Indigenous peoples' resistance to colonialism play in normalizing this imagined threat that Indigeneity seems to pose? And, most troublingly, I wonder: whose purposes have discourses of monstrosity, terror, and horror been shaped to serve?

### **Horror and Indigeneity**

*The Savage Screen* critically analyzes contemporary North American horror texts which depict monstrous Indigenous resistance to colonialism, as well as horror studies theories of monstrosity, place, and race to address the above questions. Broadly, the goals of the project are twofold. On one hand, I explicate the underlying anti-Indigenous aesthetic and ideological frameworks that shape many mainstream horror texts. In addition to deconstructing the ideologies and aesthetics of a set of horror-revenge films, I turn to Indigenous authored horror-revenge texts which contest and re-inscribe not only the conventions of the horror genre, but colonial hierarchies of being. I am concerned about Robin Wood's simple substitution exercise, demonstrated in the above epigraph, as it reveals the ease in which one can slip from a discussion about monsters into a discussion of Indigeneity. This deft transposition of monstrosity and Indigeneity reveals

that there is a persistent, fundamental connection between the monstrous and the Indigenous within colonial epistemologies. If the slippage from monster into Indian occurs so easily, then it is time that scholars begin to seriously consider the ways the figure of ‘the Indian’ has shaped and continues to shape narratives of monstrosity and horror.

As a lifelong fan of the horror genre, I have always found myself obsessed with monsters. When I was a child, my mother, an elementary school teaching assistant, brought home the book *Little Dracula Goes to School*. Little Dracula was a bald, green-skinned little boy with razor-sharp fangs and bulging red eyes. He slept in a coffin, and when he had trouble falling asleep, his mother gave him a glass of blood to drink. Our different diets and appearances notwithstanding, I managed to fall in love with this little character and asked my parents to read the story to me most nights. Although we looked and acted differently, Little Dracula and I were a lot alike. Both of us were frightened at the thought of attending the first day of school on our own, we both enjoyed annoying our siblings and, like me, Little Dracula loved spending time with his family at the beach. Little Dracula’s life did not resemble my own in many ways – I did not live in a giant gothic mansion, and when I needed to go to school, I did not ride with Igor in a coffin-shaped horse-drawn chariot – my older brother drove me in his black Geo Metro. I was very different from Little Dracula, but we were also very much alike, and it was comforting to know that even those who, on the outside appear to be incapable of fear...can actually feel really scared, too.



In my view, this is what the very best horror does – it challenges viewers to question their conceptions of the monstrous and of what it means to be a person. As I grew up, I encountered films which offered similar challenges. In Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960), viewers may shudder when they realize the nice-yet-awkward boy next door is a killer wolf in sheep’s clothing. In *Cat People* (1942), audience members grow attached to the troubled and tragic Irena before discovering that she transforms into a wildcat when kissed. My very favorite horror films challenge viewers to consider: Are beings monstrous because of what they *are*, or what they *do*?

I love horror, but our relationship is complicated. As a Lakota person, I am deeply troubled by the two approaches that horror tends to take when it attempts to represent Indigenous peoples. Most of the time, horror films do not seem to be aware Indigenous people exist, although this seems to be true of most film genres aside from the Western and the early ethnographic film. When Indigenous peoples are represented in horror, we are marginalized. Take for example the *Poltergeist* series. In the first movies, Indigenous peoples a ghostly force haunting an ‘innocent’ white suburban family. In the second film there is a bit of a shift in that there is an actual Native American actor portraying the role of the medicine man Taylor (Will Sampson); However, despite Sampson’s best efforts, Taylor’s character is largely an amalgamation of various western stereotypes of Indigenous peoples. Throughout the film, Taylor’s primary role is to offer vague New Age-y advice to Steve, the white father character played by Craig T. Nelson. After transferring all of his ghost-busting knowledge to Steve, Taylor drives off into the sunset. Dallas Hunt calls this kind of narrative a “totem transfer”: at first depicting a utopian

exchange of ideas between Indigenous and white characters, such stories “...reaffirm a liberal multicultural future that requires Indigenous peoples to disappear” (72).

Indigenous peoples can have a cameo appearance in horror, but they cannot stay, and they are never the heroes. The horror genre wants access to the stories, knowledges, and histories of Indigenous peoples, but it does not seem to want us to stick around, and it does not seem to be at all interested in learning what those stories and knowledges and histories *really* mean. It is my suspicion that the thought of Natives watching scary moves rarely crosses any mainstream horror director’s mind.

And yet, here I am, a Lakota woman talking about the horror movies that I love and how they have challenged me. And in the process of developing this research project, I have encountered many other Indigenous peoples who share my love of the genre. Even more encouraging is that, since I began thinking about the relationship between horror and Indigeneity in earnest, there has been an explosion of Native-authored horror texts. Most notable is the work of Stephen Graham Jones, whose novel *The Only Good Indians* will be examined later in this work. This explosion of genre work by Indigenous authors demands that scholars of Indigenous studies begin to seriously examine the genre, not only because it has become a space which can be utilized to do political work which decenters settler colonial epistemologies, but also to closely analyze some of the stories that shaped these Indigenous writers and director’s affiliations to the genre.

This project is thus also a call to action, challenging the discipline of horror studies to reorient its relationship with Critical Indigenous Studies and theories of colonialism. Indigenous peoples continue to engage horror texts as writers, directors,

actors, and as an often-unacknowledged audience. It is time that horror and horror studies reciprocate. Rather than thinking of these texts as a manifestation of a repressed settler guilt returned to haunt the present, I argue that we must instead understand that settler-colonialism never stopped, that it has never ended. From this perspective, the persistence of representations of Indigenous monstrosity means that there must be a continued need for the state to police and restrain the colonial imaginary in ways which abject Indigenous peoples and place them outside the purview of the human. This abjection of Indigeneity from the purview of the human is useful for a variety of purposes, and so I offer answers as why this abjection occurs in each of my chapters.

Numerous other scholars have examined the linkage of horror and Indigeneity through analysis of the more familiar figure of the Indigenous ghost.<sup>1</sup> Renee L. Bergland argues in *The National Uncanny* that “By writing about Indians as ghosts, white writers effectively remove them from American lands, and place them, instead, within the American Imagination” (4). In *Phantom Past, Indigenous Presence*, Colleen Boyd and Coll Thrush agree, arguing that “...Native ghosts have...[become] stock characters in a quotidian North American drama of displacement, transformation, and belonging” (viii). Bergland, Boyd, and Thrush explain that by removing Indigenous peoples from the ‘real’ of the American landscape and relegating them to discourses of the fictional, colonialism seeks to erase Indigenous presence and the resistance to colonialism which that presence

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to Bergland’s text and *Phantom Past, Indigenous Presence*, see Warren Cariou’s “Haunted Prairie: Aboriginal ‘Ghosts’ and the Spectres of Settlement,” Darryl V. Caterine “Heirs through Fear: Indian Curses, Accursed Indian Lands, and White Christian Sovereignty in America,” Kyle T. Mays’ “Pontiac’s Ghost in the Motor City: Indigeneity and the Discursive Construction of Modern Detroit,” Eve Tuck and C. Ree “A Glossary of Haunting,” and the chapter “Tears and Trash: Economies of Redfacing and the Ghostly Indian” in Michelle Raheja’s *Reservation Reelism*.

marks. Such moves seek not only to contain and restrain Indigenous peoples within colonial discourses, but this discursive removal also asserts the settler's unquestioned right to ownership of Indigenous lands, cultures, peoples, and their stories.

Rather than focusing on texts in which a ghostly Indigenous presence appears to unsettle colonial normalcy, this dissertation examines narratives in which Indigenous peoples pose a material, physical threat to colonial forces. Each of the films that I analyze is linked by the way in which they ultimately imagine the process of decolonization as an act of revenge. I have labeled this story structure the "resistance as revenge" narrative. In these kinds of narratives, Indigenous peoples are shown enacting violent revenge against white settlers, most often white settler women. In the resistance as revenge narrative Indigenous peoples can materialize explicitly as monstrous beasts and demonically possessed killers; However, they also function as both metaphor and allegory, as is the case of the mutant family who terrorizes the Carters in *The Hills Have Eyes*. While these revenge narratives often openly allude to the history of Indigenous dispossession, they are careful to displace any culpability that may fall upon the settler characters. Figuring the threat posed by Indigeneity as material and embodied rather than spectral invokes a distinct grammar of representation within the horror genre, and so these texts require examination upon their own unique terms.

By closely examining different examples of the resistance as revenge narrative, we can better understand why it is that this kind of narrative has continued to circulate within the colonial imaginary despite ongoing critiques of the systemic violence settler-colonial states enact against Indigenous peoples by Indigenous scholars, activists,

communities, and their allies. As I will show, these grammars of representation are highly entrenched within the colonial imaginary. One of the horrors of settler-colonialism is that it has made it difficult (and sometimes it may even feel impossible) to imagine alternative modes of living and being in relation. Thus, my analysis also seeks to make visible alternative epistemologies of monstrosity and difference which emerge out of an Indigenous feminist critical orientation.

Non-Indigenous audiences may struggle with understanding the structures of antagonism which exist in Indigenous narratives because of a difference in worldviews which informs the audience's reading practices. According to Carol Warrior, "...recognition of beauty, value, or protagonism as such, and horror or antagonism as such, depends upon the epistemic, ontologic, and axiologic orientation of the reader. Since epistemologies and ontologies are in part ideological, readers may not always be aware of their own orientations" (16). Those especially who are invested in the rhetoric of colonial humanisms – or who fail to perceive such systems of knowledge as partial and situated – may find it difficult to discern who the "monstrous" character is and how language and story are used to render them as such. Readers or spectators may struggle to decode the signs which, for an anti-colonial Indigenous reader, would assuredly mark a figure as monstrous. For example, a non-Indigenous reader may struggle with engaging a narrative in which there is a non-hierarchical relationship to nature or other-than-human beings because much of Western science has, historically, argued that human beings possess characteristics which make them superior to other beings. Because Indigenous narratives are produced through Indigenous epistemologies and worldviews which assign

value to beings and behaviors in different ways, the narrative may be at least partially illegible or incomprehensible to non-Indigenous readers or viewers. At their core, Indigenous stories challenge western notions of genre, and thus they demand a different set of analytical orientations.

Aside from a difference in worldviews, Indigenous films and literatures frequently criticize aspects of colonialism which non-Indigenous viewers may take for granted or understand as universal. For Warrior, because "...a great deal of contemporary Native American fiction is meant to be resistant to colonialism in some way, the rhetorics embedded in these narratives may be ineffectual for readers who, because of worldview, cannot perceive the threats where they exist" (1). This is also what she means when she says that "Since epistemologies and ontologies are in part ideological, readers may not always be aware of their own orientations" (Warrior 16). Thus, it may not only be a problem of misperception (a reading practice which is insufficient or a 'mismatch' with the material), it may actually be the more difficult problem of a *lack of perception* which makes Indigenous narratives so inscrutable to non-Native readers. If a reader or viewer understands a colonial understanding of a concept or idea to be the universal and singular way of decoding or engaging that concept or idea, they may not be able to even perceive that alternative interpretations/lifeways/viewpoints are possible.

This inability to perceive alternative ways of being is the danger of what Sylvia Wynter has deemed "the overrepresentation of man." Because colonial humanisms have not only presented a narrow representation of what a human being is, they, since the earliest moments of colonization, "...had projected their respective creeds as universally

applicable ones, defining their God(s) and symbol systems as the only ‘true’ ones” (Wynter 302). A colonial humanist-oriented reader or spectator not only decodes meaning in particular ways, but they may also understand their processes for decoding as the only ‘true’ way of knowing or being. For a reader who is deeply invested in colonial systems of power to fully engage with Indigenous texts, they must first come to awareness that their own worldviews and reading practices are *not* universal, a task which requires significant ‘unlearning’ on the part of the reader. In my own experiences teaching, I often encounter students who write things like “this author is writing about human nature as we all understand it” or “this writer takes up our notions of nature to do x, y, or z.” Although students, when pressed, often admit that they know that such universal notions of nature or the psyche could be contested, the ease in which this language comes ‘naturally’ to myself and my students indicates the deep ways that a universal notion of the human – and the human’s place in the world – have been figured as ‘common sense,’ or in Jodi Byrd’s terms, a “colonialist discursive given” (*Transit of Empire* 31). Such statements are hallmarks of colonial humanist frameworks which, as they interpolate one into its reading practices and values, position those practices and values as the only possible options available with which someone can engage reasonably or logically.

As such, a problem arises: how can those viewers who have been repeatedly told the resistance as revenge narrative come to recognize it for what it is – a strategic distortion of Indigenous peoples, their stories, and their worldviews for the benefit of white supremacy and settler-colonialism? An important part of this project requires

seeking out different reading practices and orientations towards these texts so that these ideas which are figured as ‘common sense’ or ‘normal’ can be exposed for the partial and politically motivated knowledges that they are. This means that, despite the potential for misperception, engagement with Indigenous texts is a practice which I deeply believe can provide readers with the tools to contest and unmake the core values and beliefs of settler-colonialism. Our stories matter and the way we tell those stories and think about the meanings of those stories matters. Indigenous stories which are critical of the settler-state, in addition to deconstructing powerful ontological, legal, and epistemological institutions, importantly posit the existence of multiple alternative modes of doing and being. I have observed the profound and exciting changes these texts can have on my student’s reading practices, and my own work would not be possible without the theories that Indigenous stories explain and put into practice.

### **Distance as Keyword**

Ultimately, I argue that by producing geographic and temporal distance or by figuring Indigeneity as a total absence, the settler-produced resistance as revenge narratives positions white settler subjects as technologically, ethically, epistemologically, and ontologically superior to Indigenous peoples. This means that, despite their sympathetic renderings of Indigenous peoples, the settler-produced horror films that I discuss in this dissertation often end up reaffirming the very colonial hierarchies which these narratives purport to critique.

As a conceptual strategy, distance allows me to think through what Jodi Byrd might call the “cacophonous” or “discordant and competing” representations of



Indigenous peoples within the resistance as revenge narrative (*Transit of Empire* xiii). In *Playing Indian*, Philip explains that Indian “hobbyists” who “...imagined Indian Others as authentic, yet accessible – culturally *close* and racially *distant* [my emphasis]” sought to position themselves in proximity to Indigeneity as a method to claim a particular relationship to seized Indigenous lands while simultaneously maintaining their dominant status within white supremacist settler hierarchies (147). I denote a similar move in the resistance as revenge narrative. Within the colonial imaginary, the figure of the Indian functions as a valuable symbol of a prior, more ‘authentic’ form of being that is untouched by a simultaneously liberating and corrupting modernity. Yet there is a risk in moving the Indian proximate to oneself. As Deloria writes, “...Indian play...carried the threat that [colonists] could lose themselves” as they could regress into savagery and thus descend the colonial hierarchy (35). It was thinking together with Byrd and Deloria that I arrived at distance as a keyword, as it allows me to think about various techniques which are used within the resistance as revenge narrative to bring various figures (the white patriarch, the suffering white woman, and the Indian for example) nearer and further away from one another. In my first chapter, for example, I think about the ways in which Indigenous peoples and land are placed in proximity to one another in colonial discourses, often to the point where one is collapsed into the other and thus indistinguishable. It is this constant movement, a push and pulling force, that reveals the important function the resistance as revenge narrative plays in creating and policing the boundaries that undergird colonial humanisms.

Distance also allows me to think about proximity in terms of both space *and* time. As noted, the first chapter plays upon the geographic connotations of the distance keyword in order to think about how spaces are mapped through colonial discourses. In the second chapter, I think about temporal proximity is also managed through the resistance as revenge narrative. Elizabeth Povinelli writes in “The Governance of the Prior” that both Indigenous peoples and colonial states are, “caught in strategic manoeuvres of temporalization and territorialization” (16). I would refer to such maneuvers as acts of distancing through which the settler state negotiates the feeling of being “addressed, animated and aggravated” by Indigenous challenges to colonial sovereignty (Povinelli 16). To create distance between the Indigenous subject and the settler state, whether that distance be geographic, temporal, ethical, aesthetic, or otherwise enables the settler state, and its contingent imaginary, to defer an acknowledgement of Indigenous claims as legible and legitimate. This explains why, as Bergland, Boyd, and Thrush have written, the figure of the Indian is placed at a distance from the ‘real’ and relegated to the territory of fiction. Distance allows me to apprehend and describe these multiple discourses in ways that other terms that I flirted with (inoculation and trauma) could not.

Finally, distance is a term which allows me to speak about the affective experiences of being an Indigenous horror fan that I have discussed above. Genre can, on one hand, be used to consolidate fans around a set of texts with shared aesthetic, ethical, and political values. At its worst, however, genres can function as a kind of ‘do not disturb’ sign which exclude works that do not fit into a tightly devised set of rules and

conventions. When I hear horror scholars and fans arguing about the ‘rules’ of the horror genre and what makes a text ‘count’ as this or that subgenre, I can’t help but be reminded of the colonial discourses of authenticity which have perpetuated the material and discursive genocide of many Indigenous peoples. For those of us whose very bodies have been subjected to a similar form of scrutiny through the logics of, say, blood quantum, such debates (and intellectual the premises they are based upon) are deeply alienating and disturbing. Personally, I find my filiation not with those horror texts that unquestionably belong within one subgenre or another, but instead with the enigmatic works which shapeshift, slip, and slither between fixed categories. Distance thus allows me to not only describe the movements that occur within specific individual horror texts, but it also enables me to think about the larger ways genre theory as a whole indulges in colonial modes of knowledge production when it seeks to generate and police boundaries between texts by placing all forms of within a finite set of possibilities.

### **Chapter Descriptions**

The four chapters of this dissertation examines the four different resistance as revenge films in order to parse out the formal and ideological mechanisms at work within this kind of storytelling. I examine texts that have been widely discussed within horror studies, such as Wes Craven’s *The Hills Have Eyes*, as well as lesser-known works like *Prophecy* and *The Ghost Dance*. The chapters are organized semi-chronologically and thematically. I do this partially to show that the resistance as revenge narrative does not become more politically ‘progressive’ or less harmful as time passes. In this way, this project resists the imperatives of dialectical materialism and progressivism. Instead of

tracing out a genealogy in which we move from ‘more problematic’ to ‘less problematic’ texts, I examine distinct techniques that have been developed to distance Indigenous peoples from humanity either through the discourses of geography and temporality, or via the complete absencing of Indigenous peoples from the representational grammars of a film. This organizational schema is designed to show that while this form of storytelling may shift in its aesthetics, techniques, and even in its political goals, it does not manage to overcome fundamental problems in its rendering of Indigenous peoples. It is for this reason I turn to Indigenous re-inscriptions of the revenge narrative in my final chapter to show that a fundamental epistemological and ontological overhaul is what is necessary to render Indigenous acts of resistance to colonialism in complex and ethically sound ways. In this way, I reveal that it is actually the constrained imaginary of colonial humanism which causes the resistance as revenge narrative to encode Indigeneity in such troubling ways. It is my contention that once these epistemological and ontological constraints can be made visible and imagined otherwise, a different and more liberatory set of aesthetic and ethical storytelling practices emerge.

The first chapter examines the 1979 film *Prophecy*, arguing that the film’s ecologically progressive message is informed by anti-Black and anti-Indigenous worldviews. Through a close reading of the film’s visual and sonic encodings of Black and Indigenous peoples, paying special attention to the film’s representations of fecund Black and Indigenous women, I argue *Prophecy* ultimately re-asserts the very racial hierarchies that its explicit narrative content seeks to unmake. The film’s colonial racial and gendered hierarchies are managed through the production and maintenance of

geographic discourses which collapse Black and Indigenous communities into the lands they occupy. In this process, racialized peoples are made into objects which can be justifiably mapped, managed, and surveilled. As one of the few horror films, and even films in general, to triangulate whiteness, Blackness, and Indigeneity, *Prophecy* also reveals how white supremacy seeks to create and bolster antagonisms between Black and Indigenous liberatory projects. The film is thus unique not only for its depiction of Indigenous monstrosity (rather than spectrality) but also for its explicit antagonistic positioning of Black and Indigenous peoples against one another.

My second chapter analyzes the identificatory schema of the slasher from a Critical Indigenous Studies orientation, foregrounding the role that colonial discourses play in producing audience sympathy. For some, the figure of the Final Girl, a suffering female character who resists and overcomes the violent gaze of the monster/killer, marks a possible progressive turn within the genre. I argue that the Final Girl may find her origins in the women protagonists of captivity narratives written in the early American period, as these women protagonists also invited audiences to sympathize with the suffering they allegedly incurred at the hands of their Indigenous captives. By placing the slasher genre in conversation with the captivity narrative, I show that in both instances the protagonist is offered traditionally masculine forms of agency in exchange for affirming colonial hierarchies and epistemologies.

Chapter three examines the self-reflexive critique of modernity that takes place in Wes Craven's 1977 film *The Hills Have Eyes* and Alexandre Aja's 2006 remake of *Hills*. While neither of the films explicitly represent Indigenous peoples, primitivism and the

threat of savage regression subtend both narratives. I argue that in the process of their critique, both films confess that the nation and the family are technologies that make visible the forms of permissible violence that whiteness can wield. By figuring the white settler as an always-already injured subject (injured by modernity which dispossesses the white subject of an authenticity that the figure of the Indian embodies), colonial discourses can then justify the use of frontier violence against Indigenous subjects.

The final chapter turns to Indigenous revenge narratives, showing how writers Jeff Barnaby (Mi'kmaq) and Stephen Graham Jones (Blackfeet) both contest and reinscribe the conventions of the resistance as revenge narrative. Through acts of refusal which reject the constrained conventions of the settler imaginary, their texts *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* and *The Only Good Indians* imagine otherwise, modeling different forms of relationality with people and other-than human kin.

These chapters show the shifting and entangled aesthetics of the resistance as revenge narrative. Resisting the notion of positivist progress and dialectical materialism, I argue instead that the resistance as revenge narrative continues to emerge because of settler-colonialism's ongoing snake-like grasp on our imaginaries. In my final turn towards Indigenous revenge narratives, I suggest that authentic change is only possible through a fundamental re-orientation of our systems of knowledge production, relationality, and investment in the fixity of genre forms. Without such changes, the resistance as revenge narrative is a story which we are all doomed to repeat.

## **A Note on Timespan**

Each of the film texts that I examine were released after 1977, as this period marks the emergence of Indigenous political organizing into the mainstream via movements like the American Indian Movement and the National Indian Youth Council. It was also during the 1970s that several important legal battles for Indigenous sovereignty and cultural autonomy gained momentum. In 1970, a Yankton Dakota woman named Maria Pearson who was living in Iowa was appalled to discover that when several sets of human remains were uncovered during road construction, only the Indigenous remains were sent to a lab for study while the 26 sets of settler remains were immediately reburied in a local cemetery. After much consideration, Maria dressed herself in her regalia, drove to the state capitol, and directly confronted the Iowa governor, telling him, “You can give me back my people’s bones and stop digging them up.” In 1976, thanks to the advocacy of Maria and other Indigenous peoples, the Iowa Burials and Protection Act was passed, a law which extended the protection of graves within the state to include ceremonial burial mounds and unmarked gravesites. In the year 1977, retired Georgia Supreme Court Justice William Gunter was appointed by then-US president Jimmy Carter to examine the land claims of the Indigenous communities whose lands lie in what is now referred to as the state of Maine. 1978 marks the passing of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, which granted Indigenous peoples in the US some legal protections over their right to access sacred sites and make claims to cultural patrimony. In 1980, the Main Lands Settlement Act would be approved by Congress, extinguishing all aboriginal land title claims in exchange for reparations for

lands taken from tribes. Eventually, in 1990, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) was passed, which provides both protections over sites where Indigenous remains and funerary objects are found, it also sets in place systems which can expedite the repatriation of Indigenous remains that have been seized and sequestered in archives across the country without the permission of relatives or tribes. Each of these landmark cases offered additional state-sanctioned protections to Indigenous peoples, their lands, cultural objects, and their relatives, and also brought these issues into the mainstream discourse. Undoubtedly works like *Prophecy* and *The Ghost Dance* were inspired by these political and legal developments, and so it is their status as *interpretations* of these acts of Indigenous resistance which draws me to evaluate them seriously, despite many of these films' statuses as marginal or 'low-brow' within the canon of horror studies.



## Chapter 1: “The Environment is Us”: Settler Colonial Cartographies of Land and Bodies

In *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, Carol Clover’s landmark intervention into horror scholarship, she writes that the plots of many contemporary horror films expose an ongoing tension between the “city” and the “country.” Works dating back to the early colonial period, such as *The House of the Seven Gables* and *Edgar Huntly*, take as their starting point a fear that the wild and untamed spaces of the country can cause an otherwise ‘civilized’ population to descend into madness, and more recent works like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), *Deliverance* (1972), and *I Spit on Your Grave* (1978) figure the country as a lawless playground for psychopathic killers. Ultimately, Clover names the city’s fear of the country “urbanoia,” explaining that underling these narratives’ representations of class conflict (wherein the city represents the rich “haves”, and the country represents the poor “have-nots), there is a more disturbing and ‘originary’ fear:

The story is a familiar one in American culture. The city approaches the country guilty in much the same way that the capitalist approaches the proletarian guilty (for plundering her labor) or the settler approaches the Indian guilty (for taking his land). In fact, films like *Deliverance*...resemble nothing so much as theories and forties westerns of the settler-versus-Indian variety (134).

What Clover ultimately deduces is that the ongoing guilt over Indigenous land theft continues to haunt the national imaginary, and yet the absence of Indigenous characters from films like *Deliverance*, *Texas Chainsaw*, and *I Spit on Your Grave* reveals that such

narratives are, for some reason, “no longer tellable in their original terms” because they disguise their plots of Indigenous dispossession behind stories of class conflict (163).

If horror is a genre obsessed with ‘bad places,’ and the threats posed to civilization by these places and the beings who inhabit them, then it is a genre which is deeply concerned with how human beings shape and are shaped by their relationships to place. Such concerns are shared by Indigenous Studies. Many Indigenous epistemologies understand land as an agential being that actively engages with people and animal beings, and in this way people and their environments are seen as mutually co-constituting.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, Critical Indigenous Studies contests the ways settler-colonialism has mapped land as an object of possession and domestication by white settler patriarchal subjects and which is only accessible to Indigenous peoples via the “right to occupancy.”<sup>3</sup> If we understand settler-colonialism to be a structure which continues to constrain the possibilities of our present conditions - rather than understanding it as a historical event of the distant past - then these stories are *not just* expressions of past settler guilt but are instead *manifestations* of the *present* racial hierarchies. Is it the fear of exposing how this narrative of ownership has been consciously constructed that prevents the settler imaginary from telling these stories “in their original terms”? And if, as Clover writes, the city continues to be guilt-stricken by its colonial past, then might stories of

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<sup>2</sup> See Vanessa Watts’ “Indigenous place-thought and agency amongst humans and non humans (First Woman and Sky Woman go on a European world tour!)”, Keith Basso’s *Wisdom Sits in Places*, Peter Nabokov’s *A Forest of Time*, Robin Wall-Kimmerer’s *Braiding Sweetgrass*, and Coll Thrush’s *Native Seattle and Indigenous London*.

<sup>3</sup> For example, the Commerce Clause of the U.S. Constitution (Article 1, Section 8) empowers US Congress to manage all trade with Indigenous peoples within the US boundaries. Such laws are implicitly paternalistic.

“urbanoia” be productively read as expressions of settler imaginary’s continued negotiation of settler relationships to place and the shifting anxieties which inform colonial hierarchies of race and being?

A text which can help us to untangle these questions which link race, place, and colonialism within the horror genre is *Prophecy* (1979), a film that is unique not only because of its explicit representation of guilt over the ecological racism which colonialism perpetuates against Indigenous peoples, but also because of the ways that it maps Indigenous women as non-humans so that white settler subjectivities can be recuperated and regenerated. Through its explicit rendering of a white-city versus Indigenous-country conflict, *Prophecy* appears to contest Clover’s claim that stories of white settler urban exploitation of Indigenous lands are “no longer tellable in their original terms.” The questions of colonialism and racialization which narratives like *Deliverance*, *I Spit on Your Grave*, and the later-discussed *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977) seek to disguise by having characters ‘play Indian’ are brought to the fore in *Prophecy*, which directly depicts a vengeful Indigenous “country” force seeking revenge on a white rich city which has destroyed lands and peoples through acts of ignorance and greed.

*Prophecy* further complicates the white-city versus Indigenous-country conflict that reoccurs within “urbanoia” texts by triangulating both groups in relationship to an urban Black community which the film renders as degenerative and inhuman, an addition which distinguishes the film from other works within the genre. This triangulation not only works to abject Black and Indigenous peoples by posing them as threats to white orderliness and futurity, but it also works to produce antagonisms between Black and

Indigenous communities through an instrumentalization of the concept of sovereignty. Despite a shared endpoint (abjection), colonial racial hierarchies are established which position Black and Indigenous women incongruously, resulting in distinct logics of inhumanity and placelessness for each figure. In repeatedly figuring Indigenous and Black peoples as irrationally violent and inhuman others, the white settler-colonial humanisms at work in “urbanoia” horror films like *Prophecy* transit Indigeneity to erase Indigenous critiques of colonial violence while also asserting primitivist anti-Indigenous and anti-Black hierarchies of being.

In this chapter, I show how the production and maintenance of geographic distance is a mechanism deployed within US settler-colonialism as a way to produce and maintain its conceptions of the human. Through a series of strategic productions and eliminations of distance between white, Black, and Indigenous bodies and land, the film *Prophecy* shows how settler-colonial humanism manages geographic and ontological distance concurrently as a method to uphold white supremacist colonial hierarchies. Although sympathetic in its rendering of Black and Indigenous experiences of ecological racism, *Prophecy* nonetheless ‘maps’ racialized bodies into the spaces they inhabit in order to justify white surveillance, management, and violence towards Black and Indigenous peoples and lands. As the film orients viewers away from Black and Indigenous peoples by rendering them as monstrous objects which produce their own conditions of oppression, the film also orients the viewer towards Robert and Maggie by figuring their acts of suffering at the hands of Indigenous lands and peoples. In this way, *Prophecy* thus utilizes the resistance-as-revenge narrative schema to render Indigenous

and Black women as abject and monstrous while working to center and recuperate white heteronormative paternity.

### **Urbanoia and Revenge in *Prophecy***

To summarize the plot of film: *Prophecy* tells the story of Robert (Robert Foxworth) and Maggie Vern (Talia Shire), a white couple who are sent to investigate an environmental dispute between a paper company and the fictionalized Masaquoddy Indigenous tribe. Shortly after they arrive on the reservation, Robert and Maggie are terrorized by a giant bear whom the Indigenous “Opies” (short for “Original Peoples”) refer to as Katahdin. Through the course of their investigation, the pair also discover that they have also been exposed to the toxic chemical methylmercury, a chemical which has poisoned the local animals and water system. This exposure threatens the couple’s own reproductive future, as they cannot determine whether their own exposure has also compromised the health of the as-yet unborn child Maggie is carrying. As Robert works to collect evidence of the contamination, he, Maggie, and their Opie assistants John Hawks (Armand Assante) and his wife Ramona (Victoria Racimo) are pursued by Katahdin until Robert finally destroys the monster in an extended fight sequence, complete with a bow-and-arrow assault.

*Prophecy* expresses what Clover has called “urbanoia” because it represents acts of white suffering and mourning which orients the audience away from Indigenous and Black maternal figures. In Clover’s theory of “urbanoia,” she poses that the rape-revenge horror subgenre works on two axes: the gendered and the economic. The gender axis is divided into a male/female binary and the conflict of this gender axis of rape-revenge

stories is premised upon the patriarchal violence that male characters enact against women. On this axis men are empowered, and women are disempowered. Yet another axis is also structuring these narratives: class. In films like *Deliverance* and *I Spit on Your Grave*, characters are divided geo-economically: those who inhabit the “country” are figured as economically disempowered and those who inhabit the “city” are understood to be wealthy and can thus wield that wealth against the country to extract resources and destroy both land *and* rural social and trade markets. Thus, the woman from the city is figured as a logical threat to the country in the ways that she is aligned with systems of ecological and economic exploitation. In *Prophecy*, such an analysis applies to John’s wife Maggie, who, as a concert cello-player and wife of a doctor, is associated with signs of civilization and affluence. One could use Clover to argue that the violence Maggie and Robert face within the narrative is that Katahdin represents the pent-up anger of the country now taking its vengeance on the forces of the city, but as we will see, further context is necessary when examining *Prophecy*.

Clover ultimately finds that the “urbanoid” narrative conceals a conservative and misogynistic political project. In films that pit a woman from the city against rural male threats, what results is what Clover refers to as a “gender snarl” around the subjectivity of the white male “country” assailants:

In one urbanoid film after another, the local people are presented as ‘fucked’ by city interests even before real city people arrive on the scene...If the city raped the country metaphorically...the country responds in literal, carnal kind. Thus in the double-axis film, the (metaphorically) raped are pitted against the (literally) raped (162).

While the rural men are empowered because they sit at the top of one hierarchy, the gendered, they sit below the city woman on an economic hierarchy. In order to reclaim power, they target the woman protagonist using what power they have available to them, in this case the physical, psychological, and symbolic power to physically assault and thus “dispossess” the woman of her human status by treating her as a sexual object. In this analysis, the rape-revenge genre thus argues that class hierarchies are ultimately subordinate to gender hierarchies. Urbanoia horror is thus a manifestation of “urban” guilt over feelings of having “metaphorically” “raped” the land and that the land’s inhabitants may emerge to carry out a literal form of violence in retribution. By displacing a story of land dispossession onto a story of sexual violence, the rape-revenge subgenre has found a way to dress a defense of colonial hierarchies in feminist sheep’s clothing, at least in Clover’s formulation.

In the case of *Prophecy*, the implications of the urbanoia are even more troubling, as these anxieties ultimately invite the viewer to identify *against* the Indigenous Opies and with Robert and Maggie, thus undermining the film’s otherwise sympathetic rendering of Indigenous peoples. When audiences cheer on Robert in his final confrontation with Katahdin, they are aligning themselves with what would be the “cowboys” in a traditional Western. A fundamental problem of *Prophecy*’s narrative, then, is that it draws upon the conventions of “urbanoia” without fully interrogating how city versus country conflicts ultimately invites viewers to cheer on the “haves” in their murder of the “have-nots.”

In addition to being an expression of urbania, *Prophecy* is also a narrative which renders Indigenous resistance to colonialism as an act of revenge. There is a twin narrative conflict that drives the action and produces the structures of antagonism within the film *Prophecy*: the first conflict, which Robert works to resolve, is that he must discover the source of the contamination on the reserve. Robert is a doctor sent in to serve as a mediator of the competing claims of the paper mill and the Opies. An outsider to the conflict, Robert is rendered as a neutral party who bears “the white man’s burden”: he sympathizes with the plight of the Opies, and yet his investigation also positions the paper mill as a non-guilty party when he discovers that the mill owner was unaware of the contamination that was spreading. Robert’s character thus enacts a “settler move to innocence” via an adoption plot (Tuck and Yang 15). Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang introduce this terminology and argue that these are rhetorical and representational moves made by settlers which “attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all” (10). In this narrative schema, “He [the settler] adopts the love of land and therefore thinks he belongs to the land” (15). Thus, in these moves to innocence, the settler “makes” himself Indigenous, or positions himself in ways parallel to the Indigenous person, by mimicking their ways of knowing and being. Tuck and Yang explain that one way that settlers perform the “adoption” of Indigenous identity is through experiences of violent suffering, instrumentalizing traumatic experience in order to claim a ‘right’ to Indigeneity or Indigenous knowledge. In this way, this move is also a process of paving over Indigenous suffering so that a new history of *settler* suffering can become the dominant historical



narrative, as well as an affirmation of the right of white patriarchal settler possession. In this process of re-inscription, the settler produces a narrative of suffering which, as it encodes its own representational schema, erases Indigenous historic and contemporary suffering.

In *Prophecy*, it is through their suffering at the hands of Katahdin, for the sake of protecting and saving “the land,” that Robert and Maggie “prove” themselves to be adequate stewards of land and knowledge. For the last thirty minutes of screen time, the couple are chased from location to location by Katahdin, and this extended suffering serves to bolster audience identification with the characters. Through his experience of suffering, Robert is figured as the “rightful” steward on the land via his successful rejection of an extremism that is represented by both the Opies and the mill owners. Through this appropriation of Indigenous suffering, Robert augments white settler identity so that it becomes purified through an experience of violence, rendering him as innocent and as most ethically and technologically equipped character in the narrative.

Simultaneous to Robert’s plot is another, one which serves to bolster audience identification with the couple: the question of Maggie’s imperiled pregnancy. Viewers are told at the start of the narrative that Maggie is pregnant and that she has not yet told Robert about this development, fearing that he may pressure her into having an abortion. For much of the film (most of the narrative up until Katahdin’s pursuit in the final act of the film), narrative tension is generated around this white settler heteropatriarchal domestic drama. In a scene where Robert explains the way the contaminants have travelled up the food chain and produced the monstrous Katahdin, Maggie interrupts him

to ask, “So if a pregnant animal ate some fish...”, thus disguising that the question is about her by routing her inquiry through a question about Katahdin. It is here that the horror of the film pivots away from Indigenous reproductive futurity, which never matters, and towards white reproductive futurity, which always matters the most in the national imaginary, in public policy, and in medical practice. As Robert explains that the effects of mercury poisoning are mutation and “freakism,” the film posits that Maggie’s body has been rendered vulnerable (made “like” Indigenous women’s bodies and land) due to her recent regression into animalistic forms of living – most specifically her consumption of wild, local animals. Maggie’s “innocent” encounter with nature has resulted in her contamination by the seemingly uncontrollable forces that the film argues reside there. In his response to her question, Robert affirms Maggie’s fears - yes, she has been reduced to the position of the contaminated animal that she fears most. Throughout the sequence the camera focuses on Maggie, lingering on her in long takes that force the audience to study her horrified, silent reactions. The shared positionality of Maggie and Katahdin becomes explicit as the scene continues. As Robert elaborates on the monstrosity of Katahdin, the audience is aware that he is also unknowingly producing an increasingly clearer object of horror for Maggie. Maggie, who is now isolated from medical science that could confirm or deny her fears, thus becomes the central object of audience anxiety and sympathy since we too cannot know whether the being in her womb has been contaminated and made monstrous.

The problem in this moment is that the previous mysteries of the film have been resolved: the audience now knows what created Katahdin and why the monster appears

the way it does. What remains unresolved - and will do so for the remainder of the film - is whether or not Robert's decision to pursue this knowledge has resulted in unknowingly disrupting the reproductive futurity of himself and his wife. What began as a horror story about the unforeseen consequences of capitalist greed has now mutated into a story that effaces the violence against Indigenous women by centering audience horror and identification around Maggie's opaque, unknowable body. Maggie's plot is another example of a settler adoption move to innocence; In her instance, Maggie "becomes" Indigenous because the film subjects her to the same reproductive uncertainty that the Indigenous Opies - and their lands - experience.

*Prophecy's* structure of identification reveals that violence only becomes recognizable as violence when the settler is the one who suffers. In *Prophecy*, the settler move to adoption occurs through Robert and Maggie's suffering at the hands of the mercury contamination *and* Katahdin. Robert, Maggie, and their as-yet unborn child suffer for the sake of protecting and saving the Opie's spaces, and it is through their suffering that the viewer is to understand the *true* stakes of ecological racism: the collapse of the middle-class settler family. By showing that they can suffer and respond properly to this suffering (through medical science, positivism, heteronormative forms of romance, and "reasonable" forms of violence) Robert and Maggie "prove" themselves to be adequate stewards of land. The film thus makes a clear ethical distinction between Indigenous peoples and white settlers: Indigenous peoples want *revenge* and white settlers demand *justice*.

## Indigenous Women's Abjection

Alongside its representation of white colonial innocence in the face of Indigenous revenge, *Prophecy* repeatedly represents the Opies, and particularly the Opie women, as not only non (re)productive, but *dangerous* to their children. Ramona, the only Opie woman character who speaks in the film, reports to Robert that many of the Opie women have been experiencing stillbirths or other reproductive complications. She also hints that the Opie women are killing or abandoning any children born that exhibit symptoms of mercury poisoning. As the film progresses, there is less emphasis placed on a resolution for the Opies and more focus is placed on Maggie's reproductive concerns. The Indigenous women begin to simply function as a backdrop for the film's primary drama, which is the threat the contaminated environment creates for a white settler heteropatriarchal future.

The dynamic between active Robert and the inert Opie women is the product of same racial hierarchies through which the film maps Indigenous spaces. Throughout the narrative, Indigenous peoples are swept up into Robert's project of 'ecological purification' (read: land seizure), and their positioning as passive objects to be treated seeks to justify systems of patriarchal white supremacy. Such uneven positioning reveals that '...attachments to place and the capacity for ecological agency are dependent on the roles afforded to people by human systems' (Ruffin 53). Thus, *Prophecy's* white supremacist, paternalistic discourses map both Indigenous places *and* bodies as sites to be managed. Through this paternalistic and colonial framing, Robert's "righteous" ecological mission to "discover" the root of the contamination and "purify" the land and

its inhabitants both justifies his colonial intrusion and figures Indigenous peoples and lands as always already the property of white male settlers.

The film figures Indigenous women's relationships to their children as antagonistic and dangerous, and this anti-Indigenous and misogynistic logic also orients the audience's relationship to the film's monstrous antagonist Katahdin. Throughout the film and in promotional materials, the monster Katahdin is gendered as female and is closely aligned with the Indigenous Opie community to the point where she herself is coded as an Indigenous woman. Although she, unlike the film's other Indigenous feminine characters, is an active agent within the film, her status as a degenerated, inhuman other means that she does not properly belong within any space in the narrative. Unassimilable into any categories, the bear-like creature Katahdin's unmappability throws colonial cartographies into crisis. This is a crisis common within horror and other speculative genres, wherein "man confronts something he has never had to confront before, a new creature, a new problem...", a theme which reenacts notions of colonial first contact (Murphy 35). Like the reservation land and the Opie women, Katahdin is both a figure of both possible salvation ("Awakened to protect us," the character M'rai says) and horrific degradation, "a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions" (Cohen 6).

Katahdin's body, like the bodies of the Opie women, is a visible relic of a temporally and biologically degenerated state of being. She is an especially threatening figure not only because of her embodiment: she, unlike the Opie women, is *active*, and she directs her rage outwards - towards Robert and Maggie. As a figure who violently

resists Robert's paternalistic maintenance of Indigenous spaces, she is positioned as a threat that must be destroyed so that colonial order can be restored. In the previously discussed scene where Robert discovers that the mill has contaminated the reservation's water supply, he explains the origin of Katahdin, detailing the forces that led to her monstrous existence:

A developing fetus goes through certain distinct phases. Each phase represents a specific stage of evolution. The human fetus for instance at one stage it's a fish – it looks like a fish it's got fins and gills. At another it's amphibian – webbed hands. At another it's reptilian. At another feline. Developing upward in the distinct shapes and phases of the evolutionary scale. This chemical, methylmercury, adheres to the DNA...it could freeze certain parts at one certain evolutionary stage, while the other parts continue to grow.

According to Robert's description, Katahdin is an assemblage, a being that resists classification within the narrative of the film but whose appearance most resembles a large bear. It is key, at this point, to note that Katahdin, in the film and in marketing materials, is continuously referred to using the female pronouns she and her. The choice to gender her in such a way, combined with her association with the Opies and their land, marks her as the film's most abject figuration of Indigenous femininity. Like the other Indigenous women characters, she is presented as a helpless victim of ecological racism; however, is key to note that the process which led to her monstrous anatomy is couched in the biological terms of evolution. Formulating evolution as a linear movement from primitive to civilized, Robert's monologue is premised on progressivist notions that abject Katahdin and position her as monstrous. Additionally, his explanation of the process of evolution closely resembles the writings of Ernst Haeckel, a German biologist who first coined the term 'ecology.' Haeckel's theories of evolution were highly

progressivist: in his work *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte*, he argued for, “the biogenetic law that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. This principle holds that the embryo of a developing organism goes through the same morphological stages as the phylum went through in its evolutionary history” (Richards 502). This invocation of Haeckel further links *Prophecy*’s entanglements of aestheticized forms of embodiment to progress. Such frameworks seek to make the bodies of racial others ‘readable’ so that seeing and knowing the racial other are the same act.

Such progressivist theories of evolution that link advancement to an aestheticized notion of embodiment have been used to render racialized subjects inhuman vis-à-vis their physical appearance. Zakiyyah Iman Jackson critiques Haeckel’s work, which she explains has placed not only animals on a hierarchy of civilization but also *races*: “Haeckel’s signature articulation of progress in evolution asserted directly that the telos of evolution was evidenced in an observable, and Haeckel maintained, progressivist hierarchy of races” (172). For Haeckel, the work of the scientist was ‘to hone skills of discernment necessary for delineating the metrics and scales given by nature,’ meaning that evolutionary differences were both embodied and observable. Such a desire for science to be able to visually discern differences between species, according to Jackson, reveals that, “...imperialist rationale drove a demand for a material basis of scientific evidence in *general* and was the engine of species designation in both humans and nonhumans” (173). That discourse surrounding species differentiation is deeply informed by, and informing, theories of white racial supremacy thus, “...invites a reconsideration of the extent to which exigencies of racialization have preconditioned and prefigured

modern discourses governing the nonhuman” (Jackson 14). This is precisely the case in *Prophecy*, since the signs of Katahdin’s inhuman degeneracy are not only manifested visually, but her abjection is deeply entangled with the ways in which she is mapped as a racially inferior Indigenous other through her relationship to the space of the reservation and through her association with the other Indigenous women characters.

Like the Opie women who transmit mercury to the bodies of their children, Katahdin’s abjected, inhuman status also carries over to her offspring, a move which again marks Indigenous women as non-(re)productive non-beings. Depicted as skeletal and disfigured, Katahdin’s cubs physically resemble their mother and are thus read in the same ways. When Robert, Maggie, John, and Ramona discover two of Katahdin’s cubs left abandoned in a fishing net, they decide to capture the beings and use them as evidence in their case against the mill. When they arrive at a nearby Opie village, Robert begins to treat one of the cubs, and as he does so, the cub begins to howl loudly. This scene, which allegorically depicts a white settler ‘rescuing’ an Indigenous child, re-enacts longstanding colonial ideologies. Indigenous women have long been represented as incompetent mothers, and Katahdin serves as an extreme example of this. Although Indigenous women are often represented as extensions of a fertile nature, colonial hierarchies have positioned Indigenous peoples at-large as wards of the state. Legally posited as wards of the state, Indigenous peoples are ‘perpetual children’ and thus incompetent parents. This has led to policies where Indigenous children are removed from their families and placed in either white-run boarding schools or adopted into non-Indigenous (primarily white) families. As horrific non-subjects under the care of a



matriarch who has been deemed incompetent through the logics of settler-colonialism, the only salvation for Katahdin's cubs arrives from their rescue by the white paternal forces which Robert embodies.

While at times the film depicts the Indigenous peoples and land sympathetically by showing the negative effects of environmental racism on these beings, it simultaneously takes up Social Darwinist narratives and figures ecological devastation as an inevitable result of their incivility. Because the Opies "...belong to a space in which violence routinely occurs, and...have a body that is routinely violated," their relationship to place serves to naturalize their social conditions (Razack 93). Thus, as *Prophecy* engenders pity towards Indigenous peoples by depicting the horrors of environmental racism, it reproduces colonial cartographies of racial difference that normalize the premature death of Indigenous peoples and map Indigenous lands and peoples as permanently uncivilized and in need of colonial maintenance.

### **The "No Place" of Blackness and Indigeneity**

*Prophecy* further entangles the associations between non-white bodies, degeneracy, and non-places by also distancing Black women and their children from humanity. Visually and sonically, Black space and embodiment are mapped as "non-places," degenerative spaces which threaten to unmake humanity. In one of the film's first scenes that Robert enters a Black housing community. This is the only place, narratively and geographically, where Black people are depicted. Here, Robert interacts with a Black mother and her child. In a shot that shows Robert driving up to a building in the community, Black space is positioned as chaotic and underdeveloped. Black adults

and children stand on the street, some awaiting Robert's arrival, others indifferent to it. A young Black child is shown jumping up and down on a car. The camera slowly zooms in, following Robert's movements, drawing the viewer's attention to Robert as he exits the ambulance and enters the building. The eyes of the neighborhood are also drawn to him, as the crowd is seen looking at and approaching Robert. Visually, the space is depicted through the grammar of decay and disorder, signaled by the trash which litters the street, the graffiti that covers the walls, and by several abandoned cars that line the street. Cars are missing parts and appear rusted. This rendering of Black space as a kind of "non-place" is an example of the afro-pessimist framework that Frank Wilderson III explains in his book *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structures of U.S. Antagonisms*, wherein he argues that there is no "place" for Blackness: "...no slave is *in* the world" (Wilderson 11). Before one can develop a relationship to a place, one must be seen as occupying a place in the world, and for Wilderson, the "void" of Blackness prevents this from ever happening. When reading this sequence's mis-en-scene, it becomes clear that there is no visual of any sense of community, productivity, or coherence, signaling that this Black space may in fact *may not be any place at all*.

Rather than belonging to modernity, the Black housing complex is associated with urbanity gone awry, a place where modernity could flourish if not for the incomprehensible disorder of Blackness which seem to plunge the social relations of the space into chaos. Contradictorily existing within yet on the outskirts of modernity, this black space "serves as a dislocation for blackness, intimate to and yet necessarily cast out from the great metropolises of empire...the ghetto is imperialism's interior frontier..."

(paperson 116). Mapped outside of civilization and progress, places where action happens, the Black mother tells Robert that her landlord “lives in Georgetown. He lives with those rich rats up there.” Black space is abjected, like the Indigenous reservation, because it is understood to be a space disconnected from modernity, and this spatial disconnection from modernity serves - like the film’s depiction of Indigenous space - to recursively map the occupation of non-places as both cause and the effect of Black degeneracy.

The encounter that then unfolds between Robert, the Black mother, and her baby portrays the Black mother as unable to care for her child autonomously. The film seems to understand that, within white supremacy, Black women embody a form of maternity which does not allow them to possess their own children. Hortense Spillers argues as much in “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” explaining that gender does not adhere to the body of the Black “woman” and “man” in the same ways it adheres to white men and women, and as evidence she turns to the ways that Black parents could not be recognized as such due to the “total objectification” of the Black person’s body (68). Displaced from the world of paternity and maternity, Black people were excluded from a field which, in non-racialized culture, largely structured one’s gender identity through imposed gender roles and responsibilities. In other words, within white supremacist logics the heteronormative imperative does not apply to Black people because the desire for white dominance supersedes the need to enforce gender coherently. While *Prophecy* does express sympathy for the exploitation of Black and Indigenous bodies under capitalist modernity, this does not prevent the narrative from restaging the dispossession of Black

and Indigenous mothers: Robert takes the child away for treatment, and to serve as evidence in a civil suit against the landlord. After the mother and child leave and Robert returns home, the community is never depicted again. Just as the Black baby is set to function as evidence of her landlord's exploitative housing practices, this scene will be echoed when Katahdin's cubs are later also taken to prove the existence of the contamination. Like Indigenous women, Black women are figured as incapable mothers because of their ontological inability to assimilate into white-supremacist hierarchies. This unassimilability derives as much from their embodiment as non-white beings as it does their placement within spaces of degeneration.

Visually, the film marks Black space as disordered and uncivilized, but Black space is rendered as abject through the film's use of sound. As Robert jogs up the stairs, several men shout at him and several older women are seen standing and talking at the entrance to the apartment. While the viewer can see these verbal interactions, the voices of the Black people in the scene do not register on the soundtrack. Instead, the soundtrack is dominated by the sounds of car alarms and music, reducing the sonic space to inscrutable, voiceless noise. While Robert ascends the stairs of the housing complex, the sound of music fades, becoming replaced with the sounds of a crying baby. The child's screams come to dominate the soundtrack, again associating Black spaces with illegible noise and, specifically here, the noise of pain and suffering. The cries of the Black child foreshadow the cries of Katahdin's children. Sonically and visually, this sequence represents Blackness as chaos, noise, poverty, and decay, concepts which are "incongruous with humanness" (McKittrick, "Plantation Futures" 6).

*Prophecy* does not offer any possibility to reunite Black and Indigenous children with their mothers. Relegated to serve as evidence of the ecological violence that has already been proven, Black and Indigenous children become *specimens* rather than subjects. They do not speak through the voice or words, only their flesh can be utilized as a visual index of a violence that the only the film's White characters are able to ethically question. Black and Indigenous bodies, within the racial hierarchy of the film, cannot function as witnesses of violence against their own bodies, their own communities. Black and Indigenous mothers, and their children, cannot act in ways which would allow them to escape or successfully disrupt colonial hierarchies.

Black and Indigenous places and bodies have, since contact, been mapped through white supremacist colonial conceptions of being and subsequently “made into the physical referent of the idea of the irrational/subrational Human Other” (Wynter 226). Likewise, in *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* Tiffany Lethabo King, affirms this line of thinking, arguing that the process of the colonization of the Americas,

“[inaugurated] the modern notion of the human and...this European human knows itself and continually performs its existence through the dehumanization of Indigenous and Black people. This aspect of conquest, a violent and *repetitive* process of making the modern human through extinguishing Black and Indigenous life, is disavowed and willfully forgotten [my emphasis]” (39).

King calls the relationship between whiteness and Black and Indigenous life “parasitic,” meaning that it is only through juxtaposition with Black and Indigenous incivility and inhumanity that whiteness produces itself through difference as the human. In this understanding Blackness and Indigeneity are *not* the nothingness which the white

colonial imaginary insists on representing them as, instead that they are a wealth of alternative life practices that are necessary targets of “genocide, mutilation, displacement, and negation” for “The human and it’s ‘sequence,’ or *repetition* and arrangement for its continuance [my emphasis]” (King, *The Black Shoals* 53). *Prophecy*’s representation of Black and Indigenous paternity is a repetition of the story of Indigenous and Black non-being which seeks to affirm colonial hierarchies despite its sympathetic representation of the violence of ecological racism against Black and Indigenous women.

As it maps Black and Indigenous people outside the purview of the human, *Prophecy* is also premised upon the abjection of Black and Indigenous *spaces* in that it associates both with the threat of degeneracy. Disconnected from modernity, these spaces are rendered as ecologically and morally degenerated beyond rehabilitation, and as such sites for further toxification, disposal sites over and over again. The result of this mapping process is that Black and Indigenous people are also positioned in this way. Although Black and Indigenous spaces and bodies are portrayed as contemporaneous to white civilization, they are nonetheless situated outside of the narrative of civilized progress and, as a result, are subsequently understood to be degenerated forms of the human. This is best observed by the way both Black and Indigenous peoples are shown watching Robert work. The inability of Black and Indigenous people to engage with and master knowledge of the human body has rendered them helpless bystanders in their struggle against ecological violence. While Katahdin is an Indigenous female figure who acts, her actions are continuously figured as monstrous and antagonistic, violence the only form of expression or agency available. Only a white male protagonist who is

aligned with medical knowledge obtained through Enlightenment modes of scientific research can come to master (and ultimately destroy) the contaminating forces that seem to govern Black and Indigenous spaces.

Despite the similarities in the ways Black and Indigenous spaces are mapped outside of humanity, it is important to note, per King's thinking, that Blackness and Indigeneity are made into irrational others through different yet interrelated grammars of representation. Colonial hierarchies of white supremacy render Black communities as placeless, always-already dispossessed, and furthermore are frequently rendered as incapable of – and uninterested in – developing meaningful relationships to place. Black relationships to place remain unrepresentable. Alternatively, Indigenous communities are seen as belonging in nature – often to the extent that Indigenous peoples have been represented as *being* nature; however, Indigenous relationships to place have been rendered improper and illegible due to the ways they fail to conform to normative capitalist emphasis on property, private ownership, and economic development. Through logics of anti-Blackness and primitivism, colonialism has cast Black and Indigenous spaces as “the lands of no one,” either because they are imagined as *terra nullius*, blank space, or because the lands themselves were deemed so uninhabitable that anyone living in them was not properly living. Through different logics – and sometimes at different times and places – “[Black and Indigenous] identities are made and remade as a perpetual limit point or outside the boundaries of Man” (King, *The Black Shoals* 15). It is worth emphasizing that while the discursive practices that mediate the colonial mapping of Black and Indigenous communities and subjectivities seem at times to be a facsimile of

one another (especially when we focus on the effects of these discourses), they are not equivalent. Yet their interconnectedness further emphasizes the incongruous representational practices which are deployed by the white supremacist colonial imaginary.

### **Traversing Black and Indigenous Antagonisms**

The colonial discourses deployed in *Prophecy* render Indigenous and Black relationships to land illegible as a way to not only abject these groups from the human spatially and ontologically, but they also strategically figure these groups as antipathetic. This, I find, is the most troubling way that *Prophecy* enunciates its white supremacist geo-ontological worldview. While drawing parallels between the two spaces, the film represents Black space in ways which serve to construct antagonistic differences between Blackness, and Indigeneity. After Robert and Maggie are shown the ‘Garden of Eden,’ the following exchange occurs:

John: Don’t mistake these tents for his home. His home was this whole forest.

Robert: You know, just three days ago I was at a place where there were eleven people living in a single room.

John: Oh yes?

Robert: I just thought you should know

John: What, that we are asking too much?

Robert: That there are people in this world fighting for a single inch of living space.

John: Yes, because they fought too late.

The inclusion of the above exchange (which comes seemingly out of nowhere in terms of character motivation or plot development) serves to position the Opies fight for sovereignty over their lands and the Black communities fight to articulate their relationships to space as antagonistic political projects. Here, the film figures the Opies’



struggle to regain their territories in colonial terms, as a remapping process which would also dispossess Black communities. John's dismissive response that Black peoples fight for space is has begun "too late" is also in line with the colonial worldview that Black peoples do not produce meaningful relationships to space. Here, the film conceptualizes Indigenous sovereignty in ways which analogize it with colonial mapping processes. This instrumentalization of sovereignty "allows the Settler/'Savage' struggle to appear as a conflict rather than as an antagonism," by implying that Indigenous sovereignty movements share the same goals and grammars as colonial mapping projects (Wilderson 154). By rendering sovereignty in this way, the film shows that Indigenous relationships to space only become meaningful when rendered in legible colonial terms. *Prophecy* then also serves (though certainly unintentionally) as a warning against articulating Indigenous relationships to place through the terms of colonial recognition, as this grammar of representation bolsters white racial supremacy and perpetuates anti-Blackness.

It is especially key for Indigenous Studies to understand the way that *Prophecy's* instrumentalization of sovereignty reveals the need for anti-statist and anti-conservative mappings of Indigenous space. Rendering sovereignty in colonial terms is a move to trap Indigenous thought within a matrix of recognition that offers some legibility so long as indigeneity operates within colonial boundaries. Such a boundedness is antithetical to Indigenous critical thought, which understands that movement and change has always been a part of Indigenous histories, before, within, and beyond colonialism. Additionally, sovereignties guided by an anthropological gaze which situates authenticity in a fixed, prior, "pure" point in time are also not the solution. Rather than being fixed, "Native

sovereignty is a living and dynamic concept in constant flux” (King, *The Black Shoals* 149). An Indigenous critical thinking that seeks to oppose not only colonialism but also anti-Blackness must understand that places and peoples co-constitute each other and that peoplehood and place are not terms to be naturalized and made unchangeable: “It is our responsibility to interrogate our ever-changing Native epistemologies that frame our understanding of land and our relationships to other peoples... (re)mapping is not just about regaining what was lost and returning to an original and pure point in history, but instead understanding the processes that have defined our current spatialities in order to sustain vibrant Native futures,” writes Seneca scholar Mishuana Goeman (2). The sovereign cartographies that Indigenous peoples collaboratively live and dream should seek to remap space, being, and the grammars of representation so that Native *and* Black life can flourish. This does not mean that Black and Indigenous solidarities are not and will not be messy, complex, and difficult. As my discussion of Black and Black feminist ontologies show, there are necessary frictions between these fields which can produce productive new understandings of space and being. What *Prophecy*’s rendering of Native sovereignty makes clear is that to claim that such solidarities are impossible/unthinkable enables settler subjects to instrumentalize an antagonism which has been used to buttress white supremacist worldviews.

*Prophecy* reproduces a racial hierarchy in which Black and Indigenous people have been excluded from normative understandings of space because logics of racialization and conquest have rendered these ways of producing and relating to space as illegible, degenerate, and inhuman. Goeman argues that through colonial mapping

projects, “Bodies are organized, categorized, surveilled, and made readable to the state by mapping national and non-national spaces and appointing the appropriate bodies in these spaces” (36). An analysis of “urbanoia” which traces out the impacts of colonial and anti-Black mapping process reveals that the archetype of the rural as uncivilized persists because these places have been rendered permanently underdeveloped and unlivable is through their geographic association with racially inferior communities. As I will argue in my later analysis of *The Hills Have Eyes*, it is this prior, underlying anti-Black and primitivist geo-racial discourse that enables the analogy with lower class whites who live in rural areas to function. Deconstructing these settler cartographies of people and place can serve to denaturalize our understandings of place and the human, making visible the “transits” which enable colonial mapping processes of space and the body to operate undisturbed and as the universalized norm.

## **Conclusion**

Black and Indigenous critical geographies and theories of place have exposed how theories of subjectivity intersect with colonial mapping practices. Colonial geontological boundaries are a way to generate and police boundaries of where it is safe and possible to live. At the same time some spaces are marked livable, other spaces are marked as empty, dangerous, and/or uninhabitable, whether or not those spaces are being lived in by people already. Black feminist scholar Katherine McKittrick notes that, “Native reservations, plantations, and formal and informal segregations are just some of the ways the lands of no one were carved up to distinguish between and regulate the relations of indigenous, nonindigenous, African, and colonial communities, with some

geographies still being cast as uninhabitable for particular groups” (6). In turn, “Bodies are organized, categorized, surveilled, and made readable to the state by mapping national and non-national spaces and appointing the appropriate bodies in these spaces” (Goeman 36). There is thus a recursive relationship established between space and inhabitant: if one occupies a “non-place,” they do so because they are a non-human, and if one is non-human, the place one inhabits becomes “no place.” Through variations of this primitivist logic, Black and Indigenous people have been excluded from normative understandings of space because logics of racialization and conquest have rendered their ways of producing and relating to space as illegible, degenerate, and inhuman.

This chapter has examined the ways that colonial discourses seek to represent and thereby constrain Black and Indigenous peoples’ relationships to land. The geontological discourses at work in *Prophecy* reveal that the logics of colonial mapping projects not only generate and police the boundaries of the state, but they also delimit the conditions of possibility of bodies and identities. While this chapter has focused primarily on explaining the ways colonial discourses produce and manage geographic distances (and the understanding of what those places and distances connote), other techniques are used to position Indigenous peoples as distant from humanity. In the next chapter I will show how this occurs through temporal and intellectual discourses with emphasis on the ways that Indigenous men and white women experience racialized gendered hierarchies in ways which are incongruous with those experienced by Black and Indigenous women. In both instances, white supremacist heteropatriarchal institutions benefit from the

production of distance between marginalized communities whose collaboration threatens to unmake colonial hierarchies of being.

Chapter 2:  
The Ones Who Did Not Die:  
Captivity Narratives and Final Girls

“Bruised, half-alive, or dead is often the fate of what comes within  
the masculine grip.”

– Trinh Minh-Ha,  
“Commitment from the Mirror-Writing Box”

In this chapter I place two representations of ‘suffering women’ -- the Final Girl and the woman in captivity -- in productive friction to show how colonial epistemologies subtend representations of the female victim-hero figure that is the Final Girl. Stories of suffering white female figures like the Final Girl and the woman in captivity destabilize settler colonialism’s gender binaries and subject-object binaries by enabling white women to temporarily inhabit forms of subjectivity which is usually reserved for white men. In the case of the Final Girl, she comes to inhabit the traditionally masculine role of the hero by learning to, at least temporarily, control the ‘looks’ of the monster, the camera, and the viewer. Similarly, the Puritan woman who writes of her experiences amongst Indigenous captors occupies, temporarily, the exceptional state of a witness-subject who can attest to her own experiences of suffering and survival, acts of testimony which were largely only accessible to men. Through a close reading of the texts *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (also known as *The Sovereignty and the Goodness of God*) and the 1982 film *The Ghost Dance*, as well as a discussion of theories of slasher horror and the Final Girl, I will show that it is through the acquisition of a colonial ‘knowing gaze’ that the suffering white woman is partially afforded a ‘generic,’ unmarked (and therefore universal) form of subjectivity.

According to Carol Clover, horror's Final Girl challenges the gendered conventions of cinema because in her narrative, "The gaze becomes, at least for a while, female" and, most importantly, this apprehension of the gaze does not lead to annihilation but instead to the Final Girl's, "...triumph...[which] depends on her assumption of the gaze. ("Her Body, Himself" 219). The Final Girl thus upends the claims made by scholars like Linda Williams, who argues that in horror cinema the female who looks is "violently punished" because of the ways her look "offers at least a potentially subversive recognition of the power and potency of a non-phallic sexuality" (570). While Clover admits that allowing a female character to apprehend the gaze does not necessarily mean that the slasher film is feminist in its politics; However, the repeated representation of a heroic female lead who outlasts her male peers "...would seem to suggest that at least one of the traditional marks of heroism, triumphant self-rescue, is no longer strictly gendered masculine" ("Her Body, Himself" 219). As such, for Clover, the figure of the Final Girl marks a "visible adjustment" of the terms of gender representation, terms which are decidedly more "ambiguous" than previous representations of women in cinema and literature ("Her Body, Himself" 221).

Yet turning critical attention towards the captivity narrative reveals that there exists a long history of texts which invites a male audience to develop a similar identification with a suffering female protagonist. The captivity narrative, like the Final Girl slasher film, does not offer another tenable "alternative perspective" with which to identify other than the female protagonist (Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws* 62). And, like the slasher, there is an "exposed...invitation" for a male reader to identify with

and center the female protagonist's experiences (ibid). In this regard, the narrative journey of the Final Girl and the woman in captivity are deeply alike, both in their triumphs over a monstrous other and in the ambiguities these characters invoke. It is these resonances, and their epistemological implications, which I examine in this chapter.

Theories of the Final Girl have failed to seriously consider the ways that race, gender, and sexuality augment one another within colonial hierarchies.<sup>4</sup> In the previous chapter, my analysis of *Prophecy* reveals the ways that gender does not adhere to the bodies of racialized women in the same ways it does to the bodies of white women. Black and Indigenous women are not subject to the same protections which the patriarchal white supremacist offers to white women, and in fact have been subjected to surveillance and violence intended to curb their reproductive futures. Indigenous Feminist theories of gender and sexuality expose the historic policing of Indigenous peoples' and show how these regimes of surveillance sought to justify genocidal state policies. In *Domestic Subjects*, Beth Piatote explains that "surveillance was a fact of life on the reservation" and that all aspects of Indigeneity serve as, "...site[s] to be surveyed, documented, measured, and changed under the terms of American assimilation" (1). Likewise, Joanna Hearne has written extensively on the material and representational policing of

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<sup>4</sup> For examples of racial analyses of the monster in horror, see Robin Means Coleman's *Horror Noire: Blacks in American Horror Films from the 1890s to Present*, Leonard Cassuto's *The Inhuman Race: The Racial Grotesque in American Literature and Culture*, Harry M. Benshoff's "Blaxploitation Horror Films: Generic Reappropriation or Reinscription?", Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)", and Robin Wood's chapter "The American Nightmare Horror in the 70s" from his *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan*. Analyses of the race – and specifically the whiteness of the Final Girl – are more limited. For this, see Isabel Pinedo's "Get Out: Moral Monsters at the Intersection of Racism and the Horror Film," and Kinitra Brooks' "The Importance of Neglected Intersections: Race and Gender in Contemporary Zombie Texts and Theories".



Indigenous women and families, arguing that most Western films “refuse to imagine the continuation of Native families” and that, “In that refusal, sympathetic Westerns constitute and repeat one of the dominant tropes in the history of both the Western and federal Indian policy rhetoric, the ‘vanishing Indian.’” (8). The policing of Native people’s reproductive futures normalizes narratives of Indigenous illness, disappearance, and death, obscuring the role ongoing genocidal colonial policies and discourses play in producing these conditions.

On the other hand, within colonial patriarchy, white women’s purity and fecundity (and the cultural, political, and economic value associated with these things), must be protected at all costs. In order to understand the persistence of a suffering white woman character whose suffering is intended to conjure the sympathies of a primarily white male audience, theoretical analysis must account for the ways images of white femininity have been, and continue to be, instrumentalized within colonial racial and gendered hierarchies. Images of white women suffering at the hands of Indigenous peoples are deployed within resistance as revenge narratives to reify colonial hierarchies and justify violence against a threatening and destabilizing Indigenous presence. In Rowlandson’s text and *The Ghost Dance*, white women characters whose subjectivity threatens to breach racial, gendered, and sexualized boundaries are deeply threatening to colonial ontological and political projects. The horror associated with possible acts of trespass committed by or upon the figures of the Final Girl and the woman in captivity reveal how these figures have been instrumentalized to serve key boundary-making

functions within the colonial imaginary, and particularly within resistance as revenge narratives.

### **“Penned by this Gentlewoman Herself:” Mary Rowlandson’s Exceptional Captivity Narrative**

Mary Rowlandson’s *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* is the first and most famous captivity narrative in American literary history. In the text, Rowlandson recalls the eleven weeks she spent as a captive of the Nipmuc, Wampanoag, Narragansett, and Pokanoket which had allied together against Puritan colonists during King Philip’s War. It is also a source which has inspired countless critical debates within the fields of Early American Literature, Feminist and Women’s Literature, Early Colonial History, and Indigenous Studies.

Many of these debates center around the text’s status as a mediated object. Although Rowlandson is listed as the text’s author, scholars have debated the degree to which she was involved in the writing of the narrative. In *Buried in Shades of Night*, Billy Stratton controversially claims that similarities between the biblical passages cited in Increase Mather’s sermons and those in Rowlandson’s text, as well as the density of the interpretations of those quotations, imply Increase Mather’s “...presence not only as the outside ministerial hand in question, but as the primary author of the narrative itself” (119). Aside from the potential acts of ghostwriting by of Mather, the narrative was not published until nearly five years after Rowlandson’s captivity was said to have occurred. Scholar Ben Yael-Zvi explains how writers like Louise Erdrich have played upon this fact and the notion of memory within the text in order to expose how, “...the Rowlandson

legacy is composed of recurrent retrospective impositions of illusory semantic stability on a messy past” (21). There are many factors surrounding the production of Rowlandson’s text which create complicated and messy interpretive conditions. These various mediating factors throw into question Rowlandson’s status as a reliable witness to the events reported within her text, provoking debates as to whether the text should be approached as a piece of literature or as a primary historical text.

While the question of the degree to which the text is mediated is an interesting one, it is not within the scope of this chapter to discuss whether Rowlandson’s narrative is entirely ‘true’ in the sense that it is an accurate reflection of her experiences of captivity; Rather, I am interested in what Tara Fitzpatrick calls the “cultural work” of the captivity narrative, specifically the ways it both exposes contradictions within colonial epistemologies *and* seeks to contain these epistemological breaks. *This* is the sense of mediation that most interests me and drives my engagement with *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*. Whether or not Rowlandson’s text is a fiction or a report of her lived experiences, her narrative offers insights into the representational schemas and reading practices of the Puritans, both of which *mediated* their engagements with the world, with history, and with Indigenous peoples.

Rowlandson’s narrative mediates, within the text itself, her expression of her own experiences alongside references to biblical scripture and quotes attributed to Indigenous peoples. Additionally, the preface attempts to mediate the reader’s engagement with the body of Rowlandson’s narrative. These intra-textual negotiations between multiple speakers, interpretive practices, and historical and cultural positionalities, coupled with

captivity narrative's status as both an exceptional tale of an individual and a set of 'generic' conventions (both in the sense of specific generic classes or categories *and* the generic as the unmarked, predictable, and thus 'common' or universal), are particularly of interest for those engaged with the study of genre.

Ambiguities and tensions surrounding Rowlandson's status as the protagonist of her narrative immediately arise within the text's preface. Per Amicum's explanation, which precedes the body of the text and appears prior to any of Rowlandson's own recollections, attempts to impose an interpretive framework upon the story which follows. Per Amicum explains that the narrative should be read as a "...Narrative of the wonderfully awful, wise, holy, powerful, and gracious providence of God, toward that worthy and precious Gentlewoman" (Rowlandson 28). Such a rendering seeks to evacuate any agency on the part of Rowlandson, as all acts leading to her eventual freedom were not of her own doing, but rather acts directed by God himself. It is thus God who not only throws Rowlandson into the scene, "casting her into such a waterless pit", it is also God who is responsible for "...preserving, supporting, and carrying [Rowlandson] through so many such extreme hazards" (ibid). Reading Rowlandson's narrative through this lens, her acts of survival are far less threatening to patriarchal gender schemas as she remains an object who is acted upon by a paternalistic force (the Lord) rather than a subject who undertakes her own rescue. Such an interpretive frame is one attempt to contain the exceptional experiences of Rowlandson within Puritanism's patriarchal epistemologies.

In the preface, *Per Amicum* also offers a “dispensation” to Rowlandson as a way of authorizing not only Rowlandson’s exceptional experiences (and thereby validating their facticity), but the dispensation also seeks to re-inscribe her experiences within the conventions of biblical scripture. *Per Amicum* asks the reader that they not “cast any reflection” upon Rowlandson or her text, as it is the exceptional status of her experiences which requires that they be shared publicly: “... this was a dispensation of publick note and of Universal concernment; and so much the more...” (29). The term dispensation also appears in the passage discussed above, wherein *Per Amicum* figures Rowlandson’s experiences as a test of God. There, the preface states that “It was a strange and amazing dispensation that the Lord should so afflict his precious Servant and Hand-maid...” (Rowlandson 28). The term “dispensation,” as it functions within the preface, is thus used to describe both the exception granted to Rowlandson in order to permit the publication of her experiences *and* a mode of constructing a historical telos that emerged out of biblical precedence. Puritan typology was a mode of reading the present which justified the colonization of Indigenous lands and violence against Indigenous peoples, it was also a mode of narrating all of history which figured the Bible as historical precedent.

For the Puritans, time could be relegated into a series of temporal epochs, each marked by God’s differing interactions with people on Earth. These temporal epochs were deeply intertwined, though, as the gospel served as a prophecy of the future to come. This orientation toward time structured the Puritan’s reading practice -- typology -- as it figured all instances of providence in the present as re-occurrences of the Gospel. *Per Amicum* renders Rowlandson’s experiences precisely in this way: “Methinks this

dispensation doth bear some resemblance to those of Joseph, David, and Daniel, yea, and of the three children too, the stories whereof do represent us with the excellent textures of divine providence, curious pieces of divine work..." (29). Here, Rowlandson's suffering is rendered as a prophetic re-occurrence, and the reader is asked to interpret her suffering through the conventions established within scripture. Puritan typology emerges in Rowlandson's text as a mode of reading which justifies the colonization of Indigenous lands and peoples *and* as a mode of narrating all of history which figured the Bible as historical precedent.

In *Rhetorical Drag*, Lorraine Carroll explains that the editorial intercession of the *Per Amicum* preface serves an important function in mediating the reader's relationship to the text. Carroll explains that acts of textual mediation by male writers were an attempt to control the threatening subjective status of the woman in captivity:

The rhetorical construction of the female captive as both subject and object of her text is unstable, and the instability emerges from the category of experience itself: women's experiences conventionally did not include assuming roles of public authority. Moreover, the long tradition of viewing women's bodies as objects subverts or destabilizes the authority of the captive woman's expression, her voice of experience. That is, her subject position is always threatened by her object position. These first-person captivity narratives therefore simultaneously erected and deconstructed the foundations for their own authority. (8-9)

*Per Amicum*'s framing of the narrative is another strategy deployed to contain the ambiguities and ruptures that arise out of Rowlandson's narration of her experiences, and her experiences themselves. Rendered in this way, the threat that Rowlandson poses as an agential female narrator and author is contained because her acts of public writing are necessary because they speak to "Universal" concerns that are carefully determined by

the preface. Additionally, the threat that Indigenous peoples posed to Rowlandson's body and their ability to overcome the Puritans and take her captive is contained through typology's temporalization. Because this experience was biblically pre-ordained, it is cast as Rowlandson's successful navigation of God's test rather than a failure of Puritan society to properly police and protect her body. Approached through this orientation, Rowlandson's narrative thus both contradictorily exceptional *and* conventional, yet the threats posed by both her body (as protagonist and narrator) and Indigenous peoples are carefully contained by the reading practices offered in *Per Amicum's* preface.

Rowlandson herself takes up typology as a tool of understanding and containing the threats Indigenous peoples pose to her, her children, and the Puritan community throughout her narrative. In the opening scene which describes the raid on Lancaster, Rowlandson immediately reads the Indigenous peoples as "Heathens" who embody both a physical and spiritual threat to the community: "It was a solemn Sight to see to many Christians lying in their Blood, some here and some here, like a company of Sheep torn by Wolves" (33). Such language not only animalizes her soon-to-be captors, but it also figures the Lancaster community within the familiar biblical image of the flock. Additionally, Rowlandson invokes biblical verse several times throughout her description of the raid, most notably citing a passage from the book of Job wherein raiders attack and steal livestock, killing Job's servants and leaving only one survivor. Here, Rowlandson echoes the words of the lone survivor: "And I only am escaped alone to tell the news" (33). Rowlandson thus utilizes typology to re-cast the raid as a repetition of the attack upon Job's flock and, like *Per Amicum*, attempts to contain the threat posed by

Indigenous raiders as a ‘test’ of her by God. By reading the raid typologically, Rowlandson can manage and contain Indigenous resistance within the conventions of biblical precedence, thus diffusing some of the threat they pose to her and to the reader.

While the above passage re-casts Indigenous resistance within a Puritan historic and spiritual telos after the events of the raid, Rowlandson explains in her narrative that she also utilized typology *during* her captivity as a way to make sense of her experiences. Rowlandson is given a copy of the Bible by her captors and immediately recalls how she turned to the text for guidance:

I took the Bible, and in that melancholy time it came into my mind to read first the 28th *Chapter of Deuteronomie*, which I did; and when I had read it, my dark heart wrought on this manner, that there was no mercy for me; that the blessings were gone, and the curses came in their room, and that I had lost my opportunity. But the Lord helped me to go on reading till I came to *Chap. xxx*, the seven first verses; where I found there was mercy promised again, if we would return to him by repentance; and though we were scattered from one end of the earth to the other, yet the Lord would gather us together, and turn all those curses upon our Enemies. I do not desire to live to forget this Scripture, and what comfort it was to me. (38)

The reading of scripture and the interpretive frame it lends to her experience is a “comfort” to Rowlandson. In her typological superimposition of Deuteronomy onto her own experiences, Rowlandson sees her own redemption and return foretold. Although in the moment she remains “scattered” and is transported “from one end of the earth to the other” through her series of removes, the guarantee that typology offers Rowlandson allows her to diffuse feelings of terror as God would someday “turn all those curses” they inflicted upon Rowlandson back upon her captors.



Rowlandson's apprehension of Puritan typology is what enabled her to transform her experiences during captivity into a set of legible and predictable conventions. As Lorraine Carrol writes,

Women's captivity narratives such as Rowlandson's manipulate the double exceptionalism of wilderness survival and female first-person public voice to represent the possibilities for Puritan practice in any place, at any time, and by anyone adhering to Puritan principles of self-examination and public confession, even a woman (28-29).

By mastering this typological reading method, Rowlandson was able to claim that she knew that she would escape danger, return to her family safely, and that her Indigenous captors will soon face God's destructive wrath. Rowlandson does so within the conventions pre-ordained within the *Per Amicum* preface, and in so doing manages to remain within the conventions placed upon Puritan women. The threats posed by Indigenous peoples and Rowlandson's own voice are contained within her narrative.

One can thus cast the narrative of *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* in these terms: through her mastery of the typological gaze, the protagonist Rowlandson is delivered successfully from the grasp of her monstrous captors. Rowlandson thus performs her mastery of the typological reading practice that the *Per Amicum* preface invites the reader to deploy. By looking and reading in ways which are deemed acceptable and generative to the Puritan community, Rowlandson successfully navigated the spiritual test God has imposed upon her without breaching the limitations placed upon her Puritan motherhood. What *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* shows is that Puritan women could become proto-Final Girl type protagonists who look, act, and escape the monstrous grasp of their

captors -- so long as they operated within the temporal and ideological boundaries set forth by the church's patriarchal authority.

**“When you disturb the dead, you must pay the price”**

Images of white women threatened by demonic Indigenous peoples continue to circulate within the colonial imaginary. One such horror film which explicitly represents this fear is the 1982 slasher *The Ghost Dance*. Although significantly lesser known and critically debated than *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, the film directly invokes and re-inscribes the captivity narrative to suit more contemporary debates which arose during the late 1970s and 1980s regarding the anthropological excavation and use of Indigenous remains and cultural patrimony.

Filmed on the campus of University of Arizona, Tucson, *The Ghost Dance* depicts the story of Dr. Kay Foster, an archeologist whose investigation into Indigenous Ghost Dance cultures is interrupted after her crew excavates the remains of Nahalla, an evil Indigenous “Ghost Dance cult” leader and who actively stalked and hunted white people. A local Indigenous man named Aranjo sneaks into the excavation site at night and steals an object from the grave, causing him to become possessed by the spirit of Nahalla. The film soon slips into the conventions of the slasher, with Aranjo/Nahalla methodically stalking and killing Foster's employees and colleagues one-by-one. Ultimately, during Foster's investigation into Nahalla, it is revealed that Dr. Foster is the reincarnation of Nahalla's lover Melissa Stewart, a white woman that Nahalla and his men took captive and who eventually fell in love with her captor. And, in the film's conclusion, Foster chooses to re-unite with Nahalla, with the ending stinger implying that

the now reunited Stewart/Foster and Nahalla/Aranjo will continue upon their path of bloody revenge.

*The Ghost Dance* develops the horror underwriting Rowlandson's narrative to its logical extreme – rather than return home to safety, the captive woman not only rejects colonial authority and the partial and mediated subjectivity it grants to her, but the captive also develops an erotic relationship with an Indigenous man. In this way, the film exposes the important boundary-making and maintaining functions that images of white women in captivity continue to serve within the colonial imaginary.

For most of the film, Foster manages to resist apprehension by Nahalla by reading his body in ways which render him temporally distant. Foster's anthropological gaze functions, like Rowlandson's typological one, to diffuse the threat that Nahalla poses by rendering him an object of the past. Thus, what close analysis of this film reveals is that the colonial hierarchies of being which allow the Final Girl to move into proximity of the human require a simultaneous distancing of Indigeneity away from the purview of the human.

Prior to the staging of the conflict between Nahalla and Dr. Foster, the film first depicts the violent deaths of two Indigenous women. Before he becomes possessed by Nahalla, Aranjo is shown interacting with an Indigenous woman named Lena, who repeatedly challenges the mystical power Aranjo claims to control. Lena's character attempts to emasculate Aranjo by rejecting his claims to power. Lena is soon punished, as shortly after he possesses the body of Aranjo, Nahalla returns to the adobe and cuts Lena's throat. Right after this sequence, another unnamed Indigenous woman character is

also quickly dispatched. In this instance, the unnamed woman arrives at Nahalla/Aranjo's adobe looking for the murdered Lena, calling out to her several times. The camera cuts to show Nahalla awaken inside his adobe, and as the unnamed woman leans into the entrance, there is then a quick cut to the exterior of the adobe. Then, suddenly, she is tackled by a large black dog. In a scene that is over forty seconds in duration, the unnamed woman is brutally mauled by the dog, with quick cuts showing her bloodied flesh and missing limbs.

These two murders are notable within the narrative first because mark a change from Aranjo into Nahalla since he now openly wields violence within the narrative and secondly because they are the first two deaths in the film. Additionally, both depict violence between Indigenous peoples rather than the latter deaths which all depict violence by an Indigenous man against non-Indigenous peoples. Through these depictions of violence against Native women, the narrative implies that Indigenous women are one of the primary threats to Indigenous masculinity. The violence doled out by Nahalla is thus directly linked to an apprehension of a masculine form of power in the narrative. To restore his threatened masculinity, Nahalla must eliminate these Indigenous women. After his masculinity is affirmed, Nahalla turns his attention away from Indigenous women and towards his white targets. As such, the film is premised on a monstrous Indigenous masculinity which can wield narrative power *only after* it has eliminated Indigenous women from the erotic economy of the narrative.

For the duration of the rest of the film's revenge plot, colonial hierarchies of race and gender are structured around the romance triangle created between Nahalla,

Foster/Melissa, and Foster's Indigenous lover and fellow archeologist Tom Eagle. Foster/Melissa and Nahalla are positioned in relationship to one another through visual cues because they are subjected to ambivalent forms of looking: they are both subjected to looks with attempt to disempower them *and* they can exchange gazes which are inscrutable to other characters. In Foster's case, she is gazed upon and inscrutable because she is a woman and in Nahalla's case because he is Indigenous. Such a relationship to looking and being looked reveals that narrative's intention to interpenetrate the positions of the white woman and the Indigenous man. Within the film's imaginative economy, the Indigenous man and the white woman who has "gone native" make the only logical coupling because of their shared forms of inhumanity.

One way the characters of Nahalla and Foster are linked, within the film's visual economy, is through their subjection to masculine and paternalizing forms of the gaze. In line with classical notions of the male gaze, the film provides the viewer with scenes which reveal that Nahalla can exert power over Foster through his gaze. This is shown after Foster's colleagues are murdered by Nahalla in the university museum – once they are eliminated, he begins stalking Foster. In one sequence, Foster sits in her home, looking out the window into the woods. In a deployment of the 'camera as monster' first person perspective 'I-camera' shot, the camera cuts to the exterior of the home, and we briefly occupy the position of Nahalla, gazing into the window to look at Foster in silhouette. The inclusion of such a shot is one of the many ways that the film figures Foster as a Final Girl. Within the genre expectations, such a shot is designed to show that Foster is disempowered by the monster's gaze, a look which reveals that she is

susceptible to the violence of the monster. Eventually, Nahalla emerges from the darkness and through an eyeline match, Nahalla and Foster exchange a look. When this occurs, loud drumming takes over the soundtrack and Foster (or is it now Melissa?) is shown holding a large knife. However, this gaze is interrupted when Eagle approaches her. Foster turns, and it appears whatever control Nahalla has been exerting over her through his look is now broken.

For much of the film, Nahalla subjects Foster to this kind of monstrous, masculine, and controlling gaze. When Foster is driving home down a dark desert road, Nahalla again stalks her and produces horror through his constantly shifting gaze. In one moment, he appears as a bright red light behind her car. As Foster struggles to see him in the rear-view mirror of her car, he appears in front of her and the two again exchange a gaze. Foster attempts to escape, however Nahalla again moves, appearing again in the rear window of her car, causing Foster to scream and veer off the road. This pattern implies that Nahalla can gain some kind of psychic control over Foster through his look. The power of this control is emphasized when Foster is told that in the 1800s Nahalla captured Melissa and that later, when Melissa's sister arrived in an attempt to rescue her, both Nahalla and Melissa "tortured the girl for days."

Such instances in the film align with Linda Williams's claim that, in the horror film, the monster and the woman are linked in the ways that both signify a sexual otherness which is a monstrous deviation from traditional patriarchy. Describing the scene from *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925) when Christine looks upon and unmasks the Phantom, Williams writes that,

Clearly the monster's power is one of sexual difference from the normal male. In this difference he is remarkably like the woman in the eyes of the traumatized male: a biological freak with impossible and threatening appetites that suggest a frightening potency precisely where the normal male would perceive a lack. (567)

In *The Ghost Dance*, Foster and Nahalla are similarly marked as sexual others. Foster occupies the position of the empowered and yet still vulnerable woman who is circulated amongst various male figures, whereas Nahalla represents a racialized sexual appetite which threatens the boundaries of settler sexual propriety. Previously rendered as lacking via his relationships with Indigenous women, Nahalla achieves virility within the narrative through his use of violence. More broadly, his use of violence would be read, from a psychoanalytic perspective, as a mis-appropriation of power which seeks to fill the void created by his sexual neutering.

Foster is also subjected to objectifying white masculine forms of looking, and, more specifically, a patriarchal distrust of her ability to see. After she is stalked by Nahalla in her car, a sequence shows her in a police station attempting to report her experiences with the monster Nahalla to the police. While she produces a sketch, her report is openly dismissed by the police chief, who tells her that "I have no intention of wasting my time looking for some mystery man out in the desert." The police chief dismisses any supernatural causes but warns Foster that she may be the victim of an Indigenous person who is upset at her anthropological investigation. Since at this point the viewer has confirmation of the supernatural nature of the narrative, we are being asked to sympathize with Foster/Melissa via her experience of gaslighting by white male

authority figures. Deemed unreliable by those who can help her, Foster is left to rely on her own investigative gaze to resolve the conflict with the monster.

While police station sequence sympathetically renders the ways that white femininity is also policed via paternalistic and patriarchal colonial gaze, this narrative also works to conceal how Foster can exert power through her instrumentalization of a masculine, colonial, and white supremacist anthropological gaze. Linda Williams claims that "The woman's gaze is punished...by narrative processes that transform curiosity and desire into masochistic fantasy," yet throughout the film, Foster is shown looking at Nahalla's remains and various technological representations of his body (563). And, while Nahalla can gaze at Foster, his vision is limited to the external, whereas Foster's anthropological gaze allows her to see, literally, *inside* of Nahalla. As the sequence continues, a series of flashbacks play, showing how a funerary object has inserted into his remains prior to burial. By using x-rays, for example, Foster and her colleagues can explore the physical and mental interiority of Nahalla. During the examination of his remains, Foster asks her colleague if he wants to "open it up," when referencing Nahalla's body. The impersonal language of "it," used in reference to Nahalla's remains, is dehumanizing and objectifying, and it positions him at a distance from humanity and subjectivity.

Additionally, it is worth noting that the anthropological gaze which Foster uses to apprehend Nahalla is a temporalizing gaze as well. Like Rowlandson's typological gaze which re-casts the Indigenous body within a prophetic Christian history, Foster's anthropological gaze seeks to keep Nahalla at a distance temporally. Nahalla, within the



context of the film, literally represents a force from the past re-emerging to haunt the present. Yet, Aranjó is a man of the present re-cast as temporally distant from modernity both through his possession by Nahalla and through primitivist logics. This is what Johannes Fabian has deemed the “denial of coevalness” which emerges within anthropological and ethnographic discourse (25). Progressivist anthropology which places cultures and peoples upon a temporal telos from savagery to civilization means that “What makes the savage significant to the evolutionist’s Time is that he lives in another Time” (Fabian 27). Such is precisely the case for Nahalla *and* Aranjó, who, within the logics of the film, are rendered as belonging to a non-modern temporality which is distant from the present and contemporary time of Foster. Like Rowlandson’s typological gaze which places Indigenous peoples within the boundaries of biblical time, Foster’s anthropological time makes the same move only in secular terms. Therefore, the film places an emphasis on depicting shots of Nahalla’s remains, as they function as a visual reminder of his prior-ness temporally and his distance from humanity.

It is through Foster’s apprehension and instrumentalization of this temporally distancing anthropological gaze that she can exert power over Nahalla and uncover information which reveals his motives. This apprehension of the gaze is what empowers Foster as a Final Girl, just as Rowlandson’s use of typology empowered her to ‘read’ the bodies of Indigenous peoples in the captivity narrative. In her initial theory of the Final Girl, Clover traces out how, in the slasher film, the position of the ‘looker’ eventually shifts from the monster to the Final Girl, stating that, “...it is through the killer's eyes (I-camera) that we saw the Final Girl at the beginning of the film, and through the Final

Girl's eyes that we see the killer, often for the first time with any clarity, toward the end” (“Her Body, Himself” 219). Because this shift occurs, it shows that the “largely young and largely male” audience is both capable of and comfortable with identifying with a woman protagonist (Clover, “Her Body, Himself” 192). This is precisely the shift that develops in *The Ghost Dance* -- Foster’s use of a masculine anthropological gaze which objectifies and temporally distances the Indigenous other manages, at least for most of the film, to keep the sexual and physical threat that Nahalla represents at bay. It is only when Foster abandons this gaze at the end of the film that the threat returns, she is ‘sent back’ to a temporally prior state (of being Melissa), and she is overcome with destructive desire.

Through her claim that the figure of the Final Girl creates the conditions for a male audience to identify across gender difference with a female protagonist, Clover is specifically engaging with previous notions of the gaze that have been argued for by scholars like Laura Mulvey. Directly disputing Mulvey’s theory of a cinematic male gaze which always renders women as objects “to be looked at” rather than gazing subjects, Clover shows that, in the slasher, the female protagonist gains agency through her exercise of visual control over the monster. Further, Clover is disputing Linda Williams’ reading of horror which argues that the horror film allows the woman to look “only to punish her for this very act, only to demonstrate how monstrous female desire can be” (Williams 35). In direct contradiction to Mulvey and Williams, Clover shows that the Final Girl is an agential character who drives the narrative and that her powerful acts of

looking and later knowing are the very mechanism which reverses her punishable position:

At the level of the cinematic apparatus, [the Final Girl's] unfemininity is signaled clearly by her exercise of the 'active investigating gaze' normally reserved for males and punished in females when they assume it themselves; tentatively at first and then aggressively, the Final Girl looks for the killer, even tracking him to his forest hut or his underground labyrinth, and then at him, therewith bringing him, often for the first time, into our vision as well. (*Men, Women, and Chainsaws* 48).

Such a looking dynamic is presented using set of distinct visual techniques. For example, in many instances, Nahalla's use of the first-person 'I-camera' is mirrored by several first-person 'I-camera' perspective shots which then show his remains from Foster's perspective. Such a shift in perspective also represents the Final Girl narrative's shift in narrative perspective, since the camera is now moving from the perspective of the monster into the perspective of the Final Girl.

It is also important to note the mirrored ways that Nahalla and Foster can access interiority through looking. In Nahalla's case, he makes the interior visible through the violence of slashing and opening up living flesh. This violence is explicitly marked as inhuman and outside of the realm of rationality. However, Foster also wields this power through her physical examinations and through her various excavations of his remains. Foster begins the narrative of the film by 'opening up' Nahalla's body by extracting his remains from their burial place. Additionally, the film repeatedly shows scenes where Foster extracts knowledge from Nahalla by cutting open his funerary covering and his remains. Yet in these sequences, the film does not attempt to parallel these violent forms of 'opening up' with one-another through a use of montage or parallel editing.

Examining these sequences from an Indigenous Feminist orientation, these forms of looking which are temporally distancing justify the violent extraction of knowledge from Indigenous peoples and the surveillance of Indigenous peoples are horrifying – but in a very different way than the film positions them. During the examination sequences, the focus specifically seems to be on the grotesque nature of Nahalla’s remains, which is expressed through repeated close-ups of Nahalla’s skeletal face and body. In these instances, the film attempts to erase Foster’s violent looking-through-extraction by visually emphasizing the inhumanity of Nahalla, a technique which distracts the viewer from the fact that the anthropologist deploys these exact modes of mutilation when she works to write the narrative of the Indigenous other. In these sequences, the living white flesh of Foster/Melissa is continuously contrasted with Nahalla’s decayed, Indigenous flesh, a move which works to conceal the violence of Foster’s extractive mutilation *and* position her as human through her participation in the desecration of Nahalla’s decayed flesh.

While this analysis has revealed that both Foster and Nahalla are able to look in ways which are violently extractive, distancing, and masculine, they are both, importantly, not fully in control of their representations. By this, I mean that the film takes care to show how both characters can circulate as images without their consent or knowledge. In Nahalla’s case, as I have previously discussed, his remains and x-rays function as representations which provide Foster and her anthropological institution with knowledge about him. Nahalla is also repeatedly shown in archival images and documents that Foster uses to further explain his motivations for stalking her. Foster also

uses her vision to produce the image of Nahalla for the police, a tactic which is never mirrored or reciprocated by Nahalla.

What is notable is that Foster discovers that she, too, can circulate within the archive without her knowledge or consent. After the police produce a sketch for her, she is shown an image of Nahalla in a historical document. She places her own image next to the historical image, revealing that Nahalla is indeed the man who keeps appearing to her. However, her colleague also informs her of the image of Melissa that also exists in the archive. Foster is horrified to see her own image, in this case the self which existed prior to her present-day reincarnation, also contained within the archive. However, the film betrays its desire to conflate the positionality of Foster and Nahalla in the sequence: when Foster shows the images to Eagle, she places the image she produced of Nahalla *over* the image Melissa. In a close-up shot, Eagle carefully moves the image of Nahalla away, revealing the image of Melissa which is hidden underneath. He then places the image of Nahalla back on top of the image of Melissa and closes the book.

Through this palimpsest, I argue, the film attempts to resolve the autonomous gaze that Foster has exerted over Nahalla by reducing both to objects within the archive. However, it is precisely because Nahalla has always already been objectified within the anthropological institution in ways which Foster has managed to instrumentalize which distinguishes their positionality. In other words, Foster's position as a Final Girl, and therefore an agential subject within the narrative, is premised on the ultimate objectification of Nahalla's threatening Indigeneity.

## **The “Generic Knower”: Towards an Indigenous Feminist Theory of the Final Girl**

In the final section of this chapter, I want to interrogate feminist psychoanalytic theories of the gaze and the Final Girl from an Indigenous Feminist perspective. As I have shown in my analysis of *The Ghost Dance* and Mary Rowlandson’s narrative, the Final Girl and her prototype, the woman in captivity, serve as important narrative and ideological tools which can be used to affirm patriarchal colonial epistemologies. The Final Girl is one of horror’s most famous and most critically investigated figures, and yet the links between her whiteness and her apprehension of a ‘knowing gaze’ have not yet been theorized in relationship to one another. In the remainder of this chapter, I want to re-examine theories of the Final Girl in order to begin to understand why the colonial implication of the Final Girl’s knowing gaze have been overlooked within horror criticism and to explain how the Final Girl’s apprehension of the ‘knowing gaze’ limits the anti-colonial political possibilities of this genre archetype.

Carol Clover first proposed her theory of the Final Girl in the 1987 article “Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film” to problematize debates around audience identification theory. According to Clover, slasher Final Girls tend to conform to the following general conventions: she is a woman, an active, agential character, the one who witnesses firsthand the violence of the monster and living to tell the tale. Thus, despite the monster’s best attempts, she is, in Clover’s formulation “the one who did not die” (*Men, Women, and Chainsaws* 35). Clover’s Final Girl is also frequently described as “boyish” because she embodies many characteristics that are usually associated with male heroes in action and detective narratives: she can think on her feet, she solves

problems, she has some physical aptitude, and she slowly obtains the ability to “read the signs” of the monster’s presence. Additionally, the Final Girl is actively positioned in ways that differentiate her from other women characters in the narrative. Usually this occurs via her rejection of ‘promiscuous’ sexuality: she is shown as nervous around men (as is the case with Laurie Strode from the *Halloween* series) or as actively antagonistic against male characters (for example, Ripley from the *Alien* franchise). Although she doesn’t engage in sexual activities, the Final Girl is coded as a heterosexual woman and is often still placed in sexualizing situations despite her rejection of sexual advances in the narrative.<sup>5</sup>

A prototype for what will come in her monograph, Clover situates the stakes of her readings of horror in a cultural analysis, arguing like many others that horror films mirror the ideologies of the audiences which consume them.<sup>6</sup> She first situates herself within the horror genre by arguing that, because of its status as a less aestheticized (and therefore ideologically masked) genre, the horror film more transparently reflects contemporary understandings of gender and gender relations. She states that, “...the slasher film, not despite but exactly because of its crudity and compulsive repetitiveness, gives us a clearer picture of current sexual attitudes, at least among the segment of the population that forms its erstwhile audience, than do the legitimate products of the better studios” (Clover, “Her Body, Himself” 188). Horror films, because of their repeated plot structures and character archetypes, are a relatively “fixed” genre in Clover’s perspective.

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<sup>5</sup> The most famous example of this is Ripley, who is stripped to her underwear in the final sequence of *Alien*.

<sup>6</sup> Robin Wood is the most noted scholar who has made similar claims. It is also important to note that in her article, Clover describes Wood approach as “anthropological” (188).

In turn, the compulsiveness of the films themselves marks a compulsive desire in the audience, one which is worth interrogating further.

Clover's monograph *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* expands upon the argument posited in her essay "Her Body, Himself" and more broadly explores the role of women in other horror subgenres. I have discussed this monograph elsewhere in the dissertation, but here I will focus on how Clover develops the idea of the Final Girl in her first chapter where she argues not only that young men are statistically the group who consumes horror films more than any other demographic, she claims that "Young males are also...the slasher film's implied audience, the object of its address" (*Men, Women, and Chainsaws* 23). This addition shifts her argument significantly, since Clover is now establishing a calculated, reciprocal relationship between the horror film and the young, white, male subject. Horror films, in Clover's formulation, function as a kind of mirror for their young white male audience, a mechanism which scholars can use to track their shifting understandings of gender. In this case, the fact that horror films increasingly cast women in heroic roles shows that the older (primarily white) men making films and the younger white men consuming the films now believe "...that gender is less a wall than a permeable membrane" (Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws* 46).

Ultimately, Clover's argument about the Final Girl achieves a few goals: first, it identifies a reoccurring trope in the horror genre. Second, it explains this trope and how the presence of a Final Girl in a horror film frequently impacts and informs the structure of a horror narrative. Third and finally, she argues that the persistence of this trope must



mean that young white men are becoming more able to identify ‘against’ their gender, thus showing that earlier claims about audience identification in films are not as applicable in these instances. This shift is therefore a sign that young men are beginning to find pleasure in identifying with women characters.<sup>7</sup> Clover is, however, careful to explain that the loosening of gendered identification does not mean that the genre is radically critiquing patriarchy or heteronormativity (*Men, Women, and Chainsaws* 64). The figure of the Final Girl is thus a deeply ambivalent character type, and Clover carefully concludes that the inclusion of a main female character does not a feminist text make; Rather, the Final Girl can be and is instrumentalized for a political project that supports patriarchal gender structures.

The misogynistic implications embedded in constrained sexuality of the Final Girl has frequently been problematized in horror studies scholarship. In his contribution to Final Girl theory, Kyle Christensen agrees with Clover that the Final Girl is not an “inherently feminist figure” and proves this through an analysis of two prominently discussed Final Girls: *Halloween*’s Laurie Strode and *Nightmare of Elm Street*’s Nancy Thompson. Christensen notes that Clover’s study largely ignores Nancy’s character, insisting that she serves as one of the best examples of the “feminist” possibilities of the Final Girl trope.<sup>8</sup> Although she has been championed as a feminist figure, Christensen

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<sup>7</sup> Clover is careful not to argue that this phenomenon is undoing the patriarchy or toxic masculine ideologies, and rightfully so given the politics of the examples that she includes and the films that I will examine here. Primarily she is interested in showing how earlier notions of audience identification, namely those written about by Laura Mulvey, are not as applicable to slasher films that contain the Final Girl character type.

<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Markovitz also champions Nancy as a feminist Final Girl, arguing that *A Nightmare on Elm Street* repeatedly shows the audience that Nancy’s fears are justifiable. He uses this as evidence to claim that the overall message of *Nightmare* is that we should trust the paranoia of women, claiming that

argues that Laurie Strode's narrative arc upholds misogynist ideologies. Rather than displaying the qualities of a liberated and agential woman, "Laurie often seems to reflect the core characteristics of the oppressive 'cult of the true womanhood'...purity, piety, submissiveness, and domesticity" (Christensen 29). In his view, Laurie is "extremely pure and virginal," "very much concerned about appearing upstanding and moral," she is "submissive" and "Laurie is domesticated, using babysitting, thus surrogate motherhood, as her chief means of disposable income" (Christensen 29). According to Christensen, Laurie's ability to fight off the monstrous Michael Meyers is a direct result of her alignments with conservative notions of femininity, *not despite them*. So long as she remains within the confines of a womanhood that is pure, virginal, and domestic, she can experience the narrative agency which is usually only made available to male characters.

It is critical to note that the Final Girl must operate within a constrained relationship to her sexuality if she is to gain access to the gaze, and she must *only* look in ways that are generative to colonial epistemologies. This is just as we have seen in both *The Ghost Dance* and *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*. Importantly, Clover notes that through her use of an investigative, 'knowing,' gaze, the Final Girl emerges as an agential character within the narrative. She states:

At the level of the cinematic apparatus, her unfemininity is signaled clearly by her exercise of the 'active investigating gaze' normally reserved for males and punished in females when they assume it themselves; tentatively at first and then aggressively, the Final Girl looks for the killer, even tracking him

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"Paranoia is at the heart of the critique that horror films pose to patriarchal power. To the extent that these films encourage us to see female paranoia as a reasonable response to a world that is hostile to women, they can offer powerful critiques of existing power relationships" (Markovitz 219).

to his forest hut or his underground labyrinth, and then at him, therewith bringing him, often for the first time, into our vision as well. (Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws* 48).

Again, just as in *The Ghost Dance* and Rowlandson's narrative, the apprehension of a patriarchally-sanctioned gaze both protects the female protagonist from overstepping the barriers of propriety *and* contains her acts of witnessing within a colonially acceptable epistemology. That is, the Final Girl does not clearly fit into colonial binary gender categories because she is given access to a kind of gaze that is normally reserved for masculine and male characters in film. The ability to adopt and utilize a gaze that produces knowledge is one of the ways that allows the Final Girl to accumulate knowledge about the monster so that she can later exercise violence or other means to banish them from the narrative. So, in addition to abandoning any sexual desires, adopting this 'knowing gaze' is a fundamental way that the Final Girl becomes agential and powerful within the narrative.

Like Clover, Vera Dika also acknowledges this phenomenon of the 'knowing gaze' in her analysis of slasher films when she explains that:

The heroine of these films is usually presented as a strong, practical character with a variety of well-developed skills...*her ability to see* and to use violence gives her the status of a valuable character. In her ability (admittedly limited) to cinematically *take others (especially the killer) as the object of her gaze* and to engage in narratively significant action through the use of violence, the heroine occupies an essentially 'masculine' position within the film. [my emphasis] (55)

In both Clover and Dika's formulations of the female heroine in the slasher, there emerges a common pattern of the slasher film's narrative progression: First the narrative allows the Final Girl access to a 'knowing look' which allows her to discover information

about the monster and assess possible weaknesses. Then, she can use the knowledge she produces about the monster to either fight back herself or to assist a male authority figure in defeating the monster. Both Clover and Dika connect the apprehension of the gaze to the apprehension of *knowledge* in such a way that it appears within the slasher genre that *seeing and knowing may be one and the same*. Similarly, when Dika says that it is the heroine's "ability to see and to use violence," one must consider, when thinking about the ways that Foster violently objectifies the remains of Nahalla through her use of the anthropological gaze, whether this kind of investigative seeing *is itself* a kind of violence.

This story pattern in which the Final Girl apprehends a violently knowing gaze fits into the broad narratological structures offered by Noel Carroll in *The Philosophy of Horror*. Carroll's study attempts to apprehend, at its most abstract level, the underlying themes and structures of horror. He argues that, by apprehending how these films function narratologically, scholars can understand why it is that audiences want to watch them and why it is that we experience the affect he refers to as "art horror," which is a fearful affective response to images, ideas, or beings which we know do not exist in reality. In his elaboration of two major plot structures, the complex discovery plot and the overreacher plot, Carroll concludes that, "...horror stories are predominantly concerned with knowledge as a theme" (127). The complex discovery plot makes a more utopian argument for knowledge production, driving characters to pursue information about the monster that they later utilize to apprehend or defeat it, while the overreacher plot is more pessimistic, arguing instead that "criticizes science's will to knowledge" and that "some knowledge is better left to the gods (or whomever)" (Carroll 118). These two plots

ultimately diverge – one functioning as a critique of uncontrolled pursuit of the unknowable and one promoting this kind of inquiry. If we are to understand the investigative gaze as a violent form of looking, then in a way, horror is just as Carroll describes it: a genre deeply obsessed with managing the boundaries of what is safe and unsafe to know and in determining who it is that can safely obtain such knowledge.

Carroll's study is highly structural and while we diverge on many interpretations (and in our methodologies), he is correct in arguing that knowledge production plays a key role in the horror film. What must be added to this discussion is that knowledge production, as a theme, situates the horror genre within a genealogy of colonial humanist storytelling that aligns logic and the production of knowledge about inhuman or less-than-human others as a key aspect of humanity. Returning to his discussion of the narrative patterns in horror, he claims that "Plots [which follow the overreacher or complex discovery pattern] are concerned at some level of narrative with the process of disclosure and revelation – specifically the disclosure and revelation of that which is excluded from our standing conceptual categories" (Carroll 127). While many have argued that horror is about making visible the invisible through violence (the cutting open of the body in order to make interiority accessible to the camera and to the audience),<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> For examples of analysis which explores the cutting open of the body as a method of "making visible," see Clover's chapter "Opening Up" in *Men, Women, and Chainsaws* and Xavier Aldana Reyes *Body Gothic: Corporeal Transgression in Contemporary Literature and Horror Film*. For an alternative analysis of how knowledge production positions the audience and produces narrative tension, see Aviva Briefel's "What Some Ghosts Don't Know: Spectral Incognizance and the Horror Film." Briefel's analysis is particularly interesting because it explores films in which "that which is beyond" is unknowable even to those ghosts who unknowingly occupy the afterlife.

horror is importantly also about making that which has been previously unknowable knowable, or at least more known, to the audience and to the characters of the narrative.

One cannot deny that, as fictional creatures, that the monsters in horror films are indeed readable and knowable to the spectator/audience, but what I find troubling is the critical consensus that the Final Girl's visual apprehension of the monster is a way that this figure can be used to radically trouble patriarchal gendered hierarchies. While this comparative move to understand oneself by marking differences with the other can produce empathy, it is premised on a model of knowledge production that produces the being observing as an active agential subject and the being observed as a disarmed object. Esme Murdock has criticized this colonial mode of knowledge production which identified as the "idealized archetype...[of the]...generic knower" (214). In colonial epistemologies, the generic knower is positioned as both a universal and an unmarked positionality – a being of total objectivity to the point of non-embodiment: "...the generic knower aspires to decontextualization through obscuring or ignoring the literal conditions of epistemic vantage point" (Murdock 219). Colonial epistemologies seek to position the white, able-bodied, cis-gendered and heterosexual male as the unmarked norm of being and the paradigm of humanity.

Conversely, anyone who deviates from this norm is placed at a distance from the figure of the human: "The legacy of the generic knower has worked with processes of domination to construct nongeneric or nondominantly situated knowers in a visibilized specificity that accompanies practices of racialization and gendering" and that participation in such a regime of knowing "requires complicity in one's own

subordination” (Murdock 215). Such is the case in both Rowlandson’s narrative and in *The Ghost Dance*, wherein Indigenous characters who do not adopt colonially sanctioned forms of looking are either killed or rendered inhuman, and only through complicity in these patriarchal and colonial forms of knowledge production that Foster and Rowlandson can escape violence. Thus, the Final Girl, in being offered the positionality of the “generic knower” apprehends a gaze which has been “normally reserved for males” and is “essential masculine” - such statements also expose the non-visibility of such a “generic knower.” To occupy such a position enables a partial concealment of the white woman’s embodiment, allowing her to occupy the non-embodied and therefore ‘unbiased’ position of a trustworthy knowledge producer.

Indigenous feminisms fundamentally contest that there is a universal notion of being, no matter whether that kind of being is named as ‘man’ or ‘woman.’ Rather, they understand that “...the very categories of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ are creations of heteropatriarchy and settler colonialism, thereby invalidating the conventional assumption that women are singularly oppressed by men” (Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill 18). Such a critical orientation fundamentally challenges the frameworks offered by western psychoanalytic film theory as practiced by scholars like Laura Mulvey, Linda Williams, Barbara Creed, and Carol Clover. If there is no universal notion of womanhood and no universally experienced form of patriarchal oppression but instead a plurality of experiences which are inflected not only by one is gendered but also how one is racialized, then the figure of the Final Girl, who is consistently represented as a cis-gendered, heterosexual white woman, cannot serve as a narrative device which speaks to

the experiences of women of color, Indigenous women, as well as many other groups. As my analysis of the figure shows, it is only through a measured conformity to racial and gendered hierarchies that the figure of the white Final Girl can function as an exception to the rule. Indigenous women are consciously excluded from the kinds of agency that Rowlandson and Foster experience, and they are also figured as victims of violence at the hands of Native men in *The Ghost Dance*. The differences in experience that play out within these distinct representational strategies expose the fantasy of the universal category of ‘woman’ for what it is.

Thus, theories which ignore or overlook the persistent whiteness of the Final Girl cannot apprehend how this whiteness enables her to function distinctly from people of color within colonial racial hierarchies. Additionally, they risk appropriating Indigeneity or ‘playing Indian’ through their claim of a universal experience of patriarchal violence. For example, in the first chapter of her monograph *Women and Film*, Ann Kaplan asks the question “Is the gaze male?”. This question develops out of a larger concern of her text, which Kaplan states is to interrogate the gaze:

Following Laura Mulvey, I argue that the male gaze, in defining and dominating woman as erotic object, manages to repress the relations of woman in her place as Mother -leaving a gap not "colonized" by man, through which, hopefully, woman can begin to create a discourse, a voice, a place for herself as subject. (2)

Kaplan’s invocation of the term “colonized,” placed strategically between a set of scare quotes, signals a reoccurring move that has haunted psychoanalytic feminist film criticism since its rise in prominence in the 1970s. As an Indigenous Feminist reader, I am curious about the reasoning for, and effects of, the move to figure patriarchy as a form



of colonization and to figure women as a group which have been ‘colonized’ by men. In this formulation, man exists as colonizer and woman exists as the colonized, seeking gaps within the colonial structure through which they can effectively evade and imagine alternatives. The slippage that occurs here similarly mirrors other moves which elide the violence that Indigenous peoples face within colonialism into white women’s struggle against patriarchal violence. While colonialism in the Americas was one factor in how gender roles were established and policed, I want to state plainly that this does not mean that the kinds of violence white women face are indistinguishable from the violence that continues to be enacted against Indigenous peoples, and my analyses of *The Ghost Dance* and Mary Rowlandson’s narrative make this plainly apparent.

Kaplan’s move to figure all women – including white women – as the victims of ‘colonization’ by men of course also collapses femininity into an ahistorical category that also effaces racial and national differences between women. Additionally, to disregard the ways whiteness is linked to a possessive knowledge-producing gaze ignores the deeper white supremacist epistemologies which sanction the Final Girl’s movement into the ‘generic knower’ position. Such moves have been critiqued for decades by Indigenous and Black feminist scholarship, as this universalized discourse of “womanhood” effaces how white women have historically had access to the gaze in ways which have been denied to racialized subjects.<sup>10</sup> This, I have argued, functions as a settler

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<sup>10</sup> For examples of this Black and Indigenous feminist critique of “whitestream feminism,” see Arvin, Tuck and Morrill’s “Decolonizing feminism: Challenging connections between settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy,” Toni Morrison’s *Playing in the Dark*, Aileen Moreton-Robinson, “Troubling Business: Difference and Whiteness within Feminism,” bell hook’s *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, and Luana Ross’ “From the ‘F’ Word to Indigenous/Feminisms,”

move to innocence which conceals the ways white women, materially, and in how they function as a “grid of associations,” have sanctioned violence against Indigenous and Black peoples.<sup>11</sup> The white woman functions as a nervous boundary between that which is human and that which is not, and, if colonial boundaries and epistemologies are to be maintained, it is only through collaboration with white supremacist colonial ideologies that the white woman can access the rights that are traditionally only offered to ‘man.’ Understood this way, Kaplan’s appropriation of ‘colonization’ to explain the experiences of white women may be better understood as another settler move to innocence which seeks to erase white women’s culpability within the settler-colonial project of Indigenous genocide and erasure.

In the end, if a Final Girl were to embody an anti-colonial critique, she would, terrifyingly, make the very same choice which Foster makes at the end of *The Ghost Dance* – she would not only reject white supremacist patriarchy and ally with Indigenous peoples in the destruction of settler colonialism, but she would also reject colonial humanisms’ claim that the only ‘proper’ mode of looking is through an objectifying gaze. As we will see in the Indigenous re-inscriptions of the resistance-as-revenge narrative in this dissertation’s final chapter, this precisely describes the acts of refusal enacted by the Indigenous women protagonists in Stephen Graham Jones and Jeff Barnaby’s works.

What I seek to expose in my analysis of the objectifying gaze of the Final Girl are the troubling ways that this figure conceals more deeply entrenched colonial

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<sup>11</sup> Here I am borrowing language from Hortense Spillers in “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book.”

epistemologies. While I agree with theorists like Clover and Christensen that narratives which portray women protagonists are not necessarily feminist, it is also fundamental to understand that the gender and racial politics of these narratives are also not necessarily liberatory and anti-colonial. It is also not just sufficient to, for example, place an Indigenous woman in a traditional Final Girl narrative. Rather, if the Final Girl is to truly break down colonial boundaries of race, gender, and sexuality, she must be taught a different mode of seeing.

### **Conclusion**

As Katarzyna Paszkiewicz and Stacy Rusnak write, “The Final Girls are heroic survivors, but they continue to be victims of power relations” (27). This chapter has shown how the figure of the Final Girl affirms colonial modes of knowledge production through her apprehension of a ‘knowing gaze.’ This use of the ‘knowing gaze’ reveals deeper epistemological problems with this narrative archetype, as it is by wielding this temporalizing and objectifying gaze against a monstrously racialized other that this typically white female figure is granted fuller privileges of humanness.

Mary Rowlandson’s narrative stands as an exceptional text in the ways it allowed a white Puritan woman to narrate her own experiences outside of the space of the home. The typological gaze functions to contain Indigenous peoples within a Puritan epistemology and temporality, much in the ways Foster’s anthropological gaze keeps the Indigenous other at a distance. Rowlandson and her narrative remain contained within the boundaries of Puritan settler patriarchy, and her experiences which would have threatened the boundaries of gender and racial norms are also contained. One might even

think of the woman in captivity as a kind of precursor to the Final Girl, as the woman captive must navigate the exceptional status granted to her gender through her ability to look and become the object of reader identification in precisely the ways Clover would elaborate are particular to the Final Girl in the slasher film.

What distinguishes *The Ghost Dance* from other slasher films is that it cannot be fully theorized without considering how whiteness has written its selfhood via its use of the anthropological gaze. The anthropological gaze is rendered innocent through the logics of whiteness, as this violent gaze pries which open the interiors of Indigenous bodies and minds is disguised within a project of humanist knowledge production. Thus, within the horror film, the Final Girl is a figure which effaces the colonial, masculine violence of the anthropological gaze. In order to resist this erasure, scholarship must consider how the figure of the Final Girl is premised on the abjection of the racialized monstrous other. The necessity of this abjection is clear within *The Ghost Dance*, since the Final Girl's ultimate identification with the masculine Indigenous other leads to her regression into monstrous inhumanity.

By failing to acknowledge the ongoing system of colonialism which informs gendered looking relations within settler states, theories of the Final Girl have produced an incomplete understanding of how whiteness, gender, and racialized difference manifest to shape forms of looking. If debates about the feminist critical potential of the Final Girl remain unresolved, this chapter has shown how much deeper these ambivalences run once we consider how the figure's whiteness has been effaced in Horror Studies scholarship.

### Chapter 3

## Projecting the Savage Screen: The Self-Reflexive Horror of *The Hills Have Eyes*

“Sometimes this oppressed or repressed humanity appeared as a nightmare, at other times a goal and a dream; sometimes as an abyss into which mankind might fall, and again as a summit to be scaled; but always as a criticism of whatever security and peace of mind one group of men in society had purchased at the cost of the suffering of another” (180)

- Hayden White, “The Forms of Wildness: Archaeology of an Idea”

“For some reason, white critical theory cannot seem to fathom that self-annihilation is something white people need to figure out by themselves.”

- Tiffany Lethabo King, “Humans Involved: Lurking in the Lines of Posthuman Flight”

In the previous chapters, I have discussed the ways that temporal and geographic discourses are utilized to distance Indigenous peoples from humanity. While at times sympathetic to the suffering of Indigenous peoples, I have shown that the storytelling techniques utilized by films in the resistance as revenge genre ultimately tend to re-center white settler suffering and universalize the positionality and subjectivity of the white settler within their narratives. While contemporary critics may hope that these problematic depictions of the Indian have been overcome in current genre works, we must continue to re-assess the ways horror films instrumentalize Indigeneity within their narratives. In this chapter, I examine the 1977 film *The Hills Have Eyes* and its 2006 remake. The two films rely on the Western discourse of primitivism, both narratively and visually, although Indigenous peoples are absent from the narrative. Reading the films through a Critical Indigenous Studies lens reveals the ways that both narratives rely on grammars of Indigenous savagery when depicting landscape, monstrosity, and retributive

violence, a move which shows how Indigenous absence also functions as a tool of humanist self-making.

One may imagine that the 2006 remake of *The Hills Have Eyes* improves upon the original film's anti-Indian ideologies; However, it is the case that the 2006 version of the film deploys anti-Indigenous primitivist discourses in ways which are more insidiously coded and conservative than Wes Craven's original film. Both versions of *The Hills Have Eyes* rely on the visual grammar of the Western, the cannibal narrative, and the captivity narrative in order to present their arguments about white savagery. Craven's 1977 original is a parable that warns the viewer about the 'primal' tendency toward violence that is lurking within every subject, positing that there is a definite threat that civilization could regress into savagery because of society's insatiable desire for revenge. The 2006 version of the film, on the other hand, openly celebrates the destruction of the inhuman, Indigenous other. This conservative turn is disturbing, and it foreshadows new and emerging articulations of the Indian within the American settler imaginary.

On the surface, both films are in no way 'obviously' about Indigenous peoples or Indigeneity; However, my analysis show that, within the Euro-American settler-colonial imaginary, depictions of retaliation and revenge continuously return to the scene of frontier settler relations to Indigenous peoples. One cannot unpack what it is that makes these films horrifying without reference to the West, the frontier, and Indigenous peoples. This necessary relationship has been made clear by the discourse around the films by both the filmmakers themselves *and* critics. While some could argue that the absence of characters who are phenotypically marked or explicitly labelled 'Indigenous' or 'Indian'

means that these films are not ‘about’ the Indian, the ways that the films draw upon the visual rhetoric of the Western reveals that both have something to say about what the Indian represented and continues to represent in the national imaginary. By reading the two films comparatively, I expose how an Indigenous critical lens is necessary for analyzing *any* settler colonial films that depict retributive violence and revenge, especially those that do not initially appear to be ‘about’ Indigenous peoples.

### **Going Native**

There are innumerable instances of white settlers in the United States and Canada imagining themselves as Indigenous peoples and using these performances to construct and buttress white settler subjectivity and national identity. While few scholars have explored the role of Indigenous peoples in the horror genre specifically, their work has informed my own readings of Indigenous peoples in the genre. Thus, I begin with an overview of several works by Indigenous scholars that I utilize and augment for my own critical purposes.

Perhaps the most famous exploration of white settler representations and appropriations of indigeneity is Robert Berkhofer’s *The White Man’s Indian*, which surveys white depictions of Indigenous peoples from the first Spanish explorations of the new world all the way through the 1960s. Berkhofer posits “two fundamental but contradictory [white] conceptions of Indian culture”: the “good Indian” who is “friendly, courteous, and hospitable to the initial invaders of his lands and to all Whites,” and who lives “a life of liberty, simplicity, and innocence” (28). Opposed to this image is the ‘bad Indian’ who is characterized by “nakedness and lechery,” “passion and vanity,”

“cannibalism and human sacrifice,” as well as “indolence” and “thievery and treachery” (28). He argues throughout the monograph that this dual imagery has largely persisted, motivated both by shifts in cultural and national narratives in addition to shifting economic and political relationships with Indigenous peoples.

In his attempt to understand the who, when, what, where and why of the Indian in the white imaginary, Berkhofer explores literary and artistic representations of the good and bad Indian throughout history. While he notes that the 1920s marked a turn away from stereotypes and towards a desire for more ‘realistic’ representations, he concedes that,

About the only conclusion a historian can safely derive from the history of the Indian in the White imagination is that, even if new meaning is given the idea of the Indian, historians of the future will probably chronicle it as a part of the recurrent effort of Whites to understand themselves, for the very attraction of the Indian to the White imagination rests upon the contrast that lies at the core of the idea. (111)

Examinations of white representations of Indigenous peoples tend to only reveal things about white experience, desire, and cultural practices. This is because, according to Berkhofer, the Indian serves as an appealing image which enables authors, artists, and philosophers to resolve contradictions and tensions that exist within American culture.

While Berkhofer’s text focuses broadly on representation, Philip Deloria’s *Playing Indian* traces the long history of white settler *impersonation* of Indigenous peoples. Beginning his analysis in the late 1700s, Deloria analyzes several organizations and individuals who used Indigenous impersonation to establish individual and national identities. Deloria argues that Indigenous peoples became a tool that was used by white settlers to navigate contradictory or irreconcilable aspects of the nation’s history and



identity. During and shortly after the revolutionary war, rioters and anti-British groups dressed as Indigenous peoples in order to overcome anxieties about their ancestral and cultural connections to Britain. Deloria states that,

Playing Indian was a performance of [the settlers'] doubled identities...a shoemaker in an Indian costume was both a shoemaker and an Indian. These identities existed simultaneously, and they were something more than make-believe...White Indians were a metaphor come to life, and they allowed colonists to imagine themselves as both British citizens and legitimate Americans protecting aboriginal custom. (34)

In line with Berkhofer's thesis, Deloria argues that the Indian, in this instance, emerges as a figure which can help white American settlers imagine themselves as new and separate from the British while also establishing the US as a nation with a deep history. By impersonating Indians, Americans could overcome a cultural contradiction and thus become both new and old.

Deloria's analysis of the appropriation of the Indian and various acts of settlers "playing Indian" reveals the ways that the Indian has been variously positioned within settler-colonial imaginaries. In his discussion of early American fraternal societies, Deloria shows that settlers "...began to transform exterior, noble savage Others into symbolic figures that could be rhetorically interior to the society they sought to inaugurate...As England became a them for colonists, Indians became an us" (22). He notes, however, that these societies later had to negotiate their representations of the noble savage with the actions of actual Native peoples who disrupted colonial life (Deloria 37) . Throughout his monograph, he shows that Native peoples are understood as "internal" or "external" depending on the contradiction that must be overcome. Colonialism thus produces and manages the precise distance at which to hold Indigenous

subjects. In the example of the Boston Tea party rioters, Indians represented an internal, proximate 'us' that could be used to establish Americans as distinct from the British external and remote 'other.'

Scholar Jodi Byrd emphasizes the oppositional nature of Indigenous representation, focusing on the ways the external Indian other becomes the prototype for the ways settler states negotiate and represent "alien" others. In her monograph *The Transit of Empire*, Byrd states that "The non-discriminating, proto-inclusive 'merciless Indian Savage' stands as the terrorist, externalized from 'our frontiers,' and functions as abjected horror through whom civilization is articulated oppositionally" (xxi). Here, she makes clear that Indigenous peoples are produced at a distance from civilization. She also states that the Indian is a "non-recuperative category, a derealization of the Other," revealing that the Indian is always already a non-subject (of themselves and of the nation) and that the Indian serves a specifically representational function within literature, law, film, and other discourses (ibid). In this line of argumentation within Byrd's monograph, she focuses on revealing the fundamental role the Indian plays within subject and nation building processes within the United States. She shows that the Indian is not an absence, but rather an *abundance* of presence which is consciously invoked and disavowed, or in Lisa Lowe's terms is part of "the economy of affirmation and forgetting that structures and formalizes the archives of liberalism, and liberal ways of understanding" that functions by "relegating others to geographical and temporal spaces that are constituted

as backward, uncivilized, and unfree” (3).<sup>12</sup> Throughout her readings of critical and literary texts, Byrd focuses on the ways that Indigenous peoples have been represented as external others, making domestic Indian Law the prototype for later laws and structures applied to immigrants and foreign nations subject to imperial rule. Thus, Byrd’s work in *The Transit of Empire* seeks to identify and unpack the “colonialist discursive givens” in American and Postcolonial studies which “continue to deny indigenous peoples full agency to theorize the world and have that theorization mobilize change” by figuring them as outside of or external to these institutions (31).

One such institution that enabled and continues to enable the figuration of the Indian as an external other is anthropology and the related practice of ethnography. In the 1900s, with the emergence of ethnographic methods of observing and classifying Indigenous peoples, Indians were transformed again into an external other, existing in a different, prior time than the anthropological observer. This created some troubling contradictions for anthropological fieldworkers, as according to Deloria “living informants” who supplied ethnographers with their insights into Indigenous cultures were simultaneously alive and present yet also archaic and distant (116).<sup>13</sup> Ethnographers attempted to resolve this contradiction in ways that affected both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples for generations to come. Ethnography both established Indigenous peoples as a source of ‘authentic’ and admirable cultural and metaphysical qualities while

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<sup>12</sup> Saidiya Hartman has made similar arguments about the role of blackness in constituting liberal humanist understandings of freedom in her text *Scenes of Subjection*. Hartman’s reading practice also informs my analysis of the function of the Indian and will be engaged more thoroughly later on in the chapter.

<sup>13</sup> For more on this allochronic relationship between Indigene and Anthropologist, see *Time and the Other* by Johannes Fabian.

simultaneously relegating them to the past. Indigenous peoples were only admirable so long as they exhibited these limited, archaic qualities – those who appeared to have assimilated too thoroughly into Western culture were deemed ‘inauthentic’ and corrupted by modernity.

Shari Huhndorf has also identified the ways in which Indigenous peoples become a symbol of a more ‘authentic’ and ‘pure’ way of life. In her monograph *Going Native: Indians in the Cultural Imaginary*, she argues that

Going native in its modern manifestations originates in the relations between two simultaneous late-nineteenth-century events: the rise of industrial capitalism, with its associated notions of linear historical progress, and the completion of the military conquest of Native America...Idealizing and emulating the primitive, modernity’s other, comprised in part a form of escapism from the tumultuous modern world. Consistently throughout the twentieth century, going native has thus been most widespread during moments of social crisis, moments that give rise to collective doubts about the nature of progress and its attendant values and practices. (14)

Films and literature play an important role in mediating these moments of social crisis.

A film like *Nanook of the North* offers settler viewers insight into a simpler, more ‘authentic’ way of living in relation to nature and the means of production. Nanook is a father, a hunter, and master of his own destiny. He is not constrained by a timeclock or a factory job, and although he is ultimately destined to succumb to the elements, he lives a life that is fuller and more fulfilling than the “modern man.”

These images are seductive because, as I have noted in my discussion of films like *Prophecy*, they appear to valorize Indigenous ways of knowing and being. However, this valorization requires that Indigenous peoples remain temporally and/or spatially distant from modernity and that they remain ideologically and physically pure. Indians

who fall into the trap of modernity are, in Byrd's terms, "not greivable" because their engagements with settler-colonial systems are seen as tragic choices rather than as actions either forced upon them *or* necessary for their survival.

Through films, Nanook and other Inuit peoples became a kind of "tourist destination" which "[offers settlers] a renewed connection to the earth and the hope of spiritual regeneration" (128). By this, Huhndorf means that real, living Indigenous peoples and communities cease to matter to white settlers – instead they function as representational 'raw material' that enables settlers to develop and regenerate their personal and national identities: "The death of the primitive, staged over and over, enables the birth of the Western subject as spectator/conqueror" (115).

Killing Indigenous peoples, through genocide and acts of settler self-representation enables, in Deloria's terms, for settlers to 'have their cake and eat it too' – to both mourn and celebrate the disappearance of Indigenous peoples.<sup>14</sup> While I have previously discussed this in relation to the film *Prophecy*, I will return to this idea of regeneration later in order to show how the 1977 version of *The Hills Have Eyes* offers a different articulation of this desire for regeneration.

### **Playing Indian: The 1977 Original**

The difficulty in reading for a coherent conceptualization of Indigeneity in texts like *The Hills Have Eyes* stems from the confluences of what Deloria has termed the external and internal positionings of the Indian. Manifesting as a physical other that threatens to destroy the stability and innocence of the nuclear family, the Indian also

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<sup>14</sup> Renato Rosaldo has also articulated this relationship as "imperialist nostalgia."

appears internally, possessing the psyches of the Carter family and driving them towards what Hayden White, in this chapter's epigraph, refers to as "an abyss into which mankind might fall." Indians are dead and disappeared, yet they re-emerge through white regression into savagery. Through this convoluted representational strategy, *The Hills Have Eyes* films engage in the process of "playing Indian" that scholars like Byrd and Deloria have shown is a technique with a long and troubling history. In both versions of *Hills*, the Indian – who is sometimes vividly evoked and at others vigorously disavowed – serves as the prior object of genocide through which self-reflexive, nihilistic anxieties about whiteness, civilization, and terror become imaginable.

The plot of the original 1977 film is as follows: The Carter family, on their way to explore a silver mine that they have recently inherited, are sidetracked when they find themselves lost in the territories of the monstrous Jupiter clan. Jupiter, the group's patriarch and the mutant offspring of a local man named Fred, was left abandoned in the Nevada desert due to his monstrous appearance and behavior. Soon regressing into savagery due to his extended isolation in the terrifying and impure Nevada landscape, Jupiter finds a woman and begins a small family, some members of which are implied to be the products of incest. In a series of gruesome and violence standoffs, the two groups pick one another off one by one leaving only Doug, the son-in-law to the Carter family, and Ruby, the only female and most conspicuously human of the Jupiter clan, standing at the film's violent conclusion.

The original 1977 version of *The Hills Have Eyes* comments on several political issues: it is a nihilistic critique of the American nuclear family and of the logics of

imperialism and capitalism which serve as the basis for many Euro-American genre films. Nearly ten years after the release of this film, director Wes Craven sat down with Christopher Sharrett, then a professor of media studies at Sacred Heart University, and the two discussed the ideological, mythic, and aesthetic qualities of the 1977 film. Sharrett describes the film as “the tale of two families (one 'civilized,' one 'barbaric') clashing on the fringes of the American frontier, now portrayed as a wasteland” (139). Sharrett goes on to offer an analysis of the film’s politics, stating “By combining classical myth with renovated conventions borrowed from Western and melodrama, Craven addresses the undercurrent of repression and consequent backlash in American society” (139). In the interview, Craven explains that he imagined the film as an expression of his own rage and his own “feelings regarding family dynamics” (Sharrett 140). Ultimately Craven expresses that his film utilizes violence in order to critique what he saw as a never-ending, cyclical expression of violence by the United States military abroad:

On the one hand I wanted to deal with that great, purging feeling surrounding violence, but on the other hand, I wanted to show that the idea of reciprocal violence must be halted, this whole idea that 'I'm gonna get those sons-of-bitches who blew up my neighborhood.' This mentality seems to be at the heart of much violence internationally right now. (Sharrett 143)

In his attempt to negotiate American cultural contradictions surrounding the use of ethical violence, Craven drew upon American mythologies from the distant past, most specifically the myth of the frontier and frontier violence. As Sharrett notes, the location of *Hills* - a frontier wasteland - reveals Craven’s desire to reflexively critique a story that has long persisted in the American imaginary. In the interview, Craven explicitly invokes the figure of the frontiersman to express his skepticism over the myth of the frontier. He

says, "I don't think anyone buys the John Wayne image of how we confront violence, both collectively and in the individual" (Sharrett 142). In order to tell a story about his contemporary predicament, Craven turned to the imagery of the frontier reflexively, using the imagery of the Western in order to deconstruct and critique that same mythology.

The film also ideologically responds to the violence of Vietnam by reflexively deconstructing the myth of the heroic frontiersman and arguing that the war abroad has exposed how, when interpolated into an ideology of justified violence, even "normal citizens" can be driven to commit acts of senseless murder. Such readings of the film contextualize it within the cultural crises of the 60s and 70s, positing an explanation for both the volume of violence in Craven's film and the shifts in how that violence is represented as a visual spectacle. In these readings, the film's status as an exploitation film is especially important. The film shows its "atrocities in broad daylight" (Sharrett 139) and, so the argument goes, must do so in order to appropriately shock a now desensitized public who is accustomed to images of destruction that circulate in non-fiction media. Craven himself describes the developments in horror films at the time to be attributable to "...a kind of visceral reaction on the part of the public, perhaps because of the increase in everyday horrors" (Sharrett 140). From this viewpoint, fictionalized violence must be *excessively, spectacularly* violent to produce the desired affective and ideological responses from the spectator.

The film features many scenes where characters are driven to commit gruesome acts of violence because they have been placed into geographic spaces that lead them to



regress into savagery. The film is set in the rural, frontier space of the Nevada desert, somewhere near Nellis Airforce Base. The base served as a repository for many of the United States nuclear weapons (“the air force uses part of this as a gunnery range” Fred tells Ethel Carter, and later the planes themselves shoot overhead, frightening the stranded Carters). While not overtly stated in the movie, it is implied that the monstrous Jupiter family have somehow been physically disfigured due to their proximity to the nuclear materials tested at the base.<sup>15</sup> An old man name Fred tells the origin story of Jupiter:

...when Martha had this one, something went wrong. This thing she give me. Something happened. He was so big. He came out sideways and almost tore poor Martha apart. He weighed 20 pounds and was hairy as a monkey. When he was 10 years old we was big as I was. Accidents were happening all the time. Dogs were falling down the well. I even found chickens with their heads bit off. Then in August of '39 I was in town getting supplies. The whole damn house burned to the ground. My little baby girl was a cinder when I found her. But this monster kid wasn't even singed. I knew he'd done it. I hit him with a tire iron and I split his face wide open...I thought I'd killed him. I was afraid they'd come and take me away. So, I took him out into the desert and I left him there.

Fred’s allusions to Jupiter’s size and physical appearance invoke the descriptions of children born exposed to radioactive materials. Additionally, his animalistic appearance draws on racist Darwinist conceptions of selective evolution, making it seem as though the family’s continued exposure to untamed space of the desert has caused a physiological regression in their children. The combination of the nuclear contaminants, which has decimated the landscape *and* extensive exposure to this landscape that is marked by violence is what triggers the regression of the Jupiters.

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<sup>15</sup> This inference becomes explicitly represented in the 2006 version of the film.

The Jupiter Clan's most transgressive and brutal act of violence occurs during their 'raid' on the Carter family's Airstream trailer. During this sequence, Carter patriarch Big Bob is burned to death, the younger daughter Brenda is raped, and the two mothers of the family, Ethel and Lynne, are murdered. Describing the violence between the two families in this sequence, Craven says:

It is a basic scene wherein one culture supplants another. It always seems that it's the barbarians at the gates and the end of civilization, and all of a sudden they are the ones who end up *being* civilization. I was approaching this in terms of totally amoral forces, as part of what seems to be the human freight train. One can think of the Mayans vs. the Spaniards, the American Indian vs. the pioneers. I was not looking at this aspect of the film from a political standpoint. People just seem to grind up other people, in the same way that animals eat other animals to grow stronger. (Sharrett 143)

As Craven spirals from universality, into specificity, and then back out again, he slips back and forth between the registers of civilization/savagery and human/inhuman in contradictory and mystifying ways. In his discussion of the scene, it seems as though he is aligning the Carters with a colonizing force such as "the Spaniards" or "the pioneers." Inversely, the Jupiter clan is thus aligned with "the American Indian" and "the Mayans." Yet as he continues, these alignments become uncertain – it is unclear who represent the conqueror and who represents the conquered. I parse Craven's full response to the sequence because the contradictions embedded in his language mirror the contradictions of the film. In frontier narratives, the civilized pioneer and the monstrous Indian are posited as mirror images, invoking sympathy for both groups. Yet, like in Craven's discussion of the film, the underlying ontological differences between the pioneer and the Indian soon emerge in ways that render the Indian as abject other temporally, ethically,

and ontologically (and sometimes on all three of these registers at once). Invoking a line of thinking parallel to Richard Slotkin's *Regeneration Through Violence*, Craven implies in his response that the cycle of violence is both deeply dehumanizing and simultaneously regenerative – it occurs so that those groups who do the eating can 'grow stronger.'

This regression is contagious, as exposure to the Jupiters and the Nevada terrain also leads the Carters into savagery, only to emerge stronger – and more 'indigenous' – than the deadly Jupiter clan. The film ends in what seems to be a foreclosure of futurity for the Carter family: at the very moment the futurity of the white, middle-class Carter family is guaranteed by the final and total destruction of the Jupiter family, the film cuts abruptly to the credits. Rodowick argues that, "In a very real sense, the freeze frame which suspends the film is also the signifier of an ideological stalemate which marks not the triumph and reaffirmation of a culture, but its internal disintegration" (330). In the final sequence of the film, Doug, the remaining patriarchal figure of the Carter family, chases down Mars, the remaining patriarchal figure of the Jupiter family. Doug has fully descended into incivility, as the violence he enacts on Mars is framed as excessive, even though it a vengeance killing. The frame then cuts to a low-angle shot of Doug, placing us in the position of Mars and Doug stabs him repeatedly. At this moment of brutal violence, the audience is denied visual access and instead is asked to embody Mars and be figuratively murdered by Doug. Doug stops stabbing and then sits up when the color-correction of the frame shifts, and he becomes a hyper-saturated red color. The red suggests the blood of Mars, which is now on his hands. Although given my reading of

indigeneity as a function in the film, I cannot help but see that the redness of the frame also invokes the redness of the Indian: at the very moment Doug loses control and fully descended into savagery, he is visually marked through redness. This moment can also be read as a new visual articulation of the long tradition of frontier narratives - detailed by Berkhofer, Huhndorf, and Deloria - where the hero is forced to “go Native” to survive the disorganized space of the frontier. This violence is framed as both redemptive AND alienating – it is a necessary violence that is a natural extension of the taming of the landscape. Although the hero is violated in the process, they are redeemed because taking on this violence enables them to secure a future for the rest of settler society.

The film does not depict the reunion of the remaining Carter family members, nor does it show a return to their home. While this initially appears to be a critique of whiteness which exposes the vulnerability of the bourgeois nuclear family structure by turning our attention to the violence that constitutes/maintains both the patriarchal family unit - and the binary of settled/rural spaces - it centers white suffering and in so doing so collapses the distinct and divergent vulnerabilities that become re-inscribed onto a universal other (the Jupiter family).

I read this moment of foreclosure, and the film’s cynical refusal of the future, not as a critique of colonialism but instead as an inoculative move to innocence.<sup>16</sup> To relate this back to Vietnam and the social contract, the then film seems to be presenting the following argument: violence is not committed by insensible ‘others’ – it is just as easy for a ‘normal’ family to kill if they are placed in conditions which require murder as a

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<sup>16</sup> See “Decolonization is Not A Metaphor” by Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang.

means of survival. The feeling of violation that the film produces speaks to a social anxiety that violence can no longer be imagined as existing in an outside space, it is possible for violence to occur at any time and at any place. It, in a sense, then points to the way American experiences of Vietnam produced a radical reorientation as to how the time and space of violence was conceptualized. According to this understanding of the film, the anxiety undergirding the film is this: violence is no longer relegated to rural spaces, it can exist in supposedly civilized spaces as well.

While the film critiques colonial whiteness by showing the disturbing violence that is foundational to the US nation-state, it does not question the way this logic is framed as natural, necessary, or teleological. As a product of the white settler imaginary, the film rehearses the violence of colonialism, projecting a repressed past onto the bodies of the Carters and the Jupiters. The result is a film that seemingly functions to critique settler-colonialism while it effaces the material conditions of that system. In a settler move to innocence, audience members are subjected, safely, to the trauma of colonization, via their affective investment in the narrative. The film functions as a way to naturalize the violence of colonialism by framing white bodies as equally vulnerable to the violence colonial systems (re)produce. The film makes the claim that violence happens because *we are all evil, we are all secretly savage*. In other words – the film makes the claim that *we are all Indians if we look deep inside*. Thus, violence happens naturally and organically due to a universal human experience of alienation, *not* because some bodies wish to exploit and extract labor or land from other bodies. Imbued with a healthy skepticism of the United States' love for a heroic frontier narrative, Craven's

original 1977 film produces its own set of contradictions about the frontier, many of which unfortunately appear to replay rather than rebuke the narrative of ‘Manifest Destiny’ that the director seems so willing to overturn.

Scholarship on the 1977 version of *The Hills Have Eyes* tends to emphasize the class conflicts that occur between the Carters and the Jupiter clan while downplaying and/or failing to address the narrative’s reliance on a visual and narrative grammar of primitivism and Indigenous savagery. D.N. Rodowick analyzes the film’s economy of violence, arguing that the film exposes a contradiction that exists within the capitalist mode of production: “The idea of [filmic] exploitation is not so insidious when we consider that all commercial films manufactured within the capitalist mode of production are exploitative of someone or some class, a fact which is often elided” (321). Ironically, in this analysis, the film’s use of frontier imagery is elided in order to produce a coherent argument about white class conflict. Rodowick states that the ideologies of violence in *Hills* differ from mainstream understandings of violence: “*The Hills Have Eyes*... clearly accept[s] that an ‘ideology’ of violence is an essential, if repressed, component of in the figuration of the bourgeois family” (322). Exposing this ‘essential’ violence which serves as the basis for the family is transgressive because “...in its struggle for survival and/or revenge, the Family manifests a degree of violence which equals or exceeds that of its ‘monstrous’ aggressors, effectively implicating the family in the monstrosity it is trying to combat” (Rodowick 322). He goes on to explain that within the popular Hollywood narrative, violence tends to emanate from an external source or ‘other’ which is eventually defeated by a legally sanctioned authority figure or figures. This structure,

Rodowick supposes, “permits the vicarious pleasure of violence without implicating the audience or challenging any normative ideologies or institutions” (323). In the case of *The Hills Have Eyes*, the audience is exposed – made to consider their participation in systems of violence as they are simultaneously invited to take pleasure in the scenes of violence. Because the Jupiter and Carter families are equally transgressive because of their appropriation of a violence that is normally reserved for authorities whose use of violence is legally sanctioned, Rodowick determines that the film marks “not the triumph or reaffirmation of a culture, but its internal disintegration” (330).

Rodowick’s completes his analysis with no overt references to how the film makes this argument about class through the rhetoric of Indigenous savagery. However, his analysis itself cannot escape this rhetoric; despite the ways it effaces a discussion of savagery. He describes the landscape as “harsh and primeval,” and as “a literal ‘testing - range’ which incorporates and entraps the self-enclosed, self-sustaining space of bourgeois domesticity represented by the Carter’s trailer” (Rodowick 325). The relationship to land that he is describing in this instance has clear parallels to the ways the frontier functions in Turner’s frontier thesis, wherein the landscape is a ‘testing ground’ for the settler where they incorporate and transform through engagements with Indigenous peoples and spaces.<sup>17</sup> He also notes that “the choice of mythological names

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<sup>17</sup> Turner states: “The wilderness masters the colonist. It finds him a European in dress, industries, tools, modes of travel, and thought. It takes him from the railroad car and puts him in the birch canoe. It strips of the garments of civilization and arrays him in the hunting shirt and the moccasin. It puts him in the log cabin of the Cherokee and Iroquois and runs an Indian palisade around him. Before long he has gone to planting Indian corn and plowing with a sharp stick; he shouts the war cry and takes the scalp in orthodox Indian fashion. In short, at the frontier the environment is at first too strong for the man. He must accept the conditions which it furnishes, or perish, and so he fits himself into the Indian clearings and follows the Indian trails. Little by little he transforms the wilderness; but the outcome is not the old Europe, not simply the

for the monster family situates them as part of an archaic past, an older system of social economy whose presence lies dormant in the [Carters]” (Rodowick 325). The relationship he lays out in this quote precisely parallels the ways Deloria described the contradictions between ethnographer and ethnographic subject – the Indigene was simultaneously an external other whose externality was produced through a play of temporal and cultural difference. Simultaneously, evolutionist models of anthropology argued that the Indigene was an internal other, with their cultural and social practices representing what the ethnographer’s culture used to look like. Despite the ways frontier mythology and Indigenous savagery appears as latent content which allows Rodowick to make his argument about class violence, there is no attempt to examine how this primitivist grammar is ultimately what makes the discussion of class violence possible. The emphasis on a universalized notion of alienation and class violence - rather than the primitivist discourse which makes that violence and alienation thinkable - limits the critical potential of the reading. In this way, Rodowick falls into the same trap as *The Hills Have Eyes*: he cannot see that this critique of capitalist alienation and exploitation only becomes possible by the ways the Carter and the Jupiter family ‘play Indian.’

Rodowick is not the only scholar to fall into the trap the film sets; In *Hearths of Darkness: The Family in the American Horror Film*, Tony Williams is more thorough in the ways he links Vietnam-era horror films to Puritan narrative of Indigenous savagery and captivity, but he fails to fully interrogate why the Indian serves as a metaphor or link

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development of Germanic germs, any more than the first phenomenon was a case of reversion to the Germanic mark. The fact is, that here is a new product that is American.”



between imperialism in Asia and US national identity. He states, “Classic Puritan Captivity Narrative conflict appears between the Carters and the cannibal family. Thanks to technology the formerly static homestead is now on wheels, but it is still liable to Indian assault whenever it stops for the night. Although the cannibal family lacks the demonic associations of their counterparts in *Race with the Devil*, there are several significant parallels. Both are losers in the affluent American Dream” (Williams 144). He calls the Jupiter family structure “tribal” (Williams 144) and describes the family in one scene as “moving quickly, like silent Indians” (Williams 146). Later, Williams states, “Living outside an affluent civilization, Jupiter’s family resorts to cannibalism to avoid starvation. Like an American Indian, he regards Bob as a territorial invader. He speaks angrily as he consumes his flesh, ‘Don’t you come out here and stick your life in my face’” (148). Again, and again, Williams invokes the symbol of the Indian, but fails to consider how the significance of two white families ‘playing Indian’ informs the political critique of the film. The repetition of simile: “like an American Indian,” “like silent Indians” marks a difference between the Jupiter clan and ‘actual’ Indigenous peoples in Williams’ analysis, but there is no interrogation of that distinction. Ultimately it appears that the simile collapses into an ontological claim: the Carters and the Jupiter clan are the same when Williams deduces that at the end of the film “Civilized family values are nonexistent; both families are identical” (149). If the white middle-class family and the primitive, savage Jupiter clan are identical, what does that mean for the figure of the Indian?

I include my critiques of these readings of the 1977 *The Hills Have Eyes* because they reveal the limitations of a Marxist analytical framework that does not engage with Indigenous Critical Theory or understand settler colonialism as a structure which produces racially and nationally distinct experiences of capitalist alienation. In the 1977 film and in the two critical readings, the destruction of the Indian serves as a prototype for describing forms of white alienation under capitalism. Moving from Indianness to Vietnamese-ness to whiteness, in these readings what emerges in the interchangeability of these positions is, in Jodi Byrd's terms "not so much a dynamic between native and arrivant per se, but rather a product of colonial discourses in which the particulars of distinct colonial encounters are flattened into equivalencies..." (152). Craven's film attempts to make visible the violence US imperialism has imposed on lower class whites to the suffering of Vietnamese and Indigenous bodies, but in the process transforms these contingent experiences into a universalized 'human' suffering that emerges not through systems of oppression but instead from a primitive psychic space.

By choosing to construct this critique of imperialism through images of white-on-white violence, any reference to Indigenous or Vietnamese suffering is refracted through the visual display of white suffering. Indigenous savagery is naturalized at the same moment that US state violence is critiqued, and as a result the move to invoke empathy for Indigenous suffering becomes at the same time a declaration of white suffering as equivalent. Paralleling Saidiya Hartman's analysis of Black suffering in early American sentimentalist narratives, what ends up occurring in *The Hills Have Eyes* is a total erasure of the Indigenous body from the frame of the narrative which appears to invoke sympathy

for Indigenous suffering. Describing the writing of abolitionists who imagined themselves suffering the violence of enslavement Hartman says:

...Empathy is a projection of oneself into another in order to better understand the other or ‘the projection of one’s own personality into an object with the attribution to the object of one’s own emotions’...in making the slave’s suffering his own [the abolitionist] begins to feel for himself rather than for those whom in this exercise in imagination presumably is designed to reach...In other words, the ease of [the abolitionist’s] empathetic identification is as much due to his good intentions and heartfelt opposition to slavery as to the fungibility of the captive body (19).

To theorize a parallel relationship of the function of the Indian in the white imaginary, the Indigenous body serves as a representational mechanism through which to resolve contradictions about national identity.<sup>18</sup> As a figure that navigates the nationalist contradictions of individualist notions of freedom and the state’s use of violence that protects individuals while denying them freedom, the use of the Indian to expose the violence at the heart of the Western family is as much about the empathy of filmmakers like Craven as it is about the way the Indian has, and continues to be, instrumentalized in the white imaginary for these purposes.

### **“The Lucky Ones Died First”: From Transgression to Reactionary Politics**

While I have explained the limitations of Craven’s film, its attempt to expose the violence of white, capitalist, settler-colonialism, and how this violence informs relations

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<sup>18</sup> I want to be careful here to avoid what Frank Wilderson III calls ‘the ruse of analogy’ – to say that the representational uses of indigeneity parallel the representational uses of Blackness is not to imply that they are the same or that they produce equivalent experiences or ontologies for Black and Indigenous peoples. I want to maintain that in this case, the uses of indigeneity by the white imaginary reveal a ‘beingness’ – albeit a temporally prior beingness - of the Indian that expresses a desirable habitation of indigeneity while I agree with Wilderson (and Wynters) that Blackness functions as the absolute sign of non-being against which whiteness produces itself empirically. In this case the emptiness of the Indian, as a signifier which can be filled with any content, appears as a related articulation of the logics of terra-nullus which read Indigenous lands as empty and fillable with any cont(in)ent. This figuration of emptiness/fillability results in a feeling of *deja-vu* when I read descriptions of Black fungibility.

from the nation-state all the way down to the family, opens up some possibility for collaboration across white and Indigenous struggles for liberation. What is missing, as I have pointed out, is a storytelling and representational practice that does not rely of Indigenous erasure and the instrumentalization of the figure of the Indian. The potential alliances between the white lower class and Indigenous peoples must be articulated through critical, narrative, and aesthetic practices – not assumed through critical logics of metaphor and similitude.

One would assume that these articulations have begun to occur, and that re-imaginings of this story would manifest more complex understandings of how settler-colonialism informs US relations domestically and abroad. This is, unfortunately, absolutely *not* the case for Alexandre Aja's 2006 remake of the film. Aja's film replicates many of the same story beats as Craven's original – the Carter family end up in the desert and their trailer is eventually attacked by the Jupiter clan. As the family are divided, they slowly eliminate the Jupiter clan one by one. Doug is once again the primary hero of the film, driven to kill in order to save his young daughter.

While staying true to the plot at the broadest level, the 2006 remake includes many changes on the micro and macro levels. The first major change to the film is political: on the level of plot, there is much less emphasis on the destructive 'boomerang effect' of frontier violence. Rather, the film emphasizes a celebration of the destruction of the Jupiter clan and through this violence the Carter family become more heroic and likeable to the audience. Violence, in the remake, is much more regenerative than degenerative.

This macro change manifests in the micro level through the inclusion of several new sequences and changes to the characters of Doug and Ruby. After the raid on the Carter's airstream trailer – and the death of Big Bob – Doug chooses to stalk the Jupiter clan. This journey leads him to a section of the nuclear testing ground where a 1950s style suburban neighborhood has been constructed. The addition of this setting augments the critique of nostalgia in the first film. Here, Aja is using the imagery of the destroyed suburb as a visual argument. The images of the middle-class suburb destroyed by nuclear weapons reveals the violence which sustained this image of perfection domestically. The Jupiter clan now live in this space, transforming the suburb into its monstrous inverse.

Additionally, there is more emphasis placed on Doug's transformation from a toxic, incompetent 'city slicker' into a vengeful frontiersman. Doug is shown as being both technologically incompetent in several early scenes. First, he is a cellphone salesman who can't get a signal. Later, he attempts to fix the air conditioner in the trailer only to have Bobby comically solve the problem in a matter of seconds. Doug is also initially portrayed as uncaring – he dismisses Lynn's calls for help with their young child and is seen staring at Brenda, Lynn's younger sister, invoking a different articulation of the incest taboo. As the film progresses, Doug is transformed through his repeated engagements with the desert landscape and the Jupiter clan, who serve as an extension of that landscape. Doug eventually tracks the Jupiter clan to their home and murders them one by one with a gun – an object he rejected early on. It is important to note that the emphasis on Doug's transformation serves to justify his violence – in realizing the error of his ways, Doug learns that his disregard for his daughter and wife resulted in the

breakdown of the family unit. Although he asserts a violent hyper-masculinity, he does so out of necessity: it is the only option that is made possible for him to rescue his daughter. As a result, Doug is represented empathetically in ways which allow his violence to become justified. The choice to spend more time detailing Doug's transformation into a caring father figure has a major impact on the political stakes of the film. The increased narrative justification of Doug's violence reestablishes the differences between the Carter and the Jupiters – the Carter's wield violence in ways that regenerate the family through the re-establishment of kinship while the Jupiter's violence leads to a total destruction of the family and kinship systems.

Both versions of the film use the color red to mark Doug's transformation; However, the differences in how and when the color red appears on Doug serve to support my argument about the remake's emphasis on the regenerative potential of violence. In the 1977 version of the film, Doug turns red only at the very end of the film when he stabs Mars to death. During in the last seconds of the film, there is a freeze-frame and a color shift that transforms the entire screen into a red haze before there is an abrupt cut to the film's credits. In the 2006 remake, Doug is colored red because his clothing and body are slowly covered in the blood of the Jupiter clan. This transformation begins in the final act of the film, which takes place over the last thirty minutes of screen time. As the film moves towards its conclusion, Doug becomes more and more red, marking a longer transformation than the brief cut to red that takes place in the 1977 version of the film. In both instances, the color red marks a descent into savagery, however the abrupt ending of the 1977 original carries a more cynical meaning since it

also denies the viewer and image of the reunited Carter family. The 2006 remake covers Doug in red blood but does not, in the process, present his subjectivity as compromised – like Turner’s frontiersman he becomes something new that is not innocent but whose use of violence is deemed narratively understandable and logical. In the end, Doug is turned red, but he is also able to reunite with his daughter, Brenda and Bobby.

Significant changes were also made to the character of Ruby, both visually and narratively. In the original, Ruby is a young woman to eventually unites with Doug to help him kill her kin Mars. Throughout the 1977 film she attempts to escape the Jupiter clan and she is repeatedly mocked by the other members because she doesn’t engage in acts of overt violence. In the 1977 film’s conclusion, Ruby catches a live rattlesnake and attacks Mars with it, freeing Doug and allowing him time to overtake and kill Mars. While associated with the Jupiter clan, Ruby is positioned liminally between the Carters and the Jupiter clan – not totally inhuman but unable to free herself without intervention from an outside civilizing force.

In the 2006 remake, Ruby does not speak throughout the entirety of the film. She is shown throughout the film observing the actions of the Carters and the Jupiters but does not participate in any of the acts of violence. She does commit theft, taking Bobby’s red jacket while they are parked at the gas station in the film’s first act. From this point on the red jacket marks Ruby. In the original, Ruby is shown as clothed in a dark brown dress, wearing a variety of necklaces including several made of bones, shells, and what appears to be turquoise, evocative of the clothing of Indian women in 1950s Westerns. The use of the red jacket invokes Ruby’s name – the color red – but as I have shown also

carries connotations of indigeneity and savagery within both the 1977 original and the 2006 remake. Clothing is used in a more coded way – Ruby is still positioned liminally between the Carters and Jupiters through dress, only in the remake this relationship is abstracted from buckskins into the color reg itself. This positioning is significant considering the changes to the end of the film, where instead of assisting in the takedown of Mars, Ruby sacrifices herself by lunging at Mars and pushing him off a cliff. While this act cements Ruby as the most sympathetic of the Jupiter clan, it also reifies her status as an unassimilable other. While the Ruby of the 1977 original survives to escape her captivity, the best future available to the 2006 Ruby is a quiet death.<sup>19</sup>

When discussing the film, Aja states that he intended to present a complicated vision of violence: “On the one side you have the Carter family who are the victims, but on the other side you have the dwellers who are not only the bad guys, but the victims of the United States. They’re as much victims as the others; it’s two societies confronting each other and one of them doesn’t know that they’re also the bad guys. It’s fascinating and I love the way it comes around” he says (“IndieLondon”). Despite Aja’s claim that the film wants to present a complicated spectacle of violence, the film and the director fail to articulate this on the level of representation. In the very same interview, when asked to discuss cuts that he had to make to the violence in the film, Aja says:

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<sup>19</sup> This act of sacrifice also invokes the figure of the ‘tragic squaw’ who appears in many 1920s and 1930s Western films. These characters were often the mothers of mixed-race children and their deaths enabled the assimilation of these children into white settler culture. Often these characters committed suicide as an act of loving self-sacrifice or in order to expediate the process of the white father marrying a white woman. In either case, they revealed settler fears of miscegenation and anxieties about the assimilability of mixed-race Indigenous children. For more on this trope see Joanne Hearne’s *Native Recognition: Indigenous Cinema and the Western* or M. Elise Marrubio’s *Killing the Indian Maiden: Images of Native American Women in Film*.



What they asked us to cut is basically a couple of minutes. But I think what they cut didn't take anything from the horror and the brutality and the impact of the final film – they're just too stupid to understand that! [But] the way they cut the movie was very stupid, and I had a big, big argument with them about it. It's going beyond censorship, and it can really affect a movie. *Why can't we have a big catharsis of pleasure when you kill the bad guy?* ([my emphasis] (“IndieLONDON))

Here, Aja admits that despite wanting to see both families as victims, one of the families represents “the bad guy.” The slippage from ‘bad guys’ to the singular ‘bad guy’ reflects the content of the film – while both the Carters and the Jupiters are initially rendered problematic, the Carters eventually redeem themselves by showing off their resilience - alternatively the Jupiters remain unchanged and quickly lose audience sympathy.

The disjunction between the desire to celebrate violence against those rendered non-human and the desire to critique US domestic and foreign policy, which the film shows are based on the exploitation of those non-normative ‘others,’ informs the narrative conflicts throughout the 2006 remake. However, Aja's version of *The Hills Have Eyes* - like his remarks - frequently falters, tending towards a straightforward celebration of the Carter's violence as necessary and redemptive rather than using their regression to posit a critique of US imperialism. The inclusion of these new plot points and changes to characters of Doug and Ruby simplifies revenge narrative of the plot, leading to the ‘us vs them’ dichotomy being reasserted rather than questioned.

The other significant change to the film is the visual mode of representing monstrosity: Alexandre Aja's 2006 film rearticulates the original film's connections between rural spaces, violence, primitivist regression, and indigeneity in puzzling new ways. The 1977 film draws on the visual rhetoric of the Western, costuming the Jupiter

clan in clothing that recalls depictions of Indigenous peoples. In the remake, the visual language changes dramatically. In the 2006 remake, the Jupiters are depicted through images of disability, revealing complicated connections between primitivism, disability, landscape, and indigeneity. With the exception of the character Pluto, played by Michael Berryman, the Jupiter clan of the 1977 film are only marked as ‘other’ through clothing and costume. The use of shells, fur, and buckskin-like dresses and shirts invokes an Indigenous other, distinguishing the Jupiter clan from the middle-class Carter family. In the 2006 remake, Aja marks the Jupiter clan as monstrous through the rhetoric of disability.

The concept of debility has been deployed against racialized and minoritized peoples in order to justify mistreatment and to render them as inhuman. Indigenous peoples have been rendered as child-like through the rhetoric of primitivism, or primitivism has been used to argue that Indigenous peoples occupy a evolutionarily prior state to white people. Douglas Baynton explains that “When categories of citizenship were questioned, challenged, and disrupted, disability was called on to clarify and define who deserved, and who was deservedly excluded from, citizenship...Arguments for racial inequality and immigration restrictions invoked supposed tendencies to feeble-mindedness, mental illness, deafness, blindness, and other disabilities in particular races and ethnic groups” (33-34). Non-white peoples were *conceptualized* through disability – if they were understood to be unable to learn, become civilized, and thus become ‘cured,’ they were placed lower on the hierarchy.

This entanglement of evolutionary anthropological thinking and ableism manifests through the ways Aja's film renders the Jupiter clan as primitive priors to the Cater family. What is puzzling is that the turn towards disability appears to be a way to avoid the questions of race – specifically Indigeneity – within the content of the film. Phenotypically, the Jupiter clan are presented as white, and the backstory that is provided about a mining town whose residents refuse to abandon their homes establishes the Jupiter clan as an other through the lens of class. While class, as we have seen, was an emphasis in the original, it was through the grammar of Indigenous savagery that class distinctions were demarcated. This is clear even to Aja, who exposes the importance of costuming as a sign of difference in the original. When interviewed about the film, Aja said, “is; why do we love the original Hills Have Eyes so much? It's not because it's the scariest movie in the world. It's because it's almost fun. It's because it's cool, it's because of Michael Berryman and because of the look of the characters and the way they're dressed” (“IndieLondon”). Here, he invokes explicitly the ways the film creates pleasure through ‘playing Indian’ – it is specifically the dress used in the original film that draws viewer interest. The “look” of the characters is a key source of visual pleasure – so why does Aja choose to depict the characters as disabled in the film?

The answer is complicated and reveals parallels in the discourses of anti-Indigenous colonialism and ableism. One point of articulation between these discourses is, as previously mentioned, the evolutionist progressivist idea that those who are not normative (white, heterosexual landed men) occupy an evolutionary prior position, that

they embody a stage in evolution that is to be treated or overcome.<sup>20</sup> Disability then serves as the discourse through which Indigenous peoples in the US were declared ‘domestic dependent’ nations and ‘wards of the state’ – they were considered culturally and intellectually unable to control their own subjectivity. Aja’s remake abandons Craven’s rhetoric of the Western, turning towards the visual depiction of disability in ways that serve to disguise the racial questions of civilization and savagery that structure the 1977 original. In the 2006 version of *The Hills Have Eyes*, disability is associated with the past because the Jupiter clan are understood, narratively, to be an archaic and regressive vision of the Carter family. Not only are they ‘backwards’ socially (flagged by their behavior, their actions, and in their Greco-Roman inspired names), they come to stand in for a historical past that has been abandoned by modernity. As previously discussed in this chapter, temporality is a mechanism which has and continues to be deployed against Indigenous peoples to render them as objects of the past. The ethnographic gaze sets Indigenous peoples apart from the present, and the rhetoric of primitivism renders Indigeneity a condition that must be overcome in order for peoples to be assimilated into modernity and thus become full subjects. In the 2006 version of *The Hills Have Eyes*, indigeneity is engulfed by the visual rhetoric of disability, shifting the focus of horror of the film away from a racialized other towards a white lower-class other whose impropriety manifests on the level of the body through monstrous disability. While outside the scope of this chapter, Baynton’s claim that disability was a way

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<sup>20</sup> Alternatively, this prior position is also romanticized as a more ‘innocent’ or unmediated form of subjectivity. One can think of the similar treatments of ‘primitive’ art and ‘outsider’ art by modernism and postmodernism. For more, see *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives* by Marianna Torgovnick and “Against Outsider Art” by Jesse Prinz for discussions of primitivist and outsider art, respectively.

through which racial difference was conceptualized invites a deeper exploration of the links between primitivism, colonialism, and disability.

This deeply puzzling change seems to reveal a desire to distance the new version of the film from its invocation of indigeneity and Settler/Indigenous conflict. This change implies a desire to restage the conflict as a class conflict rather than a racial conflict, which on the surface appears progressive (let's excise the film of content which makes it racist) but in actuality performs a kind of color-blindness (by in a way claiming that this film was never actually about race or colonialism to begin with). As I have shown, changes to the plot and the visual rhetoric of the film ultimately produce a more straightforward story of revenge rather than a more troubling story. The Jupiter family, in total, is deemed too regressed to be redeemed, as is the case with the shift to sacrifice Ruby. Alternatively, the Carter family is offered more space for regeneration through violence, culminating in the reunion of a family that, while traumatized, has been transformed into a more powerful and cohesive unit. In the process, indigeneity transforms from a visual performance into a more complex, and perhaps more revealing, abstract metaphor. Ultimately, in 2006, *The Hills Have Eyes* invokes an indigeneity that is hard to discern, but that is nonetheless revealing of an ongoing desire to overcome the contradictions of contemporary imperialism and capitalism through the practice of 'playing Indian.'

### **Witnessing Settler Grief aka The Things Left Unsaid**

This specific articulation of the resistance as revenge narrative structure - a narrative which I have described as staging its conflict through acts of violence by

Indians against settlers – enables me to explore how some iterations of this narrative pattern vanish indigeneity while making evident the ways the Indian is a necessary ontological and representational figure within the settler colonial imaginary. While other readings in this dissertation will explore explicit representations of Indigenous peoples (in that the plots actively name indigeneity and are ‘about’ conflicts between settler characters and Indian characters), the *Hills* films reveal that there is a lingering anxiety about indigeneity in horror films which stage their conflicts between ‘civilization’ and a ‘savage other,’ regardless of whether or not the figure of the Indian is evoked on the level of plot.

Both versions of *Hills* stage their conflicts as a battle between two white families –presence within the world of the narrative. I argue that it is the very disappearance of Indigenous peoples which makes possible the films’ self-reflexive critique of the exploitative logics of capitalism, patriarchy, and empire. In both instances, the film’s horror is derived from the audience coming to understand that any person or family can fall into what Hayden White would describe as “the abyss” of savage violence, if they are sufficiently pressured to do so. The films thus serve as a confession of the settler imaginary’s guilty conscience. The films confess that the nation and the family are technologies that make visible the forms of permissible violence that whiteness can wield.

Annalee Newitz argues that *Hills* is one of many films which reveals to her that “one way we might understand white racial identity at the close of the twentieth century is as a social construction characterized most forcefully by an awareness of its own

internal contradictions” (133). She argues that an increase in the representation of white-on-white conflicts is a manifestation of a nihilistic and self-critical core within whiteness that, while seeming to be reflexive actually shows, “...whiteness tries to hide this divisiveness at its heart and hide from its own social responsibilities in the process” (Newitz 134). In the case of *Hills*, the film casts the Jupiter clan as a monstrous other as a way to make whiteness visible as a racial category in ways that simultaneously allows “whites [to] convert their hatred of others into a hatred of themselves. Directing racism and classism at themselves, white appear free of both while at the same time clinging to them fiercely as basic components of their identity” (Newitz 144). What Newitz’s reading reveals is the way the politics of the film both accepts violence as a constitutive aspect of whiteness while also working to justify whiteness’ use of violence against economic and racial others. This allows whiteness to figure itself as injured and thus less culpable for the ways in which it is wielded against non-white peoples.

While Newitz’s analysis identifies how the films function to alleviate white supremacist guilt, she does not consider the structural role indigeneity plays in making this system of absolution function. I want to pause here to consider how Newitz makes the same flaw as *Hills* – she disavows indigeneity as having any key structuring function within the film and quickly elides whiteness, class status, and savagery. The use of savage in the article eventually becomes interchangeable with the term “white trash,” performing the very elision of the categories of indigeneity and whiteness that occurs in *Hills*. Newitz, like the other scholars discussed in this chapter, openly acknowledges and quickly disavows any functional role indigeneity may play within the film’s goal to purge

whiteness of its guilt. She summarizes the Jupiter clan as such “*Looking something like Native Americans*, and something like genuine mutants, this family is biologically *and* economically other [my emphasis]” (Lewitz 143).<sup>21</sup> She quickly moves to emphasize how economic differences are what primarily structures the antagonisms between the Jupiter clan and the Carter family. This analysis of class tells Newitz something about race, both in terms of how whiteness seeks to imagine itself and potentially how whiteness “is viewed by non-whites” (132).<sup>22</sup> The problem with such an analysis is that it, in Byrd’s terms, “reveals the colonialist discursive givens that continue to deny indigenous peoples full agency to theorize the world” (31).

Newitz places indigeneity as one among many racial “others” within a collective multicultural field. The film asks questions about indigeneity, yet she finds answers in an analysis of capitalism and race, analytics which can only partially theorize indigeneity. By failing to recognize the ways that settler-colonialism functions through a system of dispossession which seeks to assimilate Indigenous lands and bodies, Newitz’ reading of the film re-enacts that very dispossession. Indigenous studies, as a field, accounts for the ways in which capitalism, race, *and* empire have and do interact within the lives of Indigenous peoples. A failure to consider settler-colonialism, empire, or conquest causes Indigenous peoples varying claims for justice are subsumed under Western social justice analytics.

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<sup>21</sup> This recalls Williams’ description of the Jupiters as “moving like silent Indians.”

<sup>22</sup> *Hills* is a film made by and for a white settler audience, thus it cannot expose what non-whites think about whiteness – its enunciation is an expression of what whiteness worries non-whites think about whiteness. In Newitz’s case, there is a failure to name and theorize what “non-white” voice is speaking within the text. At best, we should consider the film as expressing an anxiety about the violence of white settler colonialism being exposed, being seen. The critique posited is one internal to and regulated by the white settler imaginary.



In Andrea Smith's article "Native Studies at the Horizon of Death," she explains that Indigenous peoples often function as a kind of "raw material" that enables settler self-reflection (218). Discussing activities where white subjects "confess" to their privileges, she argues, similarly to Lewitz, that even in social-justice oriented spaces, these practices "ultimately reconstituted the white-majority subject as the subject capable of self-reflexivity and the colonized or racialized subject as the occasion for self-reflexivity" (216). What Smith's analysis shows is the ways in which indigeneity is understood as something which can be embodied and possessed within the white settler imaginary. That is, not only does this act of confession work to absolve white people and whiteness, it also reasserts colonial hierarchies that position Indigenous peoples as objects or, at best, (past) imperfect subjects. This is the point that is missing from previous scholarship on the film, and often also the very thing which scholars re-enact: a critique of white settler violence that fails to address how settler-colonialism must also end – in addition to capitalism and compulsory patriarchal heteronormativity - for Indigenous people to experience freedom from alienation.

What theorists like Newitz, Rodowick, and Williams leave unaddressed in their analyses is the ways *The Hills Have Eyes* is a text that expresses grief on behalf of Indigenous communities that ultimately centers White suffering. In the process of producing an empathetic metaphor of shared suffering, what gets left behind are the very specific and material power differentials whose disavowal is what enables a metaphoric logic to be produced. To say, like *The Hills Have Eyes* implies, that we have all become Indian savages is not only to mystify way the films draw on the white imaginary's desire

to ‘play Indian,’ it requires that the ongoing conditions of settler colonialism - that serve to reproduce white supremacy be concealed. In the 1977 movie, there is no move to connect the ways the Western, as a genre, served as a pedagogical tool that bolstered the white Settler imaginary. The ease with which Craven’s original film projects Indigenous suffering onto the lower-class white body reveals the ease with which the Indian can be transformed in order to negotiate disjunctions in US national identity. This is, again, not so much an articulation of actual shared positions and suffering so much as it shows how settler subjects imagine their alienation.<sup>23</sup>

More disturbingly, the 2006 remake, in its attempts to distance itself from the racialized indigeneity that structured the original, drives us towards a more vexing representation of Indigenous savagery. The film’s focus on the aftermath of nuclear testing provides ample opportunity to a conversation about Indigenous communities. The film is set in New Mexico and shows clips from of the nuclear tests that occurred on the Nevada Test Site, the lands of the Shoshone and the Paiute. However, rather than choosing to re-use the original California filming location – itself a displacement from the film’s intended setting – the remake was shot in Morocco. The movement between Nevada, New Mexico, Hiroshima, Vietnam, and Morocco that Aja’s film manifests again reveal the ease within which the Indian serves as a stand-in for ‘the other’ within a settler-colonial imaginary.<sup>24</sup> It is this treatment of indigeneity as an empty, fillable

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<sup>23</sup> This is again s deja-vu moment reworking of Hartman from *Scenes of Subjection*

<sup>24</sup> Byrd refers to this movement as ‘transit’

signifier which betrays a settler-colonial orientation towards Indigenous peoples in both films.

Rather than explore the ways in which nuclear weapons have decimated Indigenous communities domestically *and* abroad in these very specific places and times, Aja's remake attempts to distance the content of the film from indigeneity, in turn revealing the more complex entanglements of primitivist logics. In this way, the remake shows the complex, mutable form that the Indian takes. Simultaneously nowhere and everywhere, the Indian is a monster that continues to haunt the settler-colonial imaginary. This struggle between civilization and savagery serves as the foundation for many US and Canadian horror films, and the figure of the Indian finds themselves bound to this imaginary, forced to serve as an affirmative, silent witness to a violence they know all too well.

## Chapter 4

### No Easy Way Out: Indigenous Women, Horror, and Refusal

“Indigenous women do not desire to overcome our anger for love and, indeed, we are not limited to one or the other; many of us are often limited to feelings of sadness, mourning, and remembrance, rather than anger.”

-- Rachel Flowers, *Refusal to Forgive: Indigenous Women's Love and Rage*”

In this final chapter I examine the film *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* (dir. Jeff Barnaby, 2013) and Stephen Graham Jones’ 2020 novel *The Only Good Indians*. These two stories, in which Indigenous women engage in acts of violent revenge, critique the myriad forms of power settler-colonialism exert upon Indigenous communities as they simultaneously decenter settler-colonial worldviews and epistemologies. Both texts make visible settler-colonialism as a field which constrains the agency of Indigenous peoples and, in this way, these Indigenous horror narratives contest and re-inscribe the “resistance as revenge” narrative. This is done via stories which fundamentally contest colonial cartographies of reading, seeing, and being. I argue that in both narratives, revenge is an act which settler-colonialism positions as a productive response, yet to engage in such acts is to still operate within the constraints of the colonial imaginary. Often, these acts of revenge attempt to render the systemic, institutional violence of settler-colonialism as merely an *interpersonal* conflict. This is what Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang might call a “settler move to innocence,” as it diverts our attention away from institutions and towards individuals. Such moves are strategically obfuscating and are a deliberate tactic to further constrain the imaginations of Indigenous peoples.

Alongside my discussion of the texts, I meditate on the question of constraint within Indigenous responses to settler colonial violence. Often, when voicing their

complaints or asserting their sovereignty, Indigenous peoples are constrained to operate within settler-colonial institutions (the law, the academy, the state), forms of legibility, and ethics. In his discussion of “x-marks,” the signatures Indigenous peoples left on treaties, Scott Lyons explains that “An x-mark is a sign of consent within a context of coercion; it is the agreement one makes when there seems to be little choice in the matter” (1). While the x -mark serves, on one hand, to archive the existence of subjects capable of engaging in legal negotiation, it also serves to erase the conditions of coercion (starvation, genocidal violence, sexual assault, kidnapping, destruction of homes and lands) which frame those same negotiations. This points to a fact which brings me great joy *and* sadness: Indigenous peoples have long been surviving while making the best of a bad situation.

Indigenous feminists have theorized that one method of navigating a climate of constraint - and the feelings of joy and sadness it produces - is through acts of refusal. First theorized by Audra Simpson in her monograph *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*, refusal serves as an ethnographic technique which “moves away from cultural fetishization and timeless tradition into the ambit of politics and critique that Indigenous peoples are articulating” (112-113). In her ethnographic fieldwork, Simpson was faced with a set of ethical questions: How does one ‘speak back’ to the large archive of anthropological texts which render specifically the Haudenosaunee, but also Indigenous peoples in general, as romantic objects of the past? How does one make legible Indigenous political critiques and assertions of sovereignty within the constraint of ethnographic writing practices? How do we decide that

information which we feel obligated to render - to represent - and that information which, for a variety of reasons, best serves Indigenous peoples by *remaining concealed*? Refusal emerges as a technique to interrupt the flows of ethnographic knowledge, and to, in Tiffany Lethabo King's words "frustrate forward movement and business-as-usual in the academy" ("Humans Involved" 163). Refusal, for me, functions as a tool which can slow down our readings, our looks, and in this way make visible a new set of possibilities for action. Refusal is not always a no. Rather, it is a response which, in its demand for something else, manifests a new set of options.

In my previous analyses of horror texts, it has become clear that Indigenous peoples have frequently been relegated to a limited set of representational functions within the genre. Alongside this constraint in terms of character or symbol, Horror Studies has shown that, in western horror narratives, figures become monstrous when they exhibit some physical, ontological, embodied difference from the normative standard of the human. Thus, monstrosity itself is aligned with a set of ontological and ideological values. Yet as we will see in *Rhymes* and *The Only Good Indians*, as well as in many other Indigenous texts, monstrosity is not an easy matter of who one is. Carol Warrior explains that, for many Indigenous communities, "To exercise one's humanity in this described world is to be aware of one's responsibility to observe the phenomenon or manifestations of energy in the world, and to maintain balance between such energies" (56). To be monstrous, or in Warrior's term, "fearsome," is to "disrupt harmonious balance in families and communities—including environments" (27). This difference in

understanding of monstrosity is indicative of the differences between western and Indigenous epistemologies.

I believe that it is my appreciation of genre forms which brings me to the concepts of constraint and legibility. While genres can serve a useful function in that they are a way to bring texts with similar interests, formal qualities, and ethical concerns into conversation with one another, they can also be exclusionary. Because of this, one question which drives this chapter is this: how do Indigenous writers and filmmakers navigate the constraints/expectations of a genre - and of that genre's structurally produced audience - while also addressing their own political and cultural concerns? My Indigenous feminist sensibilities tell me that refusal is one technique which can be used productively, and so I take it up as the primary analytic in this chapter.

### **The Violence of Recognition and Reconciliation**

Jeff Barnaby's *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* tells the story of Aila, a young Mi'kmaq girl who lives on the Red Crow reservation who is left orphaned after a drunk driving accident kills her little brother, drives her mother to suicide, and sends her father to jail. The film then jumps 10 years into the future: During her father's absence, Aila has begun managing the family's marijuana dealing business, the profits from which Aila uses to ensure that her and her friend's "truancy tax" is paid. The "truancy tax" is a system of bribery enforced by the corrupt Indian agent Popper, the film's antagonist. Those that do not pay the tax are forcibly removed from the home and taken to the nearby residential school. The main point of conflict occurs when Popper beats and robs Angus and Sholo, two of Aila's dealers, leaving them penniless and unable to pay up. It is then that Aila

formulates a plan to get her money back and get her revenge on Popper. With the help of her friends and with guidance by the vengeful spirits of her mother and friend, Aila plans and executes a heist on the corrupt boarding school.

Written and produced during Canada's Truth and Reconciliation inquiry, a government-funded project which positioned itself as "a holistic and comprehensive response to the Indian Residential School legacy", the film *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* invests little faith in the politics of such a project ("Mandate for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission"). Many Indigenous Studies scholars have exposed the limitation of TRC's project, arguing that while it offered a space for Indigenous peoples to voice their experiences of sexual and physical violence within the residential school system, "Our suffering is highly mediated, its representation to ourselves and to our relations locally, nationally internationally form, interrupt, and construct larger discourses that create power in our time" (Million 24)<sup>25</sup>. Here, Million brings attention to the ways that the TRC mediated the representational practices of Indigenous peoples because it required Indigenous peoples to speak within and engage the Canadian legal structures. This constraint was deliberate, as it limited the possibilities of both representing their experiences of colonial violence, and, subsequently, of experiencing a sense of truly transformative justice. Critics agree that the main problem of the TRC was that it sought to achieve "justice" without any fundamental transformation of the form of the settler-colonial state, a framework which Million describes as "like accepting being bandaged by

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<sup>25</sup> For other critiques of the TRC, see Anna Cook's "Recognizing Settler Ignorance in the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission", Matt James' "A Carnival of Truth? Knowledge, Ignorance and the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission", and Kim Stanton's "Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Settling the Past?".



your armed assailant while he is still ransacking your house” (106). In other words, the problem of the TRC is that it depended upon the assumption that the settler-state of Canada *itself* was not the primary source of suffering amongst Indigenous peoples.

Alongside concerns about the TRC, larger questions about the efficacy of recognition-based models of affirming Indigenous sovereignty have emerged. In *Red Skins, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, Glen Sean Coulthard argues that while the methods of colonization deployed by the Canadian colonial state “underwent a profound shift,” the structure of relations “...has remained *colonial* to its foundation” (4-6). Now, rather than assimilation, the colonial state operates “...through a seemingly more conciliatory set of discourses and institutional practices that emphasize our *recognition and accommodation*” (Coulthard 6). As a result, recognition is not a technique which can adequately transform the conditions of Indigenous peoples who live under the subjection of the Canadian state. He argues that “...instead of ushering in an era of peaceful coexistence grounded on the ideal of *reciprocity* or *mutual* recognition, the politics of recognition in its contemporary liberal form promises to reproduce the very configurations of colonialist, racist, patriarchal state power that Indigenous peoples’ demands for recognition have historically sought to transcend” (Coulthard 3). So, while recognition promises to re-define the relationships between Indigenous peoples and the colonial systems they are forced to operate within, it re-writes those very relationships within a new set of terms and conditions. In both forms, the colonial government is the institution which confers the terms of legibility, forcing Indigenous peoples to live and think within a confined set of options.

It is the latter form, the politics of recognition, which seeks to deny the coerciveness of this structure through an alignment with “civil and human rights-based social justice projects,” positive affects, and a kinship-like set of discursive terms (reconciliation and recognition) (Tuck and Yang 2). For the Canadian government, the TRC was an extension of a larger project which sought to “put the events of the past behind us so that we can work towards a stronger and healthier future” (“Mandate for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission”). What the TRC exposes in its language is that “Reconciliation is about rescuing settler normalcy, about rescuing a settler future” (Tuck and Yang 35). Such a project is destined to fail Indigenous peoples, as it rejects the possibility of *present* and *ongoing* colonial violence by positioning the moment of injury in the “events of the past”. The conciliatory discourse of health, strength, and unity serve to conceal the *ongoing* misery, violence, and suffering which is a result of past, present, and future colonial dispossession of the very ground upon which the colonial nation-state sits. For Indigenous peoples, it is not a shift or interruption of dominance, that we seek, nor is it a desire to be included as agents within colonialisms systems of “justice.” Instead, “decolonization wants something different than those forms of justice” (Tuck and Yang 2). What Indigenous Studies critiques of the politics of recognition and reconciliation expose is that settler-colonialist discourses seek to prevent Indigenous people from imagining that “something different.”

In Sean Carleton’s essay on *Rhymes*, he states that Barnaby’s film is “...less about reconciliation, per se, and more about vengeance as a means to deal with colonial trauma...” In this turn away from the politics of reconciliation towards the politics of

revenge, *Rhymes* asks audiences not only to entertain revenge as a reasonable response to colonial violence and a way of resolving personal, communal, and intergenerational trauma, it also invites us to seriously contemplate the social and psychological costs of anti-colonial acts of revenge. Barnaby's film thus functions as a meditation of the ethics of Indigenous revenge, inviting the audience to reflect on the ways colonialism institutes and perpetuates cyclical systems of violence and trauma by constraining Indigenous peoples within the very conditions of their dispossession. While Carleton argues that "...the violent killing of Popper...opens a space for Aila and others on the Red Crow reserve to step outside the shadows of colonialism," such a reading fails to consider the ethical concerns that circulate throughout the narrative of *Rhymes*. A closer examination of the film, I argue, reveals a deeper ambivalence – that Popper's death in fact offers no certainty of freedom or decolonization, thus making the violence endured by Aila and her community in their acts of revenge all the more disturbing. Popper's death, at best, generates the possibility for a *shift* in forms of colonial domination which the community is subjected to. Larger institutions – most prominently the Canadian nation-state – remain unchanged. This means that *Rhymes* is not a straightforward story of Indigenous resistance and decolonization. Rather, Aila's act of revenge reveals her own constrained agency within the narrative. As such, the film exposes what Million calls the "larger discourses of power" while warning what can happen when Indigenous peoples operate within the constrained imaginary of the colonial state.

*Rhymes* is set on the fictional Red Crow Reserve, a place which is represented as having been totally socially gutted by settler colonialism. While Aila and her mother are

positively linked through stories and their art, and the Mi'kmaq language is spoken amongst several community members, there is an overwhelming sense of disconnection which undergirds the relationships between each of the film's characters. Aila, preparing formaldehyde dipped blunts for guests at a party, tells the audiences in voice-over: "This is what brings my people together. The art of forgetfulness." The major ethical dilemma which the film posits is that while the desire to forget trauma may feel justifiable, remembrance is the only mechanism through which balance can be restored. Memories are painful, but they are also necessary. Yet, throughout *Rhymes*, many characters fail to notice or resist the ways in which they perpetuate forgetfulness.

On the Red Crow Reservation, substance addiction is one of the forces which causes and perpetuates imbalance in the community, serving ironically as both an antidote to those suffering under colonialism and a further poison which dissolves social and spiritual relationships because of the way it invites the user to forget. In seeking to numb and forget the pain they experience daily under colonial dominance, reliance on marijuana and alcohol further dissolves the Red Crow community's traditional knowledge and kinship structures. Ultimately, this is the irony of Aila's observation about her community: these acts of forgetting may bring the community together in a physical sense, but they only serve to divide the community socially, culturally, and spiritually.

There is, arguably, no set of social, spiritual, or cultural practices which links the Red Crow community within the narrative - outside of the drug and substance exchange, "the art of forgetfulness", forged by Aila and her co-conspirators. While language plays a

role in connecting some of the characters together (Aila, her father and uncle, and Ceres), the primary factor which connects the majority of the characters within the narrative is their involvement in the drug industry and/or their reliance on marijuana and alcohol in order to sustain themselves materially and psychically. Each character is clearly implicated: Aila's friends Sholo and Angus run the drugs while also consuming them, and they are reliant on the income they receive to avoid being taken and held against their will in the boarding school. Aila's father Joseph and her uncle Burner are also involved in the distribution of marijuana on the reservation. The only female elder character in the film, Ceres, grows the marijuana that they sell inside her home. Although Aila may not be physically reliant on substances in the way other characters are, she is entrapped within the very system of exchange which appears to offer her freedom. Aila sells the means of forgetfulness to her community, implicating herself in the very systems which she acknowledges perpetuate imbalance and fragmentation within the community. As the characters become more deeply trapped within this system of lateral exploitation, it becomes clearer that their own flashes of freedom – if it could be called such – depends upon a sustained community amnesia. Aila's ethical dilemma is that her own capability to remember - and to remain outside of the boarding school - is made possible through other people's acts of forgetfulness.

By exposing the ways in which settler-colonialism creates disorder and then perpetuates disorder through lateral violence and trauma, the film offers a truly horrifying revelation: Aila's means of accessing and maintaining her individual freedom (a life outside of the boarding school) are premised upon her perpetuating imbalance within her

community. Put another way, Aila's means of individual subjectification are also the means of community desubjectification. Aila is seeking individual freedom and agency, but the cost is the collective unfreedom of the Red Crow community. Thus, the horror which the film's depiction of the drug trade on the Red Crow reservation makes clear: even those who feel they stand as individuals 'outside' the mechanisms of collective forgetting are deeply implicated within that very forgetting *and* the perpetuation of community trauma. In Aila's case, she does not see herself as a bad person or as a substance abuser, yet her labor within the drug trade – a closed, circular system which relies upon the forgetfulness for some –perpetuates lateral and intergenerational harms. Aila's inability to openly acknowledge how she gains access to a partial, individualistic form of human agency by enabling harmful relationships amongst her community is her act of forgetfulness.

By unpacking Aila's ambivalent position as a constrained and yet culpable agent of forgetfulness and imbalance within the narrative, I seek to clarify my skepticism that the film's conclusion marks an end to the colonial violence Aila, her friends, and her family face. This is because the film is careful to show that the problems faced by the Red Crow peoples are not simply interpersonal – they are ontological and structural. *Rhymes* makes clear that the boarding school is not the only space which entraps Indigenous peoples – it is the entirety of the space of the reserve itself, the space of the Canadian nation-state, and the boundaries of subjectivity which settler-colonialism produces and polices. While Aila manages to escape the containment of the residential school, she is still entrapped within a larger system which disempowers her and her

community, offering a partial subjectivity at a high cost. Importantly, this aspect of the film makes visible that the desire to be recognized within the modes of being colonial ontology offers is a tactic of anti-Indigenous desubjectification and genocide.

Ultimately, Popper's death offers no certainty of freedom for Aila or the rest of the community. This is not just because Popper is killed by a young boy (thereby perpetuating trauma laterally), or because her father ends up being imprisoned because he takes the blame for the killing (thereby repeating the initial trauma of Aila's becoming parentless which initiates the narrative), it is because it reveals that Aila's desires for revenge ultimately perpetuate imbalance and Indigenous desubjectification rather than resolve it. This is the film's most pressing indictment of the Truth and Reconciliation project: that recognition is another tool to entrap Indigenous peoples within systems of genocidal violence and dispossession. While Aila remains outside of grasp of the boarding school, at the film's conclusion there is no sense that she or others have managed to escape colonialism, let alone its shadow. It is precisely her turn away from community and towards an individualist notion of the subject which further entraps her within the settler-colonial regime of violence.

Thus, one is forced to ask: what has Popper's death cost Aila? Her friend? The community? The film's ending is a moment which generates further questions rather than offering a sense of peace and finality, and this is made all too clear by the film's final line: "What do we do now boss?" There is no clear sense that balance has been restored, and so these questions linger, haunting the viewer as the close-up image of Aila –whose family and community has once again been ruptured - abruptly cuts to a black, empty

screen. Is this a moment of revolutionary possibility, suspension, or a brief pause before business resumes as usual? I would argue the latter, precisely because of the disjunctions created by the “we” in the question “What do *we* do now, boss?” and the image of Aila once again isolated from her family and community. While Popper functions as a go-between, revealing the ways oppression operates both inside and outside the space of the residential school, he is not the force perpetuating Indigenous death – appropriately enough, he is just an *agent* of a larger system of violence. As we see in a flashback that reveals Popper’s relationship to Aila’s father, Popper is very much a symptom of settler-colonialism rather than its driving force. Looking at the larger systems of oppression at work on the reserve – and most importantly within the system of subjectification powered by recognition and individualism – what the film seeks to make visible, is that, while Popper’s death may offer some affective relief for Aila, it does not “open up” space for decolonization. It is not Popper himself that is the cause of suffering on Red Crow, it is colonial systems of making life and being which instantiate conditions of suffering and premature death. While one agent is gone, violent colonial structures linger, as does the question: What do we do now?

The film most clearly articulates its ethical musings on revenge in the animated segment containing the story of the wolf and the mushroom. During this sequence, there is a profound shift in the film’s aesthetics which signal the story’s intervention into settler histories and worldviews. Animation is a medium in which duration and the passage of time is a “trick” of the camera. Non-moving still images are placed in quick succession to give the appearance of movement and the passage of time. It is a medium which signals



the ways in which fixed notions of linear temporality can be thrown into question and, most importantly, reveals the ways that Euro-American notions of linear progressive time are ideologically and aesthetic *constructions*. In this move from live action to animation, there is also a clarification of the film's post-apocalyptic aesthetics: they dictate a sense of multi-temporality which, as Carol Warrior has written, is a key element of Indigenous horror. In Indigenous depictions of monstrosity "...the fearsome spirit or figure does not just emerge at the point where all paths intersect; *it is that point*—or rather, it is the 'place' where 'temporal boundaries' bleed into one another—*where pasts and futures infiltrate the present*" (19, my emphasis). The multi-temporal nature of the sequence from *Rhymes* is materially signaled not just within the content of the story but also within the aesthetics of the scene, as images of the wolf are presented through multiple comic-like frames with different lines of movement within those frames. This choice serves not only to depict the wolf as a fractured, conflicted being, it also points towards a sense of multiplicity that informs and structures the entire sequence.

One must understand the importance of multiplicity and multi-temporality in the sequence to decode the scene's full significance within the film. A key aspect of the story is that it cuts across temporal boundaries of past, present, and future to offer multiple warnings simultaneously. In the story of the wolf and the mushroom, a starved, lonely wolf misrecognizes the bodies of Mi'kmaq children as mushrooms and consumes them. Later, racked with guilt and insatiable hunger, the wolf eventually consumes itself piece-by-piece. Depicted using post-apocalyptic imagery, the story seems to function simply as a critique of settler-colonialism. In this reading, the wolf represents the Indian Act and

the Residential School system. Here, they are depicted anthropomorphically as beings with undeniable hunger whose greed kills Indigenous people as it unknowingly threatens its own future. Read this way, Ceres is comforting Aila, reminding her that colonialism will eventually suffer the rebound of its own hyper-consumptive worldviews. Such a reading is accurate, but it is not the only possible reading that the story offers to viewers.

Simultaneous to this warning are several other warnings, each directed at a different yet interconnected problem. Another way to read the wolf is within the context of Red Crow's conditions of addiction. Read in this context, the story functions more broadly as a warning about forces, like greed or addiction, which can throw communities into imbalance and ultimately destroy them. In this case, the wolf represents the Red Crow community who, through their desire to forget, are ultimately consuming and destroying themselves via their substance abuse and their lack of connection outside of these destructive practices. In this reading, the wolf's consumption of the Mi'kmaq children is a metaphor for the ways in which the community is 'consuming' its own children by exposing them to substance abuse and the violence and loss that come with it. Barnaby's film, with its emphasis on the effects of intergenerational trauma, is clearly interested in representing the devastating effects substance abuse can have on Indigenous families and youth.

Another possible reading of the story – and one which seems to be most often overlooked – is that it can be read as a direct warning to Aila. Ceres, at the end of the story, tells Aila “Before they took me off to the school, my mother told [the story] to me. Your mother is telling [this story] to you too.” In this interpretation, the story of the

wolf's self-destruction is operating as a prophecy which warns Aila that her desire to take revenge on Popper will soon spiral out of control, causing harm to herself and perpetuating - rather than resolving - systems of imbalance. Such a reading makes sense in terms of the film's ambivalent ending in which Popper's death offers no clear resolution to Aila and her community. Popper's death does not signal an end to those forces which drive the Red Crow community to collectively forget. Although Popper has been killed, the Residential school - and the systems of colonial power they operate through - still stand.

In other words, what I am working to unpack here is that to miss this multiplicity of the sequence is to misrecognize a major purpose of the story and of the whole film. In several instances I have found myself in debates about this particular scene with settler scholars of Indigenous film. In both instances, the scholars read the story of the wolf and the mushroom on the first level: as a critique of settler colonialism and nothing more. It is a reading which reduces the antagonisms of the film to the conflict between the Red Crow Reservation and the settler state, a reading which ignores the film's numerous depictions of internal conflict and lateral antagonism which I have described above. The significance of the story of the Wolf's self-annihilation is that its interpretive multiplicity (i.e., the ways in which it is a story 'about' several different things simultaneously) is that it is a narrative practice which disrupts settler interpretive methods and temporalities as a method of expanding the scale of Indigenous worlds: is a re-telling of the past, it is a warning of the present, and warning of the future to come. By signaling to Indigenous temporalities that are before and beyond colonial scales, the sequence, in Michelle

Raheja's terms, is a prophecy in which "...Indigenous ways of conceiving language, origin, and history are positioned as foundational rather than marginal" (188). To read the sequence in ways which do not foreground its essential multiplicity runs the risk of constraining the story of the Wolf and the Mushroom so that it is only legible within the history of colonialism.

As such, these readings domesticate and constrain the imaginative possibilities of Indigeneity, rendering it as a category that is only meaningful when it is placed in antagonism with colonialism and colonial institutions. While at times *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* may offer pessimistic representations of Indigenous peoples and communities, a major radical dimension of the film is that it refuses to reduce Indigenous lives, histories, and epistemologies to their encounters with colonial institutions. A core aspect of the film's reasoning is that severing an Indigenous person's connection to their culture – language, stories, and worldviews specifically – can lead to self-destructive behaviors. *Rhymes* chooses to posit questions rather than answers, looking to occlude the viewer's thinking about violence and revenge as it carefully reveals the complex systems of inter-lateral violence which settler-colonialism derives power through.

### **Making Kin in Conditions of Colonial Misery**

Stephen Graham Jones' novel *The Only Good Indians*, like *Rhymes*, takes place in an Indigenous community whose internalization of colonial hierarchies has led to a breakdown of human and other-than-human kinship systems. Jones' novel is also careful to show the ways Indigenous peoples are subjected to systemic violence vis-à-vis settler-colonialism; However, it offers a more optimistic ending than *Rhymes* by showing that a

refusal of repetition can serve as means to manage trauma and alter the conditions of being, community, and storytelling. In this way, Jones' novel makes apparent how the Indigenous feminist technology of refusal can short-circuit settler-colonial epistemologies and worldviews, paving the way for other modes of reading, seeing, and being.

*The Only Good Indians* follows the lives (and deaths) of four Blackfeet men who are haunted and hunted by the ghost of Elk Head Woman, a being who returns seeking revenge for her unwarranted death. Ten years before the events of the novel, the four men participated in the "Thanksgiving Classic," wherein they trespassed upon elders-only hunting territory and proceeded to kill an entire herd of elk. The men are caught in the act by a game warden and subsequently forced to discard the bodies of the killed elk. The body of the novel provides a snapshot of each of the men dealing with their private shame as they go about their lives on and around the reservation. Then, one by one, they are dispatched by the angry ghost of Elk Head Woman. Because the men disregarded not only their kinship responsibilities towards people but also with other-than-human beings like the elk (because they shot a whole herd and took more than they needed, and because the dead elk were subsequently left to waste), Elk Head Woman emerges to right the men's wrongs and restore balance. However, her thirst for revenge soon spirals out of control, and she begins killing anyone who tries to prevent her from carrying out her revenge.

As Jones weaves his narrative, he is careful to present each of the men within all their complexity: some of the men struggle with addiction, others run away from home to escape feelings of shame. Others feel trapped, that they have been culled in like animals

on the reservation. Jones also does not shy away from showing the shameful of Ricky, Lewis, Gabe, and Cass' actions against each other, their families, their communities, and their other-than-human kin, but he does so while carefully showing that these are people that are doing their best to navigate a world that is deeply anti-Indian. In Cree poet-scholar Billy-Ray Belcourt's words, the novel is set in a colonial world where "it is thus easy to think that the reserve is bad for life because its members are bad at life" (1-2). Yet Jones makes apparent the morbid conditions of colonialism which – alongside Elk Head Woman - pursue each of the characters towards an early death.

Unlike the eco-horror revenge narrative of *Prophecy*, a film discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, *The Only Good Indians* does not figure Elk Head Woman as a radically monstrous form of life who must be eliminated. As the narrative develops, it becomes clear that the men's inability to accept their obligations towards other-than-human beings – and their desire to eliminate Elk Head Woman and her kin - is a source of further violence within the text. Instead of functioning as a sign of absolute difference, Elk Head Woman is shown to be *like* the very men she pursues. Just like the men, she is susceptible to losing sight of her actual goals and relationships and because of this is tempted into taking more (revenge) than is needed. Both she and the men are capable of the same acts of excess, revealing that the conflicts between the groups are behavioral – not ontological. She and the men both serve as a reminder that one should remain respectful to our human and other-than-human kin and as a warning of the imbalance that can occur when people take from other beings in ways which are excessive.

I want to pause here and clarify a point: I don't believe that the text draws parallels between the men and Elk Head Woman as a tactic to "animalize" or dehumanize the men in the story. As I will argue, the novel resists this ontologizing tactic. Rather, the parallel trajectories of Ricky, Lewis, Gabe, Cass, and Elk Head Woman show that beings become monstrous not because of what they *are* but rather what they *do*. This difference is important as it reveals that different paths are possible if one refuses to engage in monstrous relationships with others.

The novel thus imagines a system of relationality which is far from utopian. Although the mutual dependencies across species are exposed, they are framed as delicate tensions which must be carefully navigated and, importantly, which are not necessarily sites of positive affect. As the character of Denorah discovers, achieving justice, especially under the constraints of settler-colonialism, proves difficult. Jones' novel imagines forms of justice and kinship within a context of extreme inequity and constraint, and so the work's idea of the interconnection of people and other-than-human beings (both embodied *and* supernatural) diverges from the idealized understandings of interconnected subjectivity which have been put forth by many theorists working within the field of posthumanism. Writing against what she deems a "generally negative social climate" which has emerged due to skepticism for theory as always conducive to radical political action, Rosi Braidotti seeks to "affirmatively" examine discourses of the posthuman "in a manner which is empirically grounded without being reductive and remains critical *while avoiding negativity*" (my emphasis, 5). Braidotti openly admits that she is "none too fond of Humanism," orienting herself against an investment in the figure

of Man who is “complicitous with genocides and crimes on one hand, supportive of enormous hopes and aspirations to freedom on the other” (16). Yet despite positioning herself as skeptical about the human because of its ambivalent uses, she sets herself apart from previous interventions affectively.

What is striking about Braidotti’s project in *The Posthuman* is its carefully framed and emphasized affective orientation – the stated desire to “avoid negativity,” an affective condition which Braidotti ascribes to those critical of “previous intellectual generations” (5). In her project to explore the ways posthumanism can “help us rethink the basic tenets of our interaction with both human and non-human agents on a planetary scale,” Braidotti also aligns prior critiques of posthumanist theory with negative affects while positioning her own “affirmative” project against – and *distanced from* - these prior critical interventions (5-6). But this move to produce distance forces me to ask several questions: What if we understand the genocidal and freedom-making potentials of the human as woven within the fabric of the human rather than being a “mutation of the Humanistic ideal into a hegemonic cultural model” (Braidotti 13-14)? How does collapsing and subsequently positioning a long, diverse history of critical interventions – which Sylvia Wynter shows begins several centuries before the 1960s and 1970s Marxist critiques Braidotti cites - as “negative” serve to conceal Indigenous studies critiques of theory and the human (Braidotti’s genealogy of antihumanism in her first chapter cites Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and makes passing mention of Franz Fanon, but undertakes no direct engagement with antihumanist critiques which emerged out of Black or Indigenous Studies)? Are theories generated by Indigenous peoples included in the



critique of theory, the critique of Humanism, or is Indigenous thought figured outside of the realm of theory? And why the insistent desire to avoid negativity? Is it even possible to escape negativity if, as Braidotti says, it is the “general climate” which we all operate under?

Does the desire to reject a nature-culture dualism in ways that privilege reaffirming notions of nature only serve to re-romanticize nature on different terms? This final question is especially concerning to me as it re-invokes the ways colonial epistemologies have sought to sustain settler-colonial claims to manage land – and the other-than-human beings occupying those lands – by positioning colonial maintenance as life-affirming and sustaining. This position has already been critiqued in this dissertation’s first chapter on *Prophecy* through its discussion of settler-environmentalism and the modes of neoliberal thought which that orientation occupies. As such, I am also skeptical of Braidotti’s desire to privilege affirming affective experiences of kinship, as such a turn seems to obscure foundational aspects of Black and Indigenous life under colonialism.

If, as Braidotti argues, “the human norm stands for normality, normalcy, and normativity” then who or what is the figure of negativity? (26). Black and Indigenous feminist interventions into humanism provide potential answers. What might it look like to understand anti-Blackness, settler-colonialism, and the discourses of primitivism which flow between the two, as that “generally negative social climate” which those subject to humanism all operate under, as the very source of negativity that Black and Indigenous scholars must negotiate in their critiques of the human? In other words: Black

and Indigenous theories of anti-humanism must grapple with feelings of misery, anger, sadness, frustration, and loss because they are the very affects which colonialism seeks to impose, ontologically, upon these forms of being.

Black feminist scholar Christina Sharpe, in her monograph *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, attends to the ways discourses of death and disaster (re)produce the conditions of Black life. There, she uses the language of “the Weather” to explain pervasive anti-Black technologies of death and the representation of that death, which she calls,

...a set of quotidian catastrophic events and their reporting that together comprise what I am calling the orthography of the wake...a dysgraphia of disaster, and these disasters arrive by way of the rapid, deliberate, repetitive, and wide circulation on television and social media of Black social, material, and psychic death. This orthography makes domination in/visible and not/visceral. This orthography is an instance of what I am calling the Weather; it registers and produces the conventions of antiblackness in the present and into the future. (20-21)

Here Sharpe makes clear that repetition can be a technique which makes the conditions of domination invisible, projecting the present conditions of being and knowing as universal and Black death as inevitable and ahistorical. To write (encode meaning) in ways which are intentionally distorted – dysgraphia – is to both dominate and to make the domination normal and invisible. In turn, alternative possibilities for relationality and modes of being which are already being carried out (other methods of encoding) are also made invisible, unthinkable, impossible.

In this turn towards the relationality between what Tiffany Lethabo King calls Black Feminist suspicion and Indigenous Feminist politics of refusal (“Humans Involved” 163), I take up Jodi Byrd’s call to see that “Weathering such a perfect storm

requires a large enough frame to see how the ground itself figures as all struggle for power and legibility..." ("Weather With Me" 212). As I have argued previously, the human functions as a technology which generates and maintains *distance* – cartographically and ontologically. I am therefore suspicious of Braidotti's move to produce a map of anti-humanist discourse which distances herself from other theorists of antihumanism via negativity, as well as her omission of Black and Indigenous theories of antihumanism (they are, at best, left in the distance, beyond the horizon of the Marxist theoretical interventions of the 1960s and 1970s). If negativity is "the climate", "the Weather", "the ground itself," then what does a turn away from negativity make invisible, unthinkable, impossible? How might we re-ground our relations so that we can find productive space in the negative frictions that occur amongst different forms of life, lives made precarious under colonialism?

*The Only Good Indians* refuses to distance relationality from negativity, showing it as an inexorable part of the ground upon which Indigenous peoples move, think, live, and relate to other beings. Jones makes clear that one of the ways settler-colonialism functions genocidally is that it figures Indigenous life as always-already disaster bound. This can be seen in the ways characters consistently misapprehend the deaths of Ricky, Lewis, Gabe, and Cass. As Ricky is descended upon by white locals after being set up by Elk Head Woman, the newspaper headline describing Ricky's death flashes before him: "INDIAN MAN KILLED IN DISPUTE OUTSIDE BAR" (Jones 14). The headline, constructed in the passive voice, conceals the agent(s) of the murder. The headline is both a critique of how killings of racialized peoples are narrated (one cannot help but recall the

case of Colten Boushie, a 22-year old Cree man whose killer Gerald Stanley was ultimately found not guilty because the gun Stanley was pointing at Colten ‘went off by itself’) and an omission of the ways Elk Head Woman utilizes the anti-Indigeneity of the world in order to carry out her revenge.

The description of Ricky’s killing furthers this obscurity: “It was a great herd of elk, waiting, blocking him in, and there was a great herd pressing in behind him too, a herd of men already on the blacktop themselves, their voices rising, hands balled into fists, eyes flashing white” (Jones 14). The use of the word “herd” to describe both the elk and the men serves to compare the two groups of beings. While some beings are men and others are elk, both groups behave in a similar fashion, invoking Carol Warrior’s important insight that in Indigenous horror narratives, “The resultant fearsome figures are fearsome because of what they *do*: they disrupt relationships, and thus, all of life (even their own lives, which is why they are also often described by Native characters as ‘crazy’) [emphasis in original]” (21). In this instance, the elk and the men are figured as equally fearsome because of their shared involvement in carrying out Ricky’s murder. While this moment could be read as a move to animalize and thus figure the men as inhuman, I want us to resist this move to create a hierarchy of life, especially because the text is consistent in showing that both human and other-than-human communities are agents of imbalance and critical of such hierarchies.

While clear that Elk Head Woman sets into motion the events leading to Ricky’s death, it is unclear whether she is actually his murderer. The opening chapters of the novel explain why Ricky has left the reservation: “He’d split from the reservation all at

once, when his little brother Cheeto had overdosed in someone's living room, the television, Ricky was told, turned to that camera that just looks down on the IGA parking lot all the time" (Jones 1). Cheeto's death becomes the reason for Ricky's exodus from the reservation "...he'd died on that couch anyway, not even from anybody else, just from himself, at which point Ricky figured he'd get out as well, screw it" (Jones 3). Here Belcourt's words again echo: "it is thus easy to think that the reserve is bad for life because its members are bad at life." For Ricky, his brother's death registers as a sign of individual failure, not as a death caused by the material, social, and affective production of the reserve as a "geography of misery" and "a place where living, dying, and failed flourishing always hang in the balance" (Belcourt 2). The reserve, for Belcourt and within Jones' novel, is a space of intentional neglect, mismanagement, and abandonment. This intentionality is made invisible through the repeated writing of Indigenous life as always-already doomed. A sign of the success of this repetition is the internalization of this narrative by Indigenous peoples, as is the case with Ricky's reading of Cheeto's death. This misreading is repeated in the case of Ricky's death, as the headline enacts a "bad type...of not-knowing that fray Indigenous worlds and bodies and produce seemingly normal forms of precarity" (Belcourt 5).

Lewis, the second character to face the wrath of Elk Head Woman, fails to recognize his relationship to the other-than-human being. This misreading of his responsibility towards human and other-than-human life eventually leads Lewis along the path towards his demise. After Elk Head Woman appears in his home and kills his dog, Lewis begins sifting through the evidence of that weekend – the "Thanksgiving Classic"

– in hopes of discovering the identity of the monster. Jones’ novel explicitly frames his behavior as an act of misreading by providing the reader with the image of a skin marked to prophesize events:

In the museum, behind glass, there’s an old winter count drawn on...probably buffalo, Lewis imagines. But why not elk?

And who’s to say it’s all drawn on either?

It could be that, back when, the people would bring any hides or skins that looked different in to the old-time version of a postal inspector. Because maybe some hides, some skins, right when they peel back from the meat, there’s already some markings there right? A starting point, maybe. A story of things to come. Pictures of the winter yet to come.

That day in the snow, the Thanksgiving Classic, there’d been too much blood and hurry to wipe the skin clean. (Jones 124-125)

Lewis tries to read the signs on the skin, but it has been marked in a way he can’t recognize: “he tries to wipe it away with paper towels but its in the pores like ink, which he guesses either blows his big theory or proves it, only what this skin is tattooed with is a storm so bad it eats the world” (Jones 125). Here, Lewis’ inability to read the warning offered in the past prevents him from seeing the ongoing violence of the present.

Lewis’ paranoid reading practice eventually leads him to suspect both his wife, Peta, and his Indigenous co-worker Shaney of being the Elk Head Woman. Lewis’ paranoid reading practice makes visible a repressed misogyny, feelings which de-subjectify women and which also informed Lewis’ killing of the elk herd. In both his theories about the women and his descriptions of the killing of the elk, Lewis denies them a sense of vitality as a way to distance himself from culpability in the violence: “And he’s not even really a killer, since she wasn’t even really a person, right? She was just an elk he shot ten years ago Saturday. One who didn’t know she was already dead” (Jones 136). The logic that Shaney was not “really” a person and was instead “an elk...who didn’t

know she was already dead” and who was “scheduled to die” both creates a hierarchy of life where animal lives are less valuable than those of humans and figures the women *and* the elk as existing in a state of precarity where violence is quotidian and inevitable.

As Lewis reflects on the violence that explodes around him, he also misreads the circumstances of Ricky’s death, echoing Ricky’s reading of his cousin’s death. Believing that he is the “first” to face Elk Head Woman’s revenge, Lewis ponders why he is the one targeted for violence: “...Why trek all the way down here first? And Ricky doesn’t factor in, since he died just a few months after Lewis left, and *it wasn’t anything out of the ordinary*, just another Indian beaten to death outside a bar [my emphasis]” (Jones 95). Again, Lewis makes visible the quotidian operations of settler-colonialism: violence against Indigenous peoples isn’t “anything out of the ordinary.” This observation is tinged with irony, given the supernatural origins of Elk Head Woman, yet it is also revealing of the ways that settler-colonial structures can become internalized by all those subject to its gaze. It is a moment of ironic misrecognition which can “alert us to the structures (visual, narrative, and otherwise) inherited and reproduced that guide how we fix the *eye* and *I*” (Sharpe 26). In other words, Ricky, Lewis, Gabe, and Cass misreadings are included to show that repetition – narrative and material acts of making violence against Indigenous peoples *ordinary* – is a technology of the dysgraphia of colonialism. This dysgraphia not only structures how the men see, but it also disguises the violence enacted by Elk Head Woman.

The men of Jones’ novel recognize the material and ontological violence Indigenous people experience under colonialism, but they also use violence to position

themselves as superior to other-than-human beings. Instead of refusing the hierarchy of life which colonialism proposes, they embrace it. It is this rejection of kinship relations that creates further imbalance within the narrative.

While the men repeatedly misread their relationship to Elk Head Woman and distance themselves from her, the novel works to position the audience alongside Elk Head Woman, at times privileging her perspective through narrative form. In several instances, the novel shifts from a third-person perspective into the second person voice, thus positioning the reader *as* the Elk Head Woman. These moments are equally insightful and troubling:

Right when he's cranking his window down to see better, you raise your face, level your eyes at him through your black hair blowing everywhere, and this is the first time you've seen him since that day, the air full of sound, your nose breathing in just blood, your calf gasping inside you, your legs gone. (Jones 175)

From the perspective of Elk Head Woman, the reader is made to experience the violence of the "Thanksgiving Classic," in this instance from the perspective of the other-than-human being who is violently hunted. Yet these shifts in perspective can also remind the reader that when they are reading about Ricky, Lewis, Gabe, and Cass, they are also reading from the perspective of hunted beings. The slippage between hunter/hunted serves to critique hierarchies of being, affirming that under colonialism, both Indigenous and animal bodies are figured as precarious and killable.

Elk Head Woman seeks to "make things right," but her desires quickly become excessive. The previously discussed deaths of Peta and Shaney show that Elk Head Woman's murderous wrath spreads beyond her targets. As the narrative progresses, she



seeks to eliminate any person associated with the men and eventually her killings begin to mirror the men's violation of the herd. In this way, Elk Head Woman is made complex in the same ways the men are made complex: both parties are seeking justice in a world where the possibilities of redress have been constrained and where violence against their bodies has been normalized. Both parties turn to acts of violence in their attempt to mend their broken subjectivity. And like Aila in *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*, they are working within the imaginary of settler-colonialism. By utilizing these methods, they ultimately perpetuate – repeat- the very violence which desubjectifies and dispossesses them. And it is only an act of refusal which eventually short-circuits this repetition of violence.

Elk Head Woman returns in the form of Shaney, killing Gabe, Cass, the local sheriff, and a teenage boy in what the novel deems a “Sweat Lodge Massacre.” She then turns her attention toward Denorah, the “Final Girl” and Gabe's daughter. Elk Head Woman/Shaney and Denorah face off in a game of basketball, but before either one can claim victory, Victor Yellow Tail fires at Elk Head Woman, giving time for Denorah to flee. Elk Head Woman follows in pursuit. Eventually, Denorah's father-in-law arrives and begins shooting at Elk Head Woman:

Denorah looks up that long hill, into the winking scope and dead eye of her new dad, and then she looks to Elk Head Woman, to the calf, and she sees now that both of her fathers have stood at the top of this slope behind a rifle, and the elk have *always* been down here, and it can stop...it *has* to stop, the old man telling this in the star lodge says to the children sitting all around him. It *has* to stop, he says, brushing his stubby braids out of the way, and the Girl, she knows this, she can feel it. She can see her real dad dead in that burned-down sweat lodge, the back of his head gone, but she can also see him up the slope ten years ago, shooting into a herd of elk that weren't his to shoot at, and she hates that he's dead, she loved him, she *is* him in every way that counts, but her new dad shooting the elk beside her isn't going to bring him back...

So – this is where the old man looks from face to face of the children in the lodge with him, a blanket of stars spread around them, this is where he says to all the children gathered around the fire that what the Girl does here, for Po'noka [elk] but also for her whole tribe, what she does is slide forward on her bloody knees, placing her small body between that rifle and the elk that killed her dad.

She holds her right hand up the slope, palm out, fingers spread – the old man demonstrates - and she says it clear in that cold air: *No, Dad! No!*

Is that the first time she's called him that?

“It is,” the old man says. It is. (Jones 347-348)

Denorah realizes that she is in a situation where she can choose to let violence repeat itself, or she can refuse that possibility. It is a moment of radical kin-making, wherein she recognizes not only her relationship to the elk but also to her stepfather. Her act of relationality, in both instances, exceeds the genealogical imperative: one can make kin beyond the logics of blood and even across modes of being. Denorah sees that continuing violence against Elk Head Woman will not restore justice – it will perpetuate imbalance. The only possibility for the future is to stop the violence, to prevent her father-in-law from re-enacting the violence of her biological father, from becoming an agent of repetition. It is especially key to realize that her feelings are mixed, she expresses both love *and* hatred in the situation. And in this moment, too, Denorah realizes that bringing about justice is complex, difficult, and not always utopian, but it is necessary. The story can be written another way.

As Denorah becomes aware of what she must do, the narrative telescopes out and the reader suddenly becomes aware that the story is also being told within a different context. An Indigenous narrator is revealed, and this “old man” is telling this story in a different time, a different place and context. Like the story of the Wolf and the

Mushroom in *Rhymes*, Denorah's story, the story of *The Only Good Indians* is revealed to be multi-temporal, a warning which speaks to multiple contexts, places, and times. In Denorah's time and place, she does what she must to protect her fathers and the elk. The "old man" also makes clear that Denorah's act to refuse violence is "for Po'noka," for the elk, "but also for her whole tribe." While her choice is painful, difficult, and not totally desirable, Denorah's decision ultimately shifts the performance of kinship in such a way that new modes of thinking become possible.

What Jones' text refuses is the notion that negativity can be excised from our relationships to land and other-than-human beings, as such a project ignores the "negative social climate" produced by colonialism. It is not possible for many beings to ignore this climate of colonialism – and the negativity it engenders – as it is this climate which serves to establish the very conditions under which many beings act and exist. Denorah's choice to live in the discomfort of kinship relationships with Elk Head Woman, rather than reject it, paves the way for new kinds of storytelling practices. Refusal, here, operates as a way to bridge the distance which the human produces.

Cree scholar Billy-Ray Belcourt writes, "It is possible to make joy or to feel enlivened within a miserable context. But, misery circumscribes the body's potentialities. If misery is a part of slow death's arsenal, if it hangs in the air like a rumor, then there is no easy way out" (2). As each of the characters of Jones' novel navigate feelings of misery – both internally produced and externally imposed – they expose the uneasiness which informs relationships between human and other-than-human beings. The uneasiness of these relationships has become especially intense under the conditions of

colonialism, which subjects land, animal, and person alike to differing regimes of precarity. Affirming these relationships and refusing colonial hierarchies of being can be one way to interrupt the flow of these repeated narratives, creating spaces for other kinds of readings and stories to emerge. These moments are few and often saturated with discomfort and struggle. They are not utopian. They are not always affirming. But such are the constrained conditions set by colonialism. And these embedded, dysgraphic modes of reading, seeing, and being have made no easy ways out.

### **Refusal, Repetition, Rage**

Refusal is one framework which links the two texts examined within this chapter. In Barnaby's case, refusal to posit an answer to the question "What do we do now?" is a means through which he makes visible the complex contours of settler-colonial violence, a force which adheres and makes possible the nation-state of Canada. Here, refusal functions as a mechanism to reorient the audience's viewing habits – it requires the viewer to slow down and re-think how violence operates within settler-colonialism. In *Rhymes*, unexamined repetitions are the fuel of violence against Indigenous peoples, and the film's enactments of refusal seek to short-circuit the audience's thinking about this violence.

In Jones' novel, refusal of the repetition of violence that occurs in revenge is the means of restoring balance within the narrative. By refusing repetition, Jones' novel imagines otherwise and works to make visible other modes of kinship which can be practiced. Simultaneously, he shows the ways that settler-colonial structures seek to make invisible and impossible these other imagined potentials. Here, one cannot refuse the

inheritance of violence which colonialism imposes upon the bodies and beings of Indigenous peoples, but what can be refused is the idea that this precarity, this violence *must* necessarily be reproduced.

In this concluding section I also want to return to the question of affect, specifically the feelings of rage and love. Although in the body of this chapter I have been attentive to feelings of sadness, misery, and grief, there are other sensations which Indigenous peoples – and specifically Indigenous women - negotiate in their resistance to settler-colonialism and in their representations of revenge stories. Coulthard explains that one perceived function of truth and reconciliation commissions is that it “requires that individuals and groups work to overcome debilitating pain, anger, and resentment that frequently persist in the wake of being injured or harmed by a perceived or real injustice...These institutional mechanisms are also seen as a crucial way to help evade the cycles of violence that can occur when societal cultural differences are suppressed and when so-called ‘negative’ emotions such as anger or resentment are left to fester within and between disparate social groups” (107). As I have shown, Canada’s take on such a commission failed to recognize the *present* conditions of settler-colonialism which produce such feelings within Indigenous peoples. It is difficult to forgive someone for violating you when they are still in the act of producing the injury.

Rachel Flowers is also attentive to questions of affect, and her concerns are signaled in the epigraph to this chapter. In her article, she explains that she is “...concerned with the effects of the increasingly common tendency to conflate Indigenous women’s resistance with love” and the “...discursive separation of love from

anger and the triumphalist narrative of love” (33). For Flowers, the problem is that “...forgiveness assumes a singular event that can be reconciled, rather than structures of dispossession that are ongoing and reinforced through settler statecraft” (47). Similarly, I have shown how acts of revenge function in this same way: they reduce systems of structural oppression to acts of interpersonal injury and violence. Both reconciliation and revenge are narratives which can be used to constrain the representational possibilities for Indigenous peoples, and so it is clear that we must refuse these methods and seek alternative modes of legibility.

It should be clear, now, that any attempt to fix a singular emotion and to label it as the driving factor in Indigenous people’s responses to settler-colonialism is a failed endeavor. Whether those emotions are anger/revenge or love/forgiveness, to reduce the complex feelings and motivations for Indigenous acts of resistance to one vector is a move to innocence which seeks to absolve settlers of their culpability in Indigenous genocide. Indigenous horror narratives make visible the complexity of the feelings Indigenous peoples experience within constraints of settler-colonialism. Yet, while our stories might echo one another, it is essential to understand that they are not simple repetitions but are instead a complex and shifting set of sensibilities, practices, and relationships. Indigenous epistemologies embrace this continuous motion, because, as Carol Warrior writes, “Relationships are not static: they move in a back-and forth, reciprocal motion and are never absent of motion” and as such “The acceptance of such continual ‘motion’ means that transformation is expected from an Indigenous epistemological orientation...” (57). Settler-colonial epistemologies which enforce

constraint run counter not only to the realities of Indigenous existence, but they also seek to limit our epistemic, ontological, and imaginative capabilities. Kinship and relationships are borne out of the productive frictions of our experiences. Love, rage, sadness, and resentment are all embodied, “felt” knowledges, and it is important to acknowledge that Indigenous peoples justifiably experience these emotions when they encounter non-Indigenous peoples and one another. What Indigenous horror-revenge texts productively challenge us to consider is what we ought to *do* with those feelings.

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