Title
Rotiskenrak&#65533;te: Violence and the Anti-Colonial

Author
Terrance, Laura Lea

Publication Date
2022

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Rotiskenrakéte: Violence and the Anti-Colonial

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Gender Studies

by

Laura Lea Terrance

2022

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Rotiskenrakéte: Violence and the Anti-Colonial

by

Laura Lea Terrance

Doctor of Philosophy in Gender Studies

University of California, Los Angeles 2022

Professor Mishuana R. Goeman, Chair

The past several years have seen the emergence of Indigenous film and music production among more mainstream audiences. Interestingly, several of these recent films and videos have centralized violence as a primary theme or plot device. While violence in Indigenous media has generally been represented as happening to Indigenous people, these films and videos have reversed that logic to represent Indigenous women, in particular, enacting or threatening violence as acts of retribution. Approaching Indigenous cultural production as a primarily political form of media, my dissertation, *Rotiskenrakéte: Violence and the Anti-Colonial* considers the relationship between violence and subjectivity formation, exploring expressions of violence or threats of violence as retributive acts that demonstrate the performer's transformation of subjectivity. I assume a colonial subjectivity forming the basis of each main character's identity at the outset of each narrative in order to expose the way violence often acts as a productive

representational form that refuses colonial ideologies and the continuation of colonized subjectivities. My dissertation pays special attention to the representation of subtle shifts in self-understanding that takes place as characters/performers decide on, plan, and enact violence upon settlers participating in settler state structures upholding efforts to eliminate Indigenous people through various forms of settler violence. Understanding cultural production as having the capacity to reflect an anti-colonial representational practice in a settler colonial context, these forms of narration, moreover, embrace a logic of anti-colonial pleasure where the viewer experiences satisfaction at the representation of violence enacted in response to colonialism. Watching performances and reading literature that represents violence as an effective form of preservation which speaks to a future yet to be determined pushes the viewer/reader to reevaluate the role violence plays within Indigenous cultural production and our sovereignty and self-determination struggles. It, also, represents the potential representational violence holds as an anti-colonial ideology that pushes imagination into an Indigenous futurity that negates the assumption of a settler colonial future.

This dissertation of Laura Lea Terrance is approved.

Michelle Raheja

Nancy Marie Mithlo

Kyungwon Hong

Mishuana R. Goeman, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2022

To my children,

Jack, Lou, & Owen

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the support of so many amazing people. First, I must thank my committee for their guidance, encouragement, and confidence in me. Mishuana, you have been an incredible mentor, providing unparalleled feedback, advice, and inspiration. I cannot express my gratitude for your unwavering support in my ability to complete this project and your dedication to its aims. Your belief in me carried me through the moments when I was not sure this would come to fruition. Grace, you have pushed my scholarship beyond what I could have hoped it would be. I am forever grateful for your deep engagement with my project and the ideas that have informed it from its conception. Michelle, your insights allowed me to give depth and greater meaning to what I believe are the implications of embracing violence as a theoretical framework. Nancy, I am grateful for the dedication you have shown to my work, the confidence you have shown in me, and the professional opportunities you have given me. You have all shown me, in one way or another, how to survive and work in academia as an Indigenous woman; it is an incredible gift.

My graduate school career began several years before my arrival at UCLA. I would be remiss not to acknowledge the community of scholars that supported and inspired me during my time at UCSD. First and foremost, the generous faculty I had the opportunity to work with gave me the confidence I needed to continue to pursue this degree. I especially thank Kirstie Dorr, Sarah Clarke Kaplan, Roshy Kheshti, and K. Wayne Yang for understanding and advocating for Indigeneity as an analytic and Indigenous studies as a discipline where others would dismiss it. I also thank Lila Sharif, Kai Small, Ma Vang, Kit Meyers, Tracy Brynne Voyles, Sal Zarate, and others for providing community and intellectual engagement during my time there. I am beyond

grateful, however, to Angie Morrill and Maile Arvin for love, support, kindness, and, above all, laughter. We are nothing if not funny. I could not have done this without you.

During my time at UCLA, I have been fortunate to be supported by the Gender Studies Department staff. Thank you to Van Do-Nguyen, Samantha Hogan, Jenna Miller-Von Ah, and, especially, Richard Medrano whose office was a place of warmth and compassion. I found a sense of home in the American Indian Studies Center and would like to especially acknowledge the support and encouragement I received from Shannon Speed and Pamela Grieman. I was surrounded by amazing peers in the Gender Studies Department at UCLA and would like to specifically acknowledge Savannah Kilner, Clementine Bourdeaux, Sarah Montoya, Stephanie Lumsden, Dalal Alfares, Esha Momeni, Sa Whitley, and Jaimie Crumley.

Finally, this would not have been possible without the comradery of Amanda Apgar, Kai Small, Sarah Montoya, and Savannah Kilner – I cherish the gift of friendship you have given me. My heartfelt thanks goes to my cohort, Angela Robinson – thank you for being here with me through this whole process! Your friendship and brilliance have brought love and laughter into my life. I am deeply grateful to Solomon who patiently acted as my sounding board on more than one occasion. Your love, support, and encouragement have carried me through to the end. I hold a special place in my heart for my mother, Agnes Terrance, who showed me how to just keep going. Lastly, I owe a debt of gratitude I can never repay to my children, Jack, Lou, and Owen. The sacrifices you made during this endeavor were at least as great as my own. My love for you is as immeasurable as it is immense – kenoronhkwa!

CURRICULUM VITAE

EDUCATION

University of California, Los Angeles
Ph.D. candidate, Gender Studies.

University of California, San Diego
Master of Arts, Ethnic Studies. June 2012
Thesis: "Unsettling the Archive: Dis-imagining Colonial Subjects to Reimagine Knowledge Production"

SUNY College at Brockport, Brockport, NY
Bachelor of Science, cum laude, English major and Psychology minor. June 2002.

FELLOWSHIPS

University of California Office of the President's Dissertation Year Fellowship (Doctoral, 2021-22).

American Indian Studies Center Director's Fellowship (Pre-doctoral, 2019-20).

Collegium of University Teaching Fellowship (Pre-doctoral, 2018-19

Regent's Fellowship (Pre-doctoral, 2017-18).

American Indian Graduate Center Scholars Fellowship (Pre-doctoral 2017-19).

Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe Graduate Fellowship (Pre-doctoral, 2016-18).

Graduate Summer Research Mentorship (Pre-doctoral, 2014).

Graduate Summer Research Mentorship (Pre-doctoral, 2015).

Eugene V. Cota-Robles Fellowship (Pre-doctoral, 2012-16).

Regent's Fellowship (Pre-doctoral, 2012-13).

Tribal Membership Initiative Fellowship (Pre-doctoral, 2009-2011).

Dean's Fellowship (Pre-doctoral, 2009-2010).

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS (Selected)

"Vengeance is Ecstasy: The Anti-Colonial in Indigenous Cultural Production." Native American and Indigenous Studies Association Conference, May 2021 (Online).

"Vengence is Ecstasy: The Anti-colonial in Indigenous Cultural Production." Native American and Indigenous Studies Association Conference, May 2020 (canceled due to COVID)

"Violence and Pleasure: Indigenous Cultural Production and Anti-Colonial Subjectivity." American Studies Association Conference, November 2018 (Atlanta, GA).

"Violence and Ecstasy: Tanya Tagaq's 'Retribution.'" Native American and Indigenous Studies Association Conference, May 2018 (Los Angeles, CA).

"Violence and Ecstasy: Tanya Tagaq and the Promise of 'Retribution.'" Neo-Native Symposium: Toward New Mythologies, November 2017 (Riverside, CA).

GUEST LECTURES

"Indigenous Representations of Revenge," Humboldt State University, March 2020

"Indigenous Power and Settler Colonialism" Occidental College, Los Angeles, November 2019.

RELEVANT PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

University of California, Los Angeles, American Indian Culture and Research Journal
Book Review Editor, July 2013 thru July 2015

PUBLICATIONS

Terrance, Laura. "Resisting Colonial Education: Zitkala-Sa and Native Feminist Archival Refusal." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 24.5 (2012): 621-626.

INTRODUCTION

> There has to be another way. And that's the challenge for young people who have bright minds: how to bring a new formula to our world so that we can have a new and renewed hope for the future. Because it is our responsibility.[1]
>
> —Jake Swamp, "Kanikonriio: Power of a Good Mind"

The Very Beginning

During my first year of graduate school in a town hall style meeting, a departmental crisis of sorts revealed significant anti-Native sentiments. Many graduate students expressed disdain for Indigenous studies, finding it "useless" and resentment towards the Native students within the department who were "taking up spaces that should be filled by black and brown bodies." At one point, a graduate student, identifying one of the Native students as Chicano, said something to the effect of "they don't even look like Indians." The Native students later found out that some faculty were sympathetic to at least some of these sentiments. We were angry, confused, and deeply offended to learn that some of our faculty and colleagues had inflicted lateral violence on us, held stereotypical ideas as the dominant culture, and desired to displace and replace us in a move typical of over five hundred years of settler colonialism. When my friend and colleague Angie, who was also in the program, was given a film assignment, she scripted a revenge fantasy that would narrate retributive violence for the wrongs of settler colonialism and provide an outlet for our more immediate collective fury towards our department. She recruited me and another student, Maile, to be her actors. She outlined the basic plot and explained that we would be making a trailer of her feature length film, *187 SUPERMAN*. During the course of filming, we explored the university campus, La Jolla, and San Diego for just the right settings, taking note of

[1] Jake Swamp, "*Kanikonriio*: "Power of a Good Mind" in *Alliances Re/Envisioning Indigenous-Non-Indigenous Relationships* ed. by Lynne Davis, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010): 23.

the terrain, the lighting, and the local traffic. Once the setting was decided we palimpsetically performed our own Indigeneity in those Kumeyaay and Payoomkawichum spaces, playing out bits and pieces of her imagined story. She filmed us running in pursuit, pretending to be in armed conflict, fighting, and more. Native people find humor in nearly every situation, however, and the filming captured frequent moments of hilarity as the filmmaker relished making our scenes end in or having them fail with bursts of laughter brought on by her behind the camera narration. In the end we ran out of time to film all the scenes she imagined, but during the editing process Angie discovered that she had made a different kind of film. As she explains: "'187 SUPERMAN' began as a revenge narrative but ended up being a document of critical hope and a love letter to my community. Maybe I will try again to put my anger into a film. In this case, the film I was making became something other than I intended."[2] Even though her production did not adhere to her expectations, I would suggest that she did put the anger she felt towards the disenfranchising actions of the department into this film.

While not necessarily in the completed project, her revenge narrative was played out amongst us as we narrated it to ourselves while inhabiting the space where the legitimacy of our scholarly contributions and very existence had been called into question. Haudenosaunee have ceremonies to confront sadness and grief as a way to move forward, and while not in a traditional sense beyond the overcoming of collective grief, for me at least, this film project presented that opportunity and helped undergird my awareness of the necessity of Indigenous studies as a theoretical framework and justified my presence within our department. Since Angie is Modoc, I cannot say what that might mean for her, but I can say that after the film we experienced the

[2] "187 Superman," directed by Angie Morrill, (2010, San Diego, CA) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8F-kbF4qYmo&t=2s.

space differently. Having determined our legitimacy to ourselves we were able to ask the question: "What do we do now, boss?"[3]

Toward Violence

We all answered that question in our own ways, and did move forward, finishing our degrees and continuing to assert our Indigeneity. From this perspective this project develops and imagines Indigenous revenge narratives emerging from a particular imaginary, one situated in a colonial context that recognizes the ongoing nature of that colonization and its impact on lived lives. It understands violence in its broadest scope, because it has experienced centuries of colonialism's varied imperial and colonial forms. Literary and visual culture revenge narratives illuminate settler states' failure to honor treaties; the detriment of systemic policies such as termination and relocation; the criminalization of Indigenous cultural practices; the theft and suppression of Indigenous languages; the cruelty of boarding schools and their policies of elimination; forced sterilization; and more as continuous forms of colonial violence sanctioned by the state but carried out through interpersonal interaction. Which is to say that state violence is deployed at the level of the individual as it operates to uphold violent and oppressive structures. The political work of revenge narratives speaks directly to our ongoing struggle for sovereignty, self-determination, and survival as political and subject-forming endeavors. It especially speaks to a need to build upon notions of violence, justice, subjectivity, and Indigenous persistence variously interrogated by Indigenous scholars. Revenge narratives

[3] *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*, directed by Jeff Barnaby (2013; Toronto, ON; Monterey Media: 2015), DVD. The film concludes with this question addressed to the main character, Aila, from the young boy who ultimately comes to kill the Indian agent. His belief that she holds the answer to the future places her in the position to lead, but more to the point of this project, forces the viewer into the position of imagining an avenger leading them into an anti-colonial future within which their subjectivity must fit.

discursively position Indigenous peoples as inherently possessing a frame of sovereignty distinct from yet in relation to the colonial states and the citizens with whom Indigenous peoples must consistently contend and negotiate. By embracing the political nature of filmic storytelling, Indigenous peoples have enacted traditional practices through new mediums that challenge current power dynamics. The critical and commercial success of recent Native films demonstrate the ongoing practice of storytelling that has consistently represented a political rather than only a cultural Indigenous identity. Likewise, in their centuries old written form, these narratives assert an alternative narrative to the history of colonization, one that does not recognize Manifest Destiny as a foregone conclusion. Instead, they have reflected the power and pleasure of triumph over danger and oppression in ways that allow for creative and meaningful understandings of time and potential futures. What revenge narratives offer that may be different from other forms of narration is a very direct conversation about centuries long consequences of imperialism and colonialism for Natives, settlers, and others that have come to occupy Indigenous lands, along with an honest conversation about ongoing violence and the role it may play in our struggles for social justice.

The violence represented through revenge fantasy and the narration of its context demonstrate the complex of difficulty, tension, contradiction, and desire within and around discussions concerning sovereignty, struggles for self-determination, and power relations. It is primarily through representations that bear some manner of relationship to sovereignty and/or self-determination that Indigenous cultural production directly challenges the colonial power dynamics of the settler nation state, particularly in settler colonial contexts fraught as they are with varying processes of settler-state recognition. Discussions around visual and cultural sovereignty occupy a long-standing place in Indigenous scholarship generally and are situated

within a larger project of "intellectual sovereignty," [4] meant to foreground the ways that the work of scholars operates in service to better the daily lives of Indigenous peoples. Having popularized the term, yet certainly not the practice, as he makes clear, Osage literary scholar, Robert Warrior, explains,

> In developing American Indian critical studies, we need to practice the same sort of intellectual sovereignty that many Native poets practice…We can find the work of criticism continuous with Native traditions of deliberation and decision making. Holding these various factors (sovereignty, tradition, community, process, and so on) in tension while attempting to understand the role of critics in an American Indian future is of crucial importance.[5]

Visual and intellectual sovereignty identify the relationship between Indigenous critical theory and challenges to current power relations that deny Indigenous peoples their inherent sovereign status. They also recognize the ways Indigenous knowledge and cultural production wish to benefit the varied Indigenous communities enduring the ongoing occupation of their lands and all the consequential circumstances of settler colonialism. When Angie conceptualized her project she directly intervened in the white supremacist, settler colonial discourse settlers and even people of color can invest in to determine Indigenous people's value and legitimacy, as was the case in our department. The nature of her behind-the-scenes statements, narration, and direction reflected that intervention. Through the film's creation and screening she defended a community of Native people by refusing the discourse, deploying fantastical violence as a tool to re-claim Indigenous identity, confront colonial violence, and legitimate violence as an appropriate, proportional (though not equivalent) response to centuries-long oppression.

---

[4] Robert Warrior, *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995): 117-18.

[5] Ibid.

Angie's film, indeed most Indigenous revenge narratives, also demonstrates the necessity of prioritizing the political positioning of Indigenous peoples rather than focusing on the cultural value of their artistic productions. "187 SUPERMAN," however, poses several questions relative to the work revenge narratives perform for the audience. Given its transformation into "something other than she intended," how might revenge narratives be understood beyond simple notions of retribution? What redress might these narratives offer that other actions cannot? How do revenge narratives identify the settler-colonial violence inherent to nation-state jurisprudence? By focusing on the way settler colonial structures inform interpersonal interaction for Indigenous people, sovereignty as a bodily act comes to represent the collective sovereignty Native people continually struggle to assert. Understanding revenge narratives relative to national sovereignty, as confrontation, and a legitimation of retributive violence, that is violence deployed in response to and as a kind of remediation for colonial and racial violence, begins to explore answers to the above questions.

Theorizing Violence

My dissertation, *Rotiskenrakéte: Violence and the Anti-Colonial*, endeavors to seek those answers. Its primary interest is to theorize violence through representations of revenge and/or retribution. It takes up an alternative point of view relative to violence that is in opposition to liberal discourses of multiculturalism, inclusion, and reform that condemn violence under any circumstances. That perspective is informed by two Haudenosaunee epistemologies that have existed under Kaianere'kó:wa or the Great Law of Peace: rotiskenrakéte and kanikonriio. Kaianere'kó:wa tells the story of the formation of the Haudenosaunee as a united people, as the Five Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy. It is an historical text that narrates a way of living peacefully in relation with all beings, and the two epistemologies centralized in this dissertation

are informed by that desire and blueprint for peace. Within that desire, however, there is an imperative to take action to achieve peace. The ultimate aim of this project, by way of its embrace of violence, is to open up new possibilities to imagine an anti-colonial future. Haudenosaunee epistemologies, and indeed Indigenous epistemologies generally, approach relations between human and non-human beings in ways that reflect different ways of understanding our responsibilities to each other and to the world. That framework provides possibilities that might be unimaginable within Western epistemes that privilege the individual to such an extent that communal well-being can be, at best, obscured and, at worst, lost entirely.

The first of the epistemologies, rotiskenrakéte, inform the actions behind the violence. Typically translated to English as the noun "warrior" the idea is more aptly understood as "those who carry the burden of peace." In opposition to the commonsense understanding of the word "warrior," the concept prioritizes peace above all else in conflict resolution, in terms of both social and political forms of engagement. Importantly, however, the goal of peace cannot preclude the possibility of violence as the most extreme response. Ellen Gabriel explains it in this way:

> In Kanien'kéha, the word is "Rotiskenrakéh:te" meaning those who carry the burden of peace. In the younger days of our societies' existence, Rotiskenrakéh:te were trained in combat using the game of Lacrosse to get "warriors" into shape. But more importantly, they carried with them the teachings of peace and the customary laws of their peoples...A real warrior, uses peaceful means first; is one who honours, respects and practices peace in their daily lives; but has the ability to protect the people and the land when threats to their safety is [sic] imminent.[6]

Rotiskenrakéte play an important role in the well-being of the community and as Gabriel makes clear, their primary objective is maintaining peace while also being willing to act to provide

[6] Ellen Gabriel, *sovereignvoices1*. January 5, 2014, "Those Who Carry the Burden of Peace," https://sovereignvoices1.wordpress.com/2014/01/05/those-who-carry-the-burden-of-peace/.

adequate protection. The "burden" that lays before them proves the profound level of responsibility in determining when violence may be an option, as well as the great effort through self-discipline and self-awareness that rotiskenrakéte must contend with to fulfill their obligations to themselves and their community.

In order to determine when protection is warranted, rotiskenrakéte must rely on another epistemology that comes directly from The Peacemaker who led the Five Nations to unite and become the Haudenosaunee.[7] Jake Swamp has described the gifting of kanikonriio:

> The Peacemaker brought three principles of peace. The first principle is that peace comes inside of us as an individual. And if we accept that peace within us, then we become a human being that loves themselves, and is confident about themselves. That's the first principle, to maintain the peace within. The second principle arrives when the peace is put to work, and how that peace emits from the human individual, and how it will affect the other people around them…
>
> So the Peacemaker had a very brilliant way of doing it. There were five warring nations that were murdering one another, and in the end they were able to come together and accept the three principles. And that's how they obtained the power of a good mind, which is the third principle. That special spirit came among us to give us the strength…[and] whatever comes to us will be beneficial to our future generations.[8]

As Swamp makes clear, the primary directive of the good mind is a unified way of living in peace that allows for the protection of following generations. Oren Lyons has also stated the importance of kanikonriio, saying, "it takes the instruction of the Peacemaker to be of one mind. He said, 'When you are of one mind, the power of the good mind can change anything.'"[9] Informed as rotiskenrakéte are by peace as the primary goal while also tasked with protection,

---

[7] For Oren Lyons's version of the story see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9iVziGHPhVw.

[8] Swamp, 23.

[9] Oren Lyons, "Oren Lyons on the Indigenous View of the World," YouTube.com, Accessed May 11, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kbwSwUMNyPU.

they are in a position to determine when protecting the good mind, and, thus, the community is warranted. In order to do so, this project argues that they are operating from a position of having a good mind which desires peace, but which must act violently to protect. Through discursivity rotiskenrakéte and kanikonriio come together to determine the need for and the quality of the violent actions the characters and performers enact and that this project examines.

To think about contemporary violence in this way means to have centralized the colonial conditions as the primary source of violence that the racialized characters under examination here endure. Colonialism has created violent conditions for Indigenous and other racialized populations for centuries. In many ways this violence has been naturalized through the formation of setter states and their monopoly on violence. In that naturalization, violence that arises in response is criminalized and morally condemned. When Lyons says the Peacemaker asserts the power of the good mind having the ability to create tremendous change, he suggests that it is a mindset within which the conditions of colonialism can be successfully challenged. This challenge occurs within a discourse of "civilization" however, where Indigenous and other racialized people can be narrated as uncivilized to justify the violence that is enacted upon them. The settler state's delineation of "civilized" and, therefore, proper subjecthood becomes a disciplinary tool in moralistic discourses of violence and upholds its multicultural discourse of "progressiveness." Speaking about colonial power, Achille Mbembe asserts that colonies are "the zone where the violence of the state of exception is deemed to operate in the service of 'civilization.'"[10] Steven Salaita reminds us that "*Civilization* and *civility* were terms injected with meaning based on a European image and defined according to the particularities of European cultures, thus rendering uncivilized those with different social systems and worldviews"

[10] Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture*, 15(1): 24.

(emphasis in the original).[11] Under settler colonialism, the state itself becomes the zone where it asserts an absolute right to deploy violence but does so under the guise of protecting its civilized society. Its discourse of civility functions to justify its violence while condemning and criminalizing all other forms of violence, particularly from those it has deemed uncivilized, i.e., the colonized. The two epistemologies that underwrite this project remove the state from discourses around violence by centering the political and social imperative of peace. Rather than assert a right to kill they assert a right to peace but do so with the caveat that moments of violence could justifiably emerge as a means of protection.

I approach the materials under examination from an Indigenous feminist perspective that understands these texts to be a refusal of colonial violence. Revenge narratives extend a term of refusal Audra Simpson identifies as "positive refusal…or failures to consent."[12] Explaining positive refusal further, Simpson states, "Such refusals, or failures to consent, require a legal response to contain those who refuse."[13] The texts I have chosen for this project do not necessarily identify violence enacted by the state as that which instigates retribution and so do not necessarily address the law as such. They do, however, demonstrate efforts to contain in response to failing to consent and in so doing depict retributive violence in ways that demonstrate a relationship to the state (and thus the law) in ways that prove the structures of settler colonialism in the minutiae of the everyday and at the interpersonal level. Simpson demonstrates a moment of refusal as a failure to consent when describing what should have been

---

[11]Steven Salaita, *The Holy Land in Transit: Colonialism and the Quest for Canaan* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2006): 76.

[12] Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014): 138.

[13] Ibid.

an uneventful encounter between her and a border agent questioning the legitimacy of her Indigeneity:

> She pushed me over the edge of civility and patience. I was having trouble keeping cool because this was taking way too long and she was treating me like *I* had a red passport and was suggesting that I needed a *green card*. So I replied, "I don't need to apply for a green card, I am an Indian!"…
> "You need to have a green card if you are going to be in the United States longer than *x* amount of time," she said, to which I replied:
> "Look, I was born down there; I don't need a green card; I am not an immigrant; I am part of a *First Nation*, and this is the card that proves it!"
> Upon hearing this her posture completely changed, she pushed my card to me, and said, "Well then
> *you*
> are an American."
> To which I said,
> "*No*, I am not,
> *I*
> am a *Mohawk*."
> I walked away from her. But as I was walking toward the door, she yelled across the border house to me,
> "*You are an American*."
> And I yelled back,
> "*I am a Mohawk*."
> And she yelled,
> *No*,
> *You are an American*."[14]

Though Simpson's status card ultimately grants her entry, her and the border agent's interpersonal exchange regarding setter citizenship exposes how settler colonialism pervades the lives of and effaces the political status of Indigenous people through banal everyday interactions. The effect of this encounter, however, demonstrates the visceral force of discursive violence that arises in what would otherwise be a mundane encounter. As she describes, "Her complete summarizing disdain for what I was saying, expressed in '*You* are an American,' registered to the

[14] Simpson, 118-119.

tips of hair that I did not know I had at the nape of my neck."[15] Understood from this perspective, the representations of violence discussed throughout this dissertation provide an alternative understanding of colonized and racialized people relative to their identities. Refusal thus becomes a crucial element of revenge narratives and a critical framework for understanding the productive anti-colonial power behind the representation of violence enacted on the settler body. Refusal is the impetus for the acts of revenge depicted in the texts.

Refusal can be a powerful reminder of the limitations of settler state political formations amid the continuing political presence of Indigenous peoples, and it poignantly demonstrates the pervasiveness of settler colonial structures relative to the everyday lives of Indigenous and racialized people. Revenge narratives provide powerful stories of refusal and interrogating them provides an important location for a productive conversation about violence and its potential relationship to interpersonal interaction informed by colonial structures and the potential for the emergence of an anti-colonial subject. Articulating a relationship between the self-representation of cultural productions, like film and literature, to sovereignty and self-determination suggests that representing revenge as a story about sovereignty and self-determination provides an alternative mode of assertion for Indigenous peoples exemplary of visual and intellectual sovereignty. In relation to Indigenous identity, Michelle Raheja has set out the "virtual reservation" as a framework for understanding the expression of visual sovereignty through the medium of film. She explains the important function of film: "The 'reelism' of film resides in its ability to function as…a representational practice [that] does not mirror reality but can enact important cultural work as an art form with ties to the world of everyday practices and the

[15] Simpson, 119.

imaginative sphere of the possible."[16] Cultural production represents and expresses methods Indigenous people have used to represent modes of life that stretch beyond survival into survivance by refusing victimhood and erasure. Films like Elle-Maija Tailfeathers's "A Red Girl's Reasoning" and Jeff Barnaby's "Rhymes for Young Ghouls" represent Indigenous survivance pregnant with potential to realize thrivance.

As a scholarly endeavor, examining revenge narratives takes for granted that cultural production and knowledge production are not mutually exclusive events. For this reason, this project relies on settler colonial studies as a body of literature that identifies knowledge production as integral to the maintenance of imperial ideologies creating and continuing to maintain the uneven balances of power constructing contemporary social relations. Consequently, the field discursively links contemporary institutions and power structures to originary colonial aims and desires. In his book *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* Lorenzo Veracini lays out those aims when he explains, "As the indigenous segment of the population system is discursively invaded by settler constituencies claiming their indigeneity, indigenous specific alterity becomes effaced" such that the geopolitical claims of Indigenous peoples asserting sovereign status become "persistently framed within the idiom of racial equality."[17] The settler state desires the effacement of the unique political status of Indigenous people. The aim is to obfuscate Indigenous sovereignty in order to overwrite it with a discourse of citizenship and rights. In this context, assertions of sovereignty must be persistently made through a distinct, Indigenous discursivity that pushes back against the aims of settler society and

[16] Michelle Raheja, *Reservation Reelism: Redfacing, Visual Sovereignty, and Representations of Native Americans in Film*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010): xii.

[17] Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2010): 33.

revenge narratives provide opportunity to do so. He goes on to connect efforts to efface with settler narratives, saying "a settler sensibility envisages a particular set of narrative refrains and a specific understanding of history where 'progress' is typically understood as a measure of indigenous displacement…and ultimate erasure."[18] Settler colonialism asserts a temporality of progress wherein Indigenous people exist only in the past and their erasure is evidence of progress towards an ever-perfecting nation state. Veracini identifies settler states' discourses of recognition and inclusion to promote liberal democratic and multicultural ideals as part of this process, particularly in his reference to racial equality. The relationship to settler narration becomes an important site to disrupt both settler colonialism's aims and the story it wishes to tell about itself. Revenge narratives provide a representational avenue for Indigenous peoples to articulate these historical violences and social structures in ways that reject elimination, supersession, and the historical narratives that portray them as passive and left behind by the inevitable forces of modernity.

Furthermore, the narratives under investigation here provide representation of Simpson's assertion in her talk, "The Chief's Two Bodies,"[19] that Indigenous women pose a threat to settler society by virtue of their reproductive capacity. The women in these narratives refuse to be disappeared and go even further to violently make their existence and persistence known. Since their bodies represent a site of potentiality and actuality for Indigenous persistence, narrating their triumph over settler violence poses an especial threat while also posing the question, what does revenge produce in a context of dangerous/threatening reproductive capacity embedded

[18] Veracini, 101.

[19] Audra Simpson, "The Chief's Two Bodies," RACE 2014 Keynote, October 2014, University of Alberta, audio recording.

within the flesh of the Native woman's body, along with her ability to impart cultural and political knowledge? This is an especially important question given that, as Simpson explains, individual settlers can be disconnected and disassociated from the settler colonial structures producing the violable Native body. Instead, they are placed in a context where individuals enact violence against other individuals, thereby masking the reproduction of ongoing corporeal colonial violence. Through the moralistic discourse of violence, the female protagonists' acts become evidence of colonized and racialized people's failure to be properly civilized. In these narratives, however, the women refuse and complicate this discourse by violently asserting the association between the individual settler and the settler colonial structures enabling the violence settlers enact. The association and the Native women's disruption of the moralistic discourse of violence highlights the falsity of the discourse of civility and the narrative of progress settler colonialism wishes to perpetuate.

Angie's film refused the liberal and multicultural logics inherent to the settler colonial narrative by representing an alternative performance of Indigeneity that does not adhere to the ideas of particular cultural performance (whether dress, language, dance, etc.) or the passive Native. When Angie had Maile and me pretending to shoot settlers as part of her revenge narrative, her representation of violence privileged the political production of difference over the cultural production of difference, thereby working to re-establish the politics of Indigeneity within setter colonialism. By portraying the conditions giving rise to a desire for vengeance as consequence of colonial structures violently pervading Indigenous lives, revenge narratives demonstrate how particular productions of difference result from settler states' interference. Providing a structural explanation Alyosha Goldstein describes the colonial condition revenge narratives respond to when he states, "Modern colonialism entails techniques and institutions

that maintain foreign control over a people or peoples and territory…depriving those subjugated of autonomy and self-determination, and justifying this imposition in terms of the (religious, moral, cultural, or racial) superiority of the foreign power."[20] Revenge narratives assert the same violences as directly tied to conflicts between competing sovereign social systems. As a result, recognition as a settler process of supersession and elimination plays a crucial role in successfully representing these circumstances as the vehicle through which settler state policies are enacted and maintained.

Revenge as an interpersonal, violent act structurally represents the conjoining of the individual and collective sovereignty of Indigenous peoples. Bringing revenge and sovereignty together leads to a transformation toward an anti-colonial subjectivity that redefines the reproductive power of the Indigenous woman's body as representative of the thrivance of Indigenous peoples. Returning again to the student's remarks about our authenticity and our bodies, within a colonial racial framework, it is possible to surmise that we did not meet his narrow expectation of the appearance of Native people, an expectation based in a settler imaginary completely ignorant of Indigenous identity-making, history, and experience. From this perspective our bodies took up space that would otherwise be filled by bodies that he could recognize as racialized. In his eyes, we failed to properly perform our non-whiteness, our Indigeneity. The collective sovereignty our bodies represent and their reproductive capacity as identified by Simpson could not be understood by the student as the threat to the legitimacy and continuation of the settler state. Rather, following settler logics, the student identified Indigenous bodies as threatening to other critical theoretical fields (Black and Latinx studies, in particular).

[20] Alyosha Goldstein, "Introduction," in *Formations of United States Colonialism*, ed. Alyosha Goldstein (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 8.

He and other students put forth a narrow and false claim of limited resources that further marginalizes Indigenous presence in spaces such as academia. This kind of lateral violence enacts harm on not only Indigenous bodies, but Indigenous epistemologies, as well.

Understood as conjoining individual and collective sovereignty, narratives of revenge open up the imagination to alternative forms of justice not abstracted through the state and which reflect Indigenous peoples' political rights to sovereignty as praxis expressed though an overt claim of difference. Craig Womack, speaking of written cultural production, identifies the discursive work of storytelling as an ancient and ongoing tradition when he asserts "Indian people were certainly talking politics when they told stories, then as now."[21] As a framework of storytelling, revenge provides a new understanding of violence relative to identity, both in terms of what constitutes violence and what violence accomplishes. If we understand violence as a productive force beyond the scope of interpersonal interaction, the narrative work revenge enacts should be understood as an anti-colonial political act viscerally produced, particularly in its relation to the development of an anti-colonial subjectivity. After all, even if revenge is understood through purely negative effects of violence, it remains nonetheless true that violence is necessarily generative of both political and affective conditions.

Additionally, in place of apprehending the violence of revenge as strictly interpersonal and not productive, the revenge narratives under examination here show how violence generates conditions of possibility. The extra-legal nature of revenge points out the falsity of liberal justice narrated through state institutions, like settler state courts, while simultaneously contemplating the very constitution of justice. As Waziyatawin explains, justice "would entail overturning the

[21] Craig Womack, *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 58.

institutions, systems, and ideologies of colonialism that continue to affect every aspect of Indigenous life."[22] Revenge narratives offer an opportunity to begin imagining what such a dismantling might entail. All the films examined in this project remain unresolved following the revenge act. It's impossible to know how Aila answers the question, "What do we do now, Boss?" The films demand the viewer consider what this question means for the character after having dis-possessed themselves, to whatever degree, from the oppressive politics of the settler nation state. By pondering the (un)resolution of the films, the viewer's mind has the potential to open up to an imaginative sphere of the possible that rejects the continuation of the settler nation state in order to create an anti-colonial, anti-settler-state future. This, I believe, is precisely the work that "187 SUPERMAN" allowed Angie, Maile, and me to do together; it is the basis upon which we moved forward, away from the structures we found prohibitive of our individual and collective subjectivities.

Anti/Colonial Discourses

The Discursivity of Violence

Most, if not all, discussions around "decolonization" espouse non-violent action and peaceful protest as holding the greatest promise for social justice. While all efforts for social justice, activist and academic, recognize the violence of oppression and seek to provide a productive response to end oppression, nearly all claim that violence in response to violence is wrong – that it perpetuates the violence already rampant in society, that "it would mean we are no better than they are," that violence cannot end violence, that it harms us, too, and so on. Despite this popular social discourse, Indigenous artists have and continue to consistently

[22] Wazayatawin, "What Does Justice Look Like?: The Struggle for Liberation in Dakota Homeland," (St. Paul: Living Justice Press, 2008), 13.

produce narratives of revenge, often representing extreme, sometimes lethal, forms of violence. Always contextualized within the power dynamics of settler colonialism and its accompanying violence on non-white bodies, the portrayal of violence as revenge illuminates the complicated nature of violence and colonialism. Few would deny that the former is inherent in the latter, and this particular representational practice underscores that reality. It provides the audience an opportunity to recognize that structural violence inflicts itself on particular subjects through interpersonal interaction with subjects benefitting from existing structures. However, it also challenges moralistic discourses around violence by demonstrating the unequivalent nature of colonial violence, which is to say that violence enacted by the colonized is not the same as violence enacted by the colonizer.

The unequal nature of colonial violence is evidenced, in part, from demands made for non-white subjects to produce legibility within their colonial context, or put another way, to be appropriately non-white in accordance with their racialized subjectivity. For Indigenous people this means performing a certain kind of Indigeneity that allows non-Indigenous subjects to identify them as such. However, this demand presents itself further relative to Indigenous sovereignty as a formal process of state recognition. Structurally, settler states have legislated methods for determining which tribes they acknowledge as legitimately Indigenous and what such a status might mean within a settler colonial society. This is an inherently violent act, though disguised as an empowering social relation. Glen Coulthard's book, *Red Skins White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, proves recognition to be the touchstone for establishing the legitimacy of the settler state's violence. Legitimate violence creates illegitimate violence and produces social discourse that only recognizes non-state violence as wrong, both moralistically and as a matter of law. Coulthard discusses how contemporary

neoliberal regimes circumscribe social movements through rhetorics of legitimacy. He explains, "This constraint [on activism] involves the type of tactics that are being represented as morally legitimate in our efforts to defend our land and rights as Indigenous peoples, on the one hand, and those that are increasingly being presented as either morally illegitimate or at least politically self-defeating because of their disruptive extralegal, and therefore potentially alienating character, on the other."[23] Settler states' control over recognition, rationality, and moral authority establish a foundation for the colonial relationship between settlers and Indigenous people. It establishes colonialism's unequal power dynamics and fortifies the settler colonial project of elimination, because recognition becomes axiomatic to any negotiated outcome with the state by virtue of a conformity to neoliberal standards of "civility," even and maybe especially for negotiations involving sovereignty. This is an important framework for understanding the discursive work of revenge narratives. Recognition, as the starting point for state violence, establishes the imbalance of power and allows the audience to understand unequal forms of violence. When violence pre-exists the interpersonal interactions of the characters in the story, the retributive violence becomes complicated by the viewers' identification with the protagonist enacting revenge.

The Discursivity of Recognition and Refusal

Revenge narratives underscore the structurally violent social relations that emerge within settler states' claims to recognition, rationality, and morality. Simpson frames recognition as a state process that produces everyday kinds of violence for those being made to perform. However, she also sees how the process of recognition is contested and reciprocal, thus leading

[23] Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014): 166.

to refusal of colonial structures. As settler colonialism creates structures that set up conditions of elimination and/or displacement, Indigenous populations refuse both conditions. The uneven power relations between colonizer and colonized, however, result in distinct expressions of these reciprocal processes. Narratives of revenge present a story of recognition that is reciprocal – a kind of "we see you, too." Their representations of vengeance consistently situate violence as a measured response to ongoing colonial oppression that threatens the existence of Indigenous people. In response to this threat and by way of interpersonal interaction, revenge refuses the paradigm of recognition put forth by the state, and represents the production of a different, if not new, expression of power. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson identifies this power when she discusses generative refusal in her book *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*. After recounting a traditional story about deer that demonstrates refusal, she concludes that refusal "is consistent with the idea that focused rebuilding using Indigenous processes enacts an Indigenous presence that has the ability to give life to an Indigenous future and changes not only the actors involved in the focused rebuilding, but the power dynamics."[24] Angie's revenge narrative took away the potential the department set up for us "not to be"; her film and our participation constituted a visual sovereign act where we recognized and refused the settler colonial drive to elimination. From this perspective, representations of revenge are ideal objects for understanding the relationship between recognition and refusal and assertions of sovereignty. Through its rejection of conventional discourses decrying violence as a useful tool in achieving social justice, revenge as a representational practice pushes beyond the confines of the settler state as the arbiter of morality, legitimacy, and legality.

[24] Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*, (Minnesota: University of Minneapolis Press, 2017): 245.

When Angie spoke from behind the camera, her remarks reflected her and our desire to defeat the violence of whiteness. Her approach in doing that, however, needed to be situated within the context of revenge. When she would chant off camera, "White people die," Maile and I laughed every time. She was calling attention to our and the viewers' social positions, and her repeated declaration during the film makes the audience hyper-aware of the oppressive structures that call the film into being. As Native students, our structure of feeling – our thought as felt and our feeling as thought – was informed by that declaration differently than it informed settlers'. The consistent presence of the phrase in the film identifies the whiteness of settler colonialism as the oppressive force her film refuses and, whomever the viewer, their positionality relative to that structure cannot be ignored in the consumption of the film. It is the element of revenge she carries through to the credits with the disclaimer, "No white people were harmed during the making of this film." For the affect it had on us, she could have added, "No Native people have been disappeared."

Dian Million in *Therapeutic Nations: Healing in an Age of Indigenous Human Rights* discusses the "felt knowledge" that stories of residential school survivors convey and how it creates a "real discursive shift"[25] relative to the history of those experiences. She explains more specifically that "One of the most important features of these stories is their existence as alternative truths, as alternative historical views."[26] Stories of revenge provide such truths and views. The violence put at the center is colonial violence. The violence that is narrated, as Angie did, identifies the truth of that while also providing a new "view" of the history of settler

[25] Dian Million, *Therapeutic Nations: Healing in an Age of Indigenous Human Rights*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2013): 67.

[26] Ibid.

colonialism, namely that at the point of colonial contact other choices were available to colonizers such that their violence becomes barbaric.

The Discursivity of Justice

Even as I argue that the representation of revenge may be understood as a sovereign act reflective of broader assertions of sovereignty, I also insist on the way this sovereign act differs from those of settler colonial society. For instance, uneven power relations necessarily mean uneven motivation for and results from acts of violence. Additionally, this project understands the possibility for colonization to occur, in part, because Indigenous peoples did not greet settlers with lethal violence. They did not immediately respond to settlers as the violent invaders they ultimately proved to be. In other words, as colonial invaders arrived, Indigenous peoples held a worldview that did not understand land as an exclusive possession. Rather, they recognized a natural right to access land and resources for settlers' own survival; Indigenous peoples did not violently claim a natural and exclusive right to land, water, and other resources. Consequently, Indigenous people's intent in the historical imperial/colonial encounter does not reflect a desire to subjugate and/or eliminate, and contemporary expressions of revenge reflect this historical dynamic. Within these representations the ongoing desire of the colonizer to subjugate and eliminate Indigenous peoples stands as the circumstance within which reciprocal, though uneven, violence is produced. Therefore, the acts of revenge portrayed through these representations do not represent the desire for settler subjugation and/or elimination. At their foundation, they challenge settler temporality that understands colonialism as a past event and represents the imperial/non-imperial differences exhibited at the historical moment of encounter as continuous. Settler colonialism, as Mark Rifkin argues, contextualizes "Native peoples [as having] been subjected to profound reorganizations of prior geographies and modes of inhabitance…in an

attempt to reorder Indigenous temporalities, to remake them in ways that fit non-native timescapes of expansion and dispossession."[27] Rifkin notes that challenging settler temporalities that understand Indigenous presence in this way allows "conceptual room for addressing Native collective articulations and experiences of time that exceed non-native accounts – for engaging expressions of temporal sovereignty."[28] Temporal sovereignty of revenge narratives defies boundaries of time that would bound Indigenous experience *and action*.

The challenge to colonial narratives and mainstream understandings of history is accomplished, in part, because the virtual reservation presents itself as both a physical and psychic space "where Indigenous people can creatively re-territorialize physical and imagined sites that have been lost, that are in the process of renegotiation, or that have been retained."[29] Because this project understands revenge narratives as a positive refusal of the settler-colonial structures that exist as their condition of possibility and as a generative force in the production of an anti-colonial subjectivity, the virtual reservation presents a site of cultural production encompassing the imaginative sphere of the possible, one that does not rely on a temporality of progress or assume stability of social relations and power structures. As such, the virtual reservation offers a view of the interpersonal violence represented within these narratives through a lens that does not see imperial and colonial violence as an unfortunate period of history within the modern era. This broader view of violence demonstrates its entanglement with time, space, corporeality, and the affective consequences of colonization while simultaneously

[27] Mark Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017): ix.

[28] Rifkin, ix-x.

[29] Raheja, 148.

situating revenge as a site pregnant with the potential to alter the discourse around violence. Even though "187 SUPERMAN" does not provide direct representation of vengeance, Angie flashes images of white children playing dead, calls out "white people die," and sings "we're going to kill white people" while depicting the three of us relishing it all. More to the point, however, her film literally tells the audience to "look towards a liberatory future."

The representation of the complexity of violence as a legitimate response to colonial structures, while effective, does leave the reader with unresolved answers as to what constitutes justice. Certainly, these narratives demonstrate the impossibility of achieving this within the confines of settler colonialism and white supremacy, and the need to reset, redefine, and/or refuse recognition as an affective framework for dismantling current social structures. By providing the reader with the potential for subjectivity transformation, the narratives, also, represent survival as insufficient and demand a persistence that moves from survivance to thrivance. Through the narratives' (un)resolution the reader is left contemplating how to achieve these goals. Unanswered questions linger in the readers' imagination, challenging the discursive dismissal of violence, suggesting the transformation of a colonized subjectivity into an anti-colonial subjectivity, and encouraging the imagination of social justice beyond the boundaries of settler colonial legislation.

Reaching for the Anti-Colonial

The chapters in this dissertation consider the political and discursive work acts of violence in cultural production accomplish. I begin that effort in chapter one by examining Alanis Obamsawin's internationally renowned, multi-award-winning documentary about the Oka crisis, *Kanehsatake: 270 years of Resistance*. I argue that representations of real-life violence function to inform our understanding of what constitutes acceptable practices to refuse colonial

political structures and dispossession. In my analysis, the state's claim to an exclusive right to violence exists simultaneously with the Mohawks' refusal of that logic, instead insisting on the legitimacy of their sovereign right to claim land that has been in their stewardship for millennia by any means necessary. My position is that Obamsawin's presentation of both forms of violence place the violence of the state as the point of emergence; rather than demonstrating, first and foremost, the Mohawks' activism as the starting point of the violence, the film portrays their willingness to engage the state on its own terms. Through this lens, when the Canadian settler state displays its aggression and deploys its violence against the Mohawk people, it instigates a responding violence from the people of Kanehsatake. As a turning point in the history of Indigenous activism it is a moment that captured national and international attention and the film asserts violence as a reasonable response to protect land and the Mohawk people's right to sovereignty over their land and over their peoplehood. I demonstrate how the documentary successfully portrays the effectiveness and, potentially, the necessity for anti-colonial violence in the face of the state's desire to dispossess land and to homogenize its political body through the elimination of Indigenous people.

Chapter two, "Threat and the Ecstatic" conceives of pleasure as a site of radical resistance through eroticism and presents that connection by examining Tanya Tagaq's music video for her song, "Retribution." In my analysis, using threats of violence though movement, Tagaq and Laakkuluuk Williamson Bathory present embodiments of retributive violence that propel the viewer/listener to consider their own role in settler colonial violence enacted on the earth. The imagery in the video as well as the opening lyrics clearly convey that the retribution to come is the result of capitalism's exploitative and profoundly destructive actions. Paying particular attention to the consequences colonial conditions have had on Indigenous women I

assert that Tagaq performs a sensuality that denies the absolute victimhood that society tends to assign onto them. Presenting retributive violence emerging from the earth, the performers demonstrate the intimate connection people have with land and water. Doing so points out the responsibility people have to the earth alongside their failure to fulfill that responsibility. Despite its condemnations, however, Tagaq's throat singing provides the viewer/listener with hope for the future with a call to action. I contend that through her performance as a throat singer and through the dance she performs, Tagaq demonstrates a transformation from a colonial subjectivity to anti-colonial subjectivity, suggesting to the viewer/listener that their future can be similarly and purposefully anti-colonial.

The sexual assault of Indigenous women plays an essential role in the ongoing structures of settler colonialism's goals relative to Indigenous peoples and chapter three focuses on these conditions. I examine the short film "A Red Girl's Reasoning" (2012) alongside Louise Erdrich's novel, *The Round House*. Both texts explore ideas of justice following violent sexual assaults and each takes a divergent approach to resolve the injustice presented in the stories. Examining these two texts side by side, in "Structuring Violence" I explore the relationship between the settler state, violence, and revenge. Using literal movement as a marker for action, I delve into the gendered nature of violence while also considering whether justice is possible within the colonial conditions presented in the texts. Ultimately, I demonstrate that while one uses extralegal violence as an alternative structure of justice, the other demonstrates an impulse to rationalize the inclusion of Indigenous epistemologies into the settler state justice system to justify revenge. I explicate the moments of violence in the texts as the points where state justice is reified through its failure. I conclude that the violence demonstrates how in one text the state justice system is refused in order to achieve justice and, in the other, invested in as having potential to reform and

provide justice. By way of the comparison, I assert that Indigenous cultural production holds great potential for re-imagining what constitutes justice.

Thinking of revenge only as interpersonal violence fails to capture the ways it can operate beyond a person-to-person encounter. In the final chapter, "Refusing Death," I compare two films, *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* and *Get Out* to understand the violence of revenge as a communal accomplishment that speaks to the futurity of Indigenous and Black people, respectively. I identify the community involvement as central to the way the viewer comes to understand the violence being enacted against racial and colonial structures rather than individual characters. Those structures are represented through the setting of the films, as well, creating a colonial map that the retributive violence disrupts. The violence enacted on the protagonists becomes possible in those spaces through a process of mapping savagery onto the Indigenous and Black body. Using savagery as a lens demonstrates the co-constituency of Indigeneity and Blackness under the violent conditions of settler colonialism. The co-constituency I identify provides points of overlap between Indigeneity and Blackness in settler colonialism's desire for elimination. I argue that each film refuses the violent conditions of settler colonialism by deploying a responding violence which remaps the colonial space of the reservation and the space of the planation, transforming each space from a place of Indigenous and Black death to a place of Indigenous and Black life. I conclude by proposing a new way to understand the relationality between Indigeneity and Blackness through land.

CHAPTER ONE Grounding Violence: Alanis Obamsawin's *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance*

> It is not happenstance or luck that Indigenous peoples and our lands still exist after centuries of attack. This is our strategic brilliance. Our presence is our weapon…[1]
>
> — Leanne Betasamosake Simpson

> We have seen how the government's agent uses a language of pure violence. The agent does not alleviate oppression or mask domination. He displays and demonstrates them with the clear conscience of the law enforcer, and brings violence into the homes and minds of the colonized subject.[2]
>
> — Franz Fanon

Introduction

In 1989 in the Town of Oka near Quebec, the mayor, Jean Ouellette, announced plans to expand a golf course, along with the construction of dozens of condominiums. The land on which the town intended to build, The Pines, is an area of land whose occupation has been vehemently disputed by the people of Kanehsatake (Kanehsatakero:non), a nearby Kanien'kehá:ka or Mohawk community, since the 18th century. With full awareness of the centuries old dispute, Oka's mayor announced a start date for this development. Even prior to this announcement Kanehsatake had been working to protect and reclaim The Pines, but with the imminence of construction came an imperative to defend The Pines, portions of which include burial grounds. Despite attempts to resolve the land issue through the colonial legal system, the dispute ultimately culminated in an armed confrontation between the Mohawks of Kanehsatake and, eventually, the Canadian military. The dispute and its resulting management by the Canadian government came at a cost to the colonizer of one man's life and $155 million over the

[1] Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*, (Minnesota: University of Minneapolis Press, 2017): 6.

[2] Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, (New York: Grove Press, 2004): 4.

course of seventy-eight days. Thinking about the conflict within the structures of settler colonialism, the state's response exemplifies power informed by the logics of necropolitics. As the "concatenation of biopower, the state of exception, and the state of siege"[3] relative to the "colony" the state's deployment of violence was and is no surprise. Establishing a state of exception allowed the Canadian state to attempt to exercise its control over Kanehsatakero:non, and to assert its absolute claim to The Pines. What distinguishes this confrontation, however, is the Kanien'kehá:ka's willingness and ability to respond to the state's violence with violence. As a moment of deep resistance and refusal this confrontation ushered in a resurgence of land protection efforts that continue today and can be seen in Standing Rock and the Landback movement.

Alanis Obomsawin, in her film *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance*,[4] documents Kanehsatake's determination and obligation to protect their sacred territory from commercial development. For the Kanien'kehá:ka's violent response to be fully understood, it must be situated on a continuum of violence contextualized in ongoing settler colonialism and dispossession. It should further be understood relative to the excessive nature of the settler state's response. Obomsawin's film depicts the Mohawk's willingness to exact violence that, as defined by the state, is "(a) an offense that has as an element the use, attempted use or threatened use of physical force against the person or property of another; or (b) any other offense that is a felony and that, by its nature, involves a substantial risk that physical force against the person or

[3] Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture*, 15(1), 22.

[4] *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance (The Oka Crisis)*. Dir, Alanis Obomsawin. National Film Board of Canada, 2003. Google Video, <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=8939345967488327634>.

property of another may be used in the course of committing the offense."[5] The Pines is not and was not at the time the property of the state; it is, nonetheless, true that the state understood itself to be justified and lawful in dispossessing Kanehsatakero:non of their land. What is also apparent in Obomsawin's film is Kanehsatakero:non's willingness to sacrifice their lives in order to ensure the sanctity of The Pines and its preservation for future generations. Within necropolitical conditions death takes on meaning and significance beyond the simple cessation of life. The Kanien'kehá:ka's response to the threat posed by development illustrates the utility and significance of the "subjugation of life to the power of death (necropolitics) [that] profoundly reconfigure relations among resistance, sacrifice, and terror."[6] Steadfastly refusing to allow The Pines to be desecrated formed a logic around the willingness to sacrifice life. At more than one point in the film, the articulation of death as a possible outcome for the sake of saving sacred land was accepted as a reasonable response that would guarantee a future for The Pines.

In this regard, Mbembe's assertion that necropolitics in a colonial context means "sovereignty consists fundamentally in the exercise of power outside the law (*ab legibus solutus*)…where 'peace' is more likely to take on the face of a 'war without end'."[7] It carries with it specific meaning relative to the ongoing relations between the people of Oka and the people of Kanehsatake. The film makes clear that the Oka land struggle is a much longer and broader struggle between the colonizers and the colonized than this one incident. Importantly, in the historical narrative provided in the film, the narrative voice situates the Mohawk claim within

[5] 18 U.S. Code § 16 2012, July 20, 2018, https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/granule/USCODE-2011-title18/USCODE-2011-title18-partI-chap1-sec16.

[6] Mbembe, 39.

[7] Mbembe, 23.

a framework of relationality to the land and not from the viewpoint of ownership or right of first possession. Rather, the Mohawk narrative of land struggle ties intimately to the identity of the Kanehsatakero:non as a distinct people. The film makes clear in its portrayal of the officials of Oka asserting control and rights over this disputed land that they disavow any longstanding struggle or conflict between the Kanehsatake people or that they understand themselves as part of a settler colonial society or project. For instance, before full military intervention in the conflict, the film shows a segment of a meeting attended by government officials from surrounding areas supportive of Oka's position and many non-First Nations people at the Oka Town Hall. Ouellette, addressing the crowd and government officials, proclaims, "If we negotiate 75 percent of Quebec's territory…how should we approach this question? We have to approach it with a clear head. We have to examine it in a way that doesn't provoke things. But there are questions we have to ask ourselves. Would you agree that we should negotiate for your land? Negotiate for 75 percent of Quebec?" In these statements and questions an "us versus them" mentality emerges through the use of the pronoun "we." Additionally, ideas of land ownership, authority and, most importantly, legitimate jurisdiction held by Canadian government officials must be assumed in order for them to make sense as a rhetorical tool. All three ideas work to proscribe a temporality to the conflict that precludes the possibility of land dispossession as central to the settler colonial project. This is necessary in order to rally support from the meeting attendees for the violent intervention to follow, but also to elide the government's settler colonial status, as well as its citizens' subjectivity as settlers.

This becomes further apparent if we consider that, as previously stated, the violence of this confrontation needs to be understood as part of a continuum to make apparent the way that each party's use of violence is not equivalent. The state's assertion of jurisdiction over The Pines

and criminalization of the occupation continues centuries long colonial violence and dispossession. Obamsawin makes this apparent when she provides the history of the formation of Kanehsatake and the level of dispossession involved, dating back to 1663 when "The gentleman of the seminary Saint Sulpice in Paris were named the seigneurs of the island of Montreal," previously known as Hochelaga, a primary Haudenosaunee settlement. Over the course of approximately 100 years the French ensured dispossession through appeals to the French king who ultimately upheld the dispossession despite a wampum belt created to memorialize the land occupation agreement. This process continued with the arrival of the British and new assertions of jurisdiction and land transfer processes between settlers. The history she provides after having introduced the struggle gives context to the occupation while also showing that Kanehsatakero:non's ancestors fought hard to preserve their land, including The Pines. They are fighting for their sacred land, but also to honor historical struggles that resulted in the preservation of places like The Pines. Part of that 20th century struggle, much as previous centuries' struggles, entailed working within the settler state system. Once that failed the people, there was little choice but to deploy violence; the people of Kanehsatake acted in good faith as rotiskenrakéte or warriors who necessarily needed to protect kanikonriio, a good mind. Within this framework the actual violence deployed by the Kanien'kehá:ka depicted in the film calls into question the effectiveness and value of purely non-violent responses to the settler state's ongoing and violent project of dispossession and elimination of Indigenous peoples.

As an examination of the Mohawk's method of land protection in this instance, the film also depicts the relevance of subject formation in determining responsive action to settler colonialism and the impact that violence has upon subjects' self-understanding as Indigenous people working against the necropolitical forces and structures of settler colonialism. Near the

beginning of the film, a young woman named Kahentsiiosta demonstrates a long-standing understanding of community subjectivity. With a close-up of her face, she recounts: “I came up here and I says, ‘So, where’s the roadblock?’ They said, ‘It’s right here,’ I said, ‘This is the road we’re blocking?” As she provides her statement the scene cuts to a dirt road and pulls back to show several cars parked along the road with people standing by, familiarizing the viewer with the terrain. Her voiceover continues, “This is the road yous [sic] been blocking for three months? It’s a dirt road,’” The camera then cuts back to her sitting in the grass, perhaps The Pines in the background, smiling as she goes on, “I thought it was maybe a highway, you know? Jeez…” Her description reveals not only how long Kanehsatake had been working to hold back the developers, but, also, that roadblocks are a participatory event that comes with expectations based on previous experiences. Her relaxed nature in the grass and the light expression on her face conveys a sense of ease about the nature of the actions being undertaken. In other words, roadblocks represent a communal experience of some frequency that is just part of being Kanien’kehá:ka. Further into the film, another woman, Chicky, also expresses a similar understanding, “If I go to jail, I’m going to walk through those doors in honor. I’m not going in as a junkie. Nothing to be ashamed of. And when I come out, I’ll teach my children and my grandchildren to fight. No more compassion, I’ve had it...If this is civilized, I’d rather stay on this side of the barricade.” Each of these women clearly articulates a self-understanding that exists in opposition to colonial structures of dispossession while reflecting the Mohawks’ reactions to those structures that have developed over the course of occupation. Donna Goodleaf describes the primary response to this conflict as “a profound will and determination to fulfill the duties and responsibilities of a Nation – to protect and defend the people and the land from any

outside aggression in accordance in [sic] the Kainerakowa, or Great Law of Peace."[8] Acting in accordance with that Law these women see their role as fulfilling a duty to protect their land within a larger understanding of obligation and community.

Framing the subjugation of life to the power of death as a discursive process between colonizer and colonized, it becomes clear that the willingness and understanding of the need for the Mohawk's violence specifically shape the ways these women view their own as well as other Kanien'kehá:ka's (and all Haudenosaunee's) expected response to this level of encroachment and deployment of colonial violence. As the colonizer acts to threaten life as a show of absolute power, the Mohawks' response answers the threat through their show of a willingness to give up life. In other words, death becomes a site of power for the colonized thereby undermining the reach of the colonizer's power. At the beginning of the film and a short time after Kahentsiiosta's statement, Ellen Gabriel, an essential participant in the protection of The Pines, reflects back on the beginning of the armed confrontation, recalling,

> John Cree, our spiritual leader, had started burning tobacco, and he was giving thanks. And, uh, about 5:15, that's when the Tilden, Tilden trucks rolled in. And the, the SWAT team came out. And there was three of us that just looked at each other and, uh, one of the, one of the women had said, 'Holy shit, they're here.' Our instincts kicked in and the women have to go to the front, 'cause, uh, it's our obligation to do that, to protect the land, to protect our, our Mother. And I can remember looking at the faces of the SWAT team, and they were all scared. They, they were like, were like young babies who had never met something so strong, who had never met a spirit. We were fighting something without a spirit. There was no thought to it. They were like robots.

Identifying the SWAT team as robots, Gabriel identifies the nationalist nature of the institution, its belief in the settler state's superiority, and the individual members of the team as acting on blind nationalism. Essentially, she articulates the process of reciprocity whereby colonizer and

[8] Donna Goodleaf, *Entering the Warzone: A Mohawk Perspective on Resisting Invasions*, (Penticton, B.C.: Theytus Books, 1995): 136.

colonized clash under the terms of occupation. The individuals carrying out the state's violence act purely under orders of the state that were issued as an expression of power and an attempt to control and subjugate; they are there to impose the threat of death, the power and ability to kill at the will of the state. The women's response on the other hand, serves to safeguard life, even if the confrontation with the SWAT team results in death. At another point in the film, Chicky explains this in more direct terms, "Somebody had asked me, 'How far are you willing to go?' I said, 'Six feet under'…But that's what they want, uh? Shut up the Indian, keep the Indian nation down where they had them for so many years." The attempts to resolve the dispute through "legal" means even though the laws that create the very conditions of legality constitute a form of colonial violence, also demonstrates the Mohawks' desire to not deploy violence; the assertion of violence emerges as a necessary consequence of the settler state's unwillingness to properly recognize First Nations peoples' rightful claims to their territories. When Ellen Gabriel says, "I think we all conducted ourselves in a very honorable way, 'cause we did try to avoid violence. And we knew what they came there for. And we knew that, uh, as it progressed, something really bad could happen. We just felt it, it was something you could taste, almost in the air" she makes clear that violence was not the preferred method of resolution. As a point of contrast to the settler state, the Kanien'kehá:ka's response is an effort meant to safeguard a collective future whose potential is under serious threat. A loss of land of this magnitude and in this way undermines the Mohawks self-understanding relative to their relationship to land. The Pines is not property to be sold or negotiated over; it is part of the fundamental collective identity for Kanehsatakero:non. The excessive nature of the state's response suggests a motive rooted primarily in exercising and spectacularizing power to reify the colonial structures naturalizing its violence towards Indigenous peoples in their efforts to combat occupation.

The settler colonial violence and necropolitics at play in this confrontation distinguishes itself in several ways, one of which is through a reciprocal process of recognition by the colonized and the colonizer. Audra Simpson, in *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*, outlines this process as an assertion of authority between sovereign nations whose opposition pushes against each other in an uneven power dynamic. Using auto-ethnography Simpson looks at recognition in the context of a daily reciprocal and contested process. Beginning with the assertion that multiple sovereignties exist simultaneously in settler colonialism, Simpson details the particularities of what she terms, "nested sovereignty"[9] in relation to the Mohawks of Kahn:awake in order to contextualize a different relationship inherent to sovereign status with settler state recognition and different processes of recognition arising out of the conditions of ongoing colonization. She explains, "First, sovereignty may exist within sovereignty. One does not negate the other, but they necessarily stand in terrific tension and pose serious jurisdictional and normative challenges to each other."[10] While processes of recognition (and misrecognition) have a long historical precedent, Simpson's interrogation of these processes lays out a relationship between the recognition granted from/by the settler state and the recognition that emerges within/between Kahn:awake and the settler state as a result of colonization. It exists as a point of contestation where each demands the acknowledgement of the legitimacy of the other. In this context the Mohawks insist on their own persistence as a people. The juxtaposition of each sovereign acting within the parameters of colonial jurisdiction, whether acknowledged as primary or false, highlights the incommensurability of colonized and

[9] Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014): 11.

[10] Simpson, 10.

colonizer subjectivities.' Furthermore, it highlights their relative understandings of temporality, spatiality, and modernity as it emerges from colonization relative to violence. In the context of the Oka crisis, the opposing colonizer subjectivities present as a result of the contestation exist as the spectral remainder of settler colonialism. When Obamsawin shows a confrontation between Canadian military attempting to conduct a raid of the Kahnawake Longhouse, resistance to their presence is shown at the same time there is a close-up of two military personnel. In this moment of tension, one of the soldiers says twice, "Sir, it's an order from higher." The nature of the interaction depicts the divergent and conflicting understandings of the settler colonial conditions within which the Oka crisis occurs. Part of its process is to assert the justifiable dispossession of land and life. As a consequence of this process, in a violent confrontation, the subjugation of life to the power of death also becomes contested between the sovereigns, each asserting their own framework of power and definition of success. For the Kanien'kehá:ka, loss of life that secures The Pines is an investment in a future hanging under the sign of precarity by virtue of the centuries-long threat posed by the state against Kanehsatakero:non's land, an investment whose imagining may require sacrifice that temporally collapses past, present, and future. In other words, while the violence of the state operates as a function of spectacularizing power, the violence of the Kanien'kehá:ka operates as a function of ongoing survivance and futurity. In the face of violence meant to provide a display of absolute force and might that vanquishes its opponent, any responding violence focuses attention on its purpose. Which is to say that if loss of Mohawk life is required to maintain The Pines, then it is not really a loss at all; success becomes defined temporally, spatially, and relative to subjectivity as those whose desire to protect is fulfilled as part of the process of understanding their self.

The way the colonizer understands the Mohawks' refusal to submit to Canada's jurisdiction necessarily frames Kanehsatake's reclamation of The Pines as a singular event requiring state response to secure the interests of its citizens. Although settler colonialism requires Canada to claim jurisdiction over Indigenous peoples through the imposition of citizenship, and thus law, the complicated nature of that jurisdiction and citizenship reveals itself through the discursive differences each group deploys when justifying the violence that has been undertaken. When Obamsawin includes a press conference held behind the barricades, she shows the participants arriving together in the bucket of a front loader. They confidently and calmly walk out of the bucket and head to the table that has been set up for the event. As they address the failure of the parties to successfully negotiate terms to end the Mohawk occupation of The Pines, Minnie Garrow declares:

> We are Native people to this land. We're not trying to take your land or anybody else's property. You ask if there's an imminent assault here. Yes, there is. Within a few hundred feet from here you'll find the armed forces. Yes, they're ready for an assault. We were here to protect our burial grounds and The Pines from a nine-hole golf course. You must keep that in mind. Have you forgotten?

She reminds the press of the stakes of the confrontation and that the aggression of the state is the primary source of violence. The question she ends her statement with, however, frames the violence that the Mohawks have undertaken as a reminder of the settler colonial conditions within which it occurs. At another point in the film, juxtaposing it between scenes of the warriors watching newscasts on TV, Obamsawin uses footage of a press conference held by Prime Minister Brian Mulroney during which he seems to want to ensure settlers forget historical and ongoing colonialism, which Obamsawin's juxtaposition refuses. He says to the reporters, "We are not going to accede to requests from a group of warriors, some of whom are not even Canadian citizens and whose actions, to understate the case, have been illegal for some considerable period of time." He points out that other Kanien'kehá:ka who are not citizens have

arrived and are also participating in the "illegal" occupation, and derisively refers to them as "warriors" intent on causing Canada and its citizens harm. His remarks situate the Mohawks as inherently violent and his focus on citizenship confines the Mohawks to structures of settler state law that colonialism requires. In so doing he refuses the reality of the Kanien'kehá:ka as a cohesive nation that pre-exists Canada, while also hiding that reality from Canada's settlers. Essentially, his characterization of Kanien'kehá:ka people as terrorists and invaders expresses a logic of possession, of both land and people. In *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*, Aileen Moreton Robinson considers possession as a kind of logic that underwrites colonial and racial structures. She explains that "white possessive logics are operationalized within discourses to circulate sets of meanings about ownership of the nation, as part of commonsense knowledge, decision making, and socially produced conventions."[11] The settler state discourse around the Mohawks as a people and The Pines as land function through such logic while the Mohawks' discourse asserts an Indigenous logic that reflects continuity of time. In their own way and in opposition to each other, each discourse temporalizes colonialism and the actions being taken in irreconcilable terms that rely on very different temporalities to fully understand.

Ranjana Khanna in her book *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism* explains these divergent understandings as "an affect of colonialism, understood as the spectral remainder of the inassimilable colonial structure of the modern nation-state, [which] informs and shapes the temporality of contemporary nation-statehood."[12] This inassimilability is on the part of the

[11] Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The Logics of Possession: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2015): xii.

[12] Ranjana Khanna. *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism*. Durham: Duke University Press (2003), 12.

colonized and is best displayed through the temporality the Mohawks construct of a colonial history spanning 270+ years. It is a temporality that is reflected in the present and which continues to assert sovereignty in opposition to the colonizer's claim to and assertion through concepts of jurisdiction over these particular subjects. The state, however, displays its settler temporality when framing the reclamation as an illegal and extra juridical event that goes beyond criminalizing the Mohawks' actions by criminalizing their sovereignty. By assuming a prior Quebecois possession of land that happens to include the area Mohawks know as The Pines, the prime minister deploys a kind of rationalization that pre-figures the existence of the state, the lawfulness of Indigenous dispossession, and the unlawfulness of Indigenous reclamation. Robert Nichols identifies this process as founded on a recursive logic. He explains, "the state itself must arise out of extra-legal force, for this no prior law that can validate founding itself."[13] With that rationalization the defensive actions of the Mohawks become criminalized as property theft that in turn works to criminalize Indigenous sovereignty that always already opposes settler colonial land dis/possession.

As much as these discursive positions reflect the oppositional political positioning of the settler state and Indigenous people, they also reflect the ways subject formation occurs within settler colonialism. More than effacing history, the prime minister's statements about Mohawks who are protecting The Pines also position Indigenous people in a particular way relative to the citizens he addresses. While his statements certainly assert superiority through the prioritization of interests, his remarks speak directly to the formation of settlers' colonial identity that can be usefully understood through the framework of worlding which Khanna asserts as a kind of

[13] Robert Nichols, "Theft is Property! The Recursive Logic of Dispossession," *Political Theory* Vol. 46(1): 20.

epistemic violence. As she explains, "Worlding is an event through which the participants are brought into temporality and history, or, conversely, excluded from these and concealed timelessly into the earth."[14] Citizens are those brought into modernity as legitimate participants in society whose subject formation reflects the liberal sensibilities that allow the forgetting that Garrow references in the press conference. Those who are excluded from this category, like the "warriors" Prime Minister Mulroney refers to, either literally or by virtue of their experience relative to race and colonialism, remain outside the bounds of liberalism and proper society. Being relegated to the exterior creates a kind of subject formation that recognizes the violence of the state as the source of primary violence, whether discursive or physical, which requires an in-kind response. Situating the status of citizen as the source of legitimacy worlds Canadians into the modernity that the "warriors" are excluded from. The category of citizen then comes to be defined against those who are banished from modernity, i.e., Indigenous peoples, and thus made into subjects meant to acquiesce to the supposed superiority of the liberal sensibilities that would exclude them.

Describing the dependent relationship between the logics of psychoanalysis and colonialism, Khanna fully lays bare the contemporary colonial nation-state's contingent existence versus the teleological and thus inevitable historicization it wishes to promulgate. In this tension between a colonial past and colonial desire, "the citizen's own responsibility to the group or nation is to *remember to forget* in order that the future can be willed into existence. National formation is understood as the assimilation into a narrative of self or of history, the past of the nation."[15] In the case of the Kanehsatakero:non and the Canadian officials responding to

[14] Khanna, 4.

[15] Khanna, 12.

their land claim, disparate ideas of nationhood, belonging, and subjectivity collide to highlight that the colonial "temporality that already rendered the colonies 'unmodern' thus fails to fully grasp the discrepant modernity that emerges in the colonies." [16] While Khanna speaks of postcoloniality relative to nations like Algeria in a way that recognizes a kind of end to colonization, in settler colonialism the colonized continually actively refuse the assimilation of the settler narrative as part of their subjectivity. We see this in the film during a joint press conference between the Mohawks and the Canadian government. Ellen Gabriel stands and says in Mohawk, "Today I am proud to be an Indian." She continues in English, "I am proud to say that I am a Mohawk within the Mohawk Nation of the Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy. When we started this blockade, something had to come out of it that would progress our cause and unite our people. This agreement is something that our nation has been searching for for many years – recognition of who we are as a people. Not just as Mohawk people but as the first people of this continent." Gabriel's remarks highlight the existence of a nation of people not only separate and apart from Canada but pre-existing the settler state itself. In terms of responsive action to that colonization, the colonized subject, while worlded "timelessly into the earth" by the colonizer, asserts the full temporality of their presence that the colonized disavows. As a result of disavowal and reorganizing of settler temporalities, the colonized are able to continue to assert the past of their own nation.

Obomsawin demonstrates such modernity in the film's contemplation of the land claim extending back to seventeenth century negotiations with the French and by including elders reflecting on their parents' and grandparents' struggle for this same land. She also presents and

---

[16] Ibid.

explains the wampum belt[17] made as a record of loss experienced by the Mohawks when the French and Catholic Church betrayed the agreement made for the lands of Kanehsatake. The last of the press conference mentioned above that Obamsawin shows is Frank Natawe addressing the government officials present by saying "As far back as I can remember there has always been a struggle. I hope that the Creator will give you the integrity to fulfill these things [the terms of the peace agreement]." Obamsawin then introduces Muriel Nicholas, a Kanehsatake Mohawk who reports that "My great-grandfather, my grandfather, and my father have been fighting over this and I never thought I'm going to see it myself, to come up like this." Her remarks provide contemporary context to a generations long struggle to combat colonial dispossession. Obamsawin's placement of her remarks following Natawe's highlights the lack of integrity historically shown. Nicholas's historical memory places the struggle as an ongoing contemporary presence. The teleological grounding of colonial history fails to recognize and/or fully comprehend the cohesive nature of these moments spanning centuries, but which actually inform and define modernity by denying pre-colonial history.

In their faithful forgetting, the nation-state's agents understand the past as over and the present established in such a way that the betrayal becomes an episteme that is violent in its instruction but also one that can justify the ongoing violence of the state. As one Oka resident and citizen reflects after the armed conflict begins and the film shows several interviewees commenting on the elected officials' disavowal of responsibility for the confrontation, "The law still has to be respected." This statement assumes and expresses the legitimacy and authority of the colonial nation-state over and above any potential or real authority the Kanehsatakero:non

[17] For information on the purpose and meaning of wampum belts for the Haudenosaunee see, http://www.ganondagan.org/wampum.html.

have over this territory. Although this citizen recognizes that the Mohawks have some manner of claim over this particular swath of territory, the focus on settler law as the ultimate determiner of proper and acceptable action reflects settlers' deep desire to invest in the settler state's position of ownership, control, and domination, but it also reflects the citizens' investment in the Mohawks' submission to the settler state's domination and their determination to forget the sovereign status of Kanehsatakero:non. It is in the context of these investments and disavowals that the Kanehsatakero:non understand violence as the most effective means to secure the sanctity of their sacred territory.

Conflicting notions of modernity within a colonial nation-state challenged by the temporality Indigenous people assert expose a colonial haunting revealing that "While some specters may be put to rest permanently through the work of a genealogy of the present, others are endemic to the structure of nation-statehood's colonial inception."[18] In a settler colonial context where the needs and desires of the nation-state encompass their own particularities, one of those structures is the pre-modern Indigenous subject against whom the modern colonial subject becomes constructed as a national citizen replete with her assimilated narrative and responsible forgetting. What the Oka Crisis demonstrates is the colonial nation-state's attempts to collapse the present into a past whose future teleologically and inevitably renders the colonizer as the victor and rightful inheritor of the land in dispute. Thus, the modern settler nation state asserts its temporality as the legitimate arbiter of both the present and the future its subjects have invested themselves in. Aside from attempting to condone the originary colonial violence that gives rise to the haunting that refuses to relinquish a colonial foundation, the related yet

[18] Khanna, 15.

autonomous notions of contemporaneity inform both instigating actions and subsequent reactions to a colonial confrontation where space and time coalesce into a de/colonial struggle.

Colonial Time, Space, and Subjectivity

Reflecting back on Gabriel's description of the arrival of the SWAT, the Mohawk women "world" themselves into being through the assertion of their gendered obligation to protect the land at any cost, which does not fit within the masculine gendered framework of warfare and conflict familiar to the colonial agents. They confront a previously asserted history that worlded them into the realm of the earthed or concealed, thus accounting for the surprise and fear on behalf of the SWAT team described by Gabriel. The interweaving of time and space noted above give rise to and sustain for short periods a kind of "time-lag"[19] that opens time and space to an opportunity for the Indigenous subject to speak herself into being in modernity and constituted with/against the colonizer. Understanding the colonizer in this historical moment as the Canadian military and police forces, a framework arises wherein "The colonizer and the colonized [are] bound together through the pathological logic of the colonial situation, which create[s] terms as dialectically opposed even as the situation [gives] rise to many contradictory positions."[20]

Near the opening of the film, Ellen Gabriel describes the initial scene of confrontation described above where all parties appear to understand the unfolding of the future before them in terms historically specific to the colonial situation that has interpellated them in particular ways. Simultaneously, Gabriel and the other women's subjectivity emerges as both present, past, and future as part of the coloniality they are confronting. In essence they refuse concealment, but also

[19] Khanna, 15.

[20] Khanna, 199.

reveal the settler colonial subject as understanding itself outside of colonial time and space. This worlding event, however, "understands history as an utterance projected into the world and understands the world…as profoundly shaped into unconcealment through the event of saying."[21] If the history of colonialism relies on the concealment of and a particular categorization of Indigenous peoples as outside modernity, this specific moment of "'Worlding' involves a creation of strife"[22] productive of a time lag that disorients the subjectivity of the colonizing subject through the inability to keep concealed and relegated the pre-modern that which allows its own colonial emergence into the world (i.e., the colonized).

The film demonstrates zones of exceptional violence in at least two ways, both of which display differing or at least divergent understandings of colonial time addressing the colonial violence depicted in the film. First, at several points in the film, Canadian citizens testify to the camera their incredulity at the action of its governing body. Specifically, one Canadian makes reference to the rise of a police state and a few others are shown speaking in sympathy with, even if not in defense of, the Mohawks' actions. Obamsawin situates the second demonstration of violence immediately following a scene where a young boy says, "They could be hidden in the forest. They could be hidden anywhere. You don't even see them" as Obamsawin shows a Mohawk man standing in the road having his car searched. Immediately after, she narrates a scene of a large crowd of non-First Nations people burning an effigy of a Mohawk Warrior yelling, "Savages!" These divergent reactions to the Mohawk's defense of The Pines express the unfolding of colonial time wherein the former appears to understand the Indigenous people as, at least to some extent, as part of a common body politic and, consequently, deserving of certain

[21] Khanna, 5.

[22] Khanna, 4.

protections and rights from the state, whereas the latter holds a severely antagonistic position reflective of the "vanquished populations" referred to by Mbembe as "enshrined by their despoilment."[23] At this moment of Oka's confrontation between the Mohawks and Canadian military, the colonial state demonstrates that "The *state of siege*…allows a modality of killing that does not distinguish between the external and internal enemy."[24] This blurred distinction between Canada's imposition of citizenship on First Nations peoples and the rhetorical tools disavowing the protection citizenship supposedly provides for the Kanien'kehá:ka' accounts for the divergent reactions on behalf of the Canadian citizens, but also makes sense of the military defense of its actions by asserting a need to "make sure that we take a position on the ground so we can ensure the security and safety of everybody around here," as one military official states. A discourse of protection emerges through this disavowal, performing the twofold task of inclusion of the Mohawks for the purpose of exclusion and represents the ongoing effort to conceal them in the earth.

The assertion of sovereignty by the colonizer is "occupation, and occupation mean[s] relegating the colonized into a third zone between subjecthood and objecthood."[25] In effect it would represent the worlding event for the colonizer whereby the colonial citizen emerges at the expense or disposability of the Indigenous subject which represents the third zone. Occupying a space of limbo between subjecthood and objecthood, the Indigenous subject's relation to the land vanishes for the colonizers because "Here, the colonial state derives its fundamental claim of

[23] Mbembe, 25.

[24] Mbembe, 30.

[25] Mbembe, 26.

sovereignty and legitimacy from the authority of its own particular narrative of history and identity."[26] As tensions between the Mohawks and Canadian military officials are shown to heighten in a moment where the opposition between the colonized and colonizer come into sharp focus for those involved, the film cuts to news reel showing Premier Bourassa making a formal statement to reporters, "The toughest call for any government in the Western world – our world – is to defend democracy against those people who do not believe in democracy." His statement erases the Mohawk people's inclusion in the Iroquois Confederacy, the oldest operating democracy in the world, while the Prime Minister's statement refuses the First Nations status of the Mohawk people in place of the assertion of a generic "warrior" characterized more as a terrorist figure. Moreover, his statement denies the treaties and court rulings explicitly excluding Mohawk peoples from having to recognize the US-Canadian border's legitimacy as it runs across their traditional territory. Additionally, two Mohawk people respond during face-to-face confrontations with Canadian military personnel with the questions, "I'm a terrorist?" and "Look whose the savage now, 'uh?" The simultaneous attempt at imposition and absolute refusal of the colonized subjectivity's inclusion represents the daily, though on a bigger scale, nested sovereignty described by Simpson. By including the colonial temporality of the settler state for the purposes of exclusion of their pre-existing sovereignty, Kanien'kehá:ka create the assertion of an alternative Indigenous subjectivity existing within its own distinct sphere of sovereignty. The Indigenous subject moves beyond the worlding event to a temporal and spatial matrix that refuses invisibility, settler colonialism as an always already existent power structure, and denies the status of conquered.

[26] Mbembe, 27.

In effect, the confrontation represented in this film over the territory known as The Pines represents a struggle for more than land; it involves a struggle for the existence of the colonized, specifically on their own terms, and the colonial narrative, both significantly figuring in multiple possibilities for death while also creating a site of life through The Pines. At the outset of the conflict, following an attempted teargassing, a participant, Kahentiiosta, in the struggle explains the collective response to the aggression, "For sure we weren't moving now. They can try whatever they want to get us out, but we weren't leaving." At a later point in the film, a warrior going by the name Freddy Kreuger is filmed explaining, "I'm willing to be here right until the end. If something does go down where we get shot up, fine, you know? But…hopefully I'll come out of this alive." In a colonial context where the only discursive future imagined by settler society for Indigenous peoples is elimination and/or vanishing, the logics of martyrdom and survival taken up by Mbembe as having an intimate relationship with death and terror relate to the Mohawk people defending The Pines. Having expressed a willingness to die, and even at times intimating an unlikelihood of survival should a full armed engagement ensue confirms "The power and value of the body [that] result[s] from a process of abstraction based on the desire for eternity. In that sense, the martyr, having established a moment of supremacy in which the subject overcomes his own mortality, can be seen as laboring under the sign of the future…in death the future is collapsed into the present."[27] This desire where the present becomes the future, is most poignantly demonstrated during the film when showing the warrior, Lorraine Thompson, taking the children around The Pines, passing on knowledge through stories and having them practice the Mohawk language. Significant to note at this moment is storytelling's

[27] Mbembe, 37.

purpose to convey necessary knowledge to descending generations in order for it to be carried with them into the future to pass down to following generations, generations which would exist as the consequence of the Kanetsetakero:non's collapsing the future into the present through death. As the knowledge of the conflict is passed on through story, the meaning and obligations of being Mohawk in a colonial context ensure that defense of The Pines and other territories will continue despite a colonial context that would disavow a future for Indigenous people.

Conclusion

While the defense of The Pines, for practical purposes, was successful in that the proposed golf course and housing development never actualize, the claim of non-surrender speaks more directly to the processes of worlding and colonial time already discussed. As Khanna further states, "The process of worlding is one of strife between the unconcealed (worlded) and the concealed (earthed), and it is one that I understand as profoundly ideological."[28] This last point is particularly important to fully understand the disparate psychic formations that create and sustain the Oka confrontation and its penultimate outcome as shown at the close of the film wherein the Mohawk people leave their encampment, face violent arrest, undergo prosecution by the Canadian government (ending almost entirely in acquittals) while continuing to maintain a position of non-surrender. Slavoj Žižek, in discussing the role of ideology and social fantasy as existing beyond the realm of simply the discursive states, "the last support of the ideological effect (of the way an ideological network of signifiers 'holds' us) is the non-sensical, pre-ideological kernel of enjoyment. In ideology 'all is not ideology (that is,

[28] Khanna, 4.

ideological meaning).'"[29] During this confrontation, the settler colonial psychic formations giving rise to incommensurable temporalities and subjectivities create contentious understandings of what constitutes the social fantasy of the Canadian nation-state. Žižek states, "Fantasy is basically a scenario filling out the empty space of a fundamental impossibility, a screen masking a void."[30] Fantasy functions as a kind of trick that provides reason and coherence in the face of the impossibility of realizing the status of a non-colonial state constructed upon principles of democracy and freedom. To be clear, if there were no Indigenous people and/or if Indigenous peoples submitted and assimilated to the settler colonial state and its normative formations, Canada could achieve a homogenous citizenry and a national narrative placing colonial violence and genocide in a regrettable but "necessary" past. However, since there are Indigenous people and they do not submit to assimilation into the settler colonial state, this possibility or current state only exists as the fantasy fed by the false idea of a homogenous nation state. The violent dispossession by Kanien'kehá:ka in turn imposes a colonizer subjectivity onto Canadian citizens that contests the pre- and actual ideology undergirding the settler state's supposed political formation. Relative to their military response to the violent reclamation of The Pines, the dispossession de-legitimizes the settler state's narrative and has the effect of limiting the level of violence the settler state can reasonably deploy if it is to preserve and maintain its own founding narrative. Nevertheless, the threat the confrontation creates leads the colonizer to assert itself as violent. While representing another process of reciprocity, the nature of the confrontation also demonstrates how the violence deployed is not equivalent.

[29] Slavoj Žižek. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. New York: Verso. Ninth Impression (2002), 124.

[30] Žižek, 126.

On one hand, the Canadian government operates within a logic that assumes its authority and legitimacy as a ruling power over all subjects present within its bounded territory. On the other hand, Canada, as a settler colonial state, cannot realize the social fantasy of a fully homogenous population of citizens in light of the presence of First Nations peoples and their assertion of sovereignty and self-determination. As a result, in a desire to resolve its coloniality and achieve homogeneity as a nation, the settler colonial state must redirect the Mohawks' opposition to its coloniality to opposition the settler state and the desire of Indigenous peoples to maintain their self-determination and autonomous identity as the source of the Oka Crisis. In other words, as a means of eliding and resolving its settler colonial status, the Canadian government portrays the heart of the conflict as the unwillingness of the Mohawk people to submit to the settler state's rightful claim of jurisdiction over the disputed land and to accept the status of Canadian citizens. By identifying the Mohawk people as approaching the dispute from a position of illegibility based on their insistence of being recognized as Kanien'kehá:ka, the structural logics of settler colonialism inhered to Canada's system of governance attempt to world Mohawks back to the realm of the concealed in the name of and in service to the desired foundational principles upon which the nation-state, Canada, justifies its inception and continued existence.

Conversely, the Mohawk Nation, and the people of Kanehsatake more specifically, refuse a full acceptance of Canadian legitimacy, jurisdiction, and citizenship in favor of preserving and maintaining their First Nations identity as Kanehsatakero:non. Crucially, that identity ties very closely to some of the land Canada needs to claim legitimate ruling authority over in order to assert itself as a true nation-state. As a project asserting rights to self-determination and sovereignty, the defense of The Pines rises against the historical narrative from which Canada

derives its authority. More particularly, the film re-organizes the teleological timeline relative to the land and prior struggles over it and seizes upon a monad which Žižek explains is "an actual moment to which is attached directly…the past…The past itself is here 'filled out with the present.'"[31]

The participants in the confrontation are also shown seizing upon this monad by virtue of their historical memory of and trauma from prior generations' struggles for land against colonial governments. During this particular confrontation the film portrays Mohawk subjects challenging the state's necropolitics through the simultaneous denial and embrace of death through their violent actions. By continuing the struggle of their ancestors, the people of Kanehsatake not only honor them and their sacrifices, but also claim a continued relationality to The Pines, and more importantly, to all lands lost in prior colonial struggles.

At several points in the film, exchanges between military personnel and Mohawk Warriors represent a fundamental inability of the colonizer to understand the colonized. As troops are laying razor wire in the adjacent river, one warrior states, "I don't think they've really clued into the idea that we're not going anywhere. Probably a concept that they just can't understand." When negotiations break down and the Kanehsatake people hold a press conference, Joe Deom states, "Our position is that we were defending our nation and our land, and we are not to be blamed for that." Through fantasy, leading ideologies form for the purpose of satisfying anxieties existent in the absence and impossibility of what is signified through the signifier that represents/expresses desire. Meaning, if the signifier is contemporary colonialism and the signified is Indigenous people, the desire is a disavowal of Indigenous presence and sovereignty for the purpose of affirming a temporality that contains colonialism to a past that is

[31] Žižek, 139.

now meant to be forgotten. The clashing desires, ideologies, and fantasies in the Oka crisis as a colonial present undoubtedly account for the colonizer's inability and/or denial of comprehension of their own settler status and ongoing colonization. Obamsawin's documentation of the necropolitical order of the Canadian settler state in her film portrays the moments of violence and the Mohawks' persistent threat of violence in response to that order. It also makes apparent disparate notions of time in a settler colonial context. The centuries long contestation that she presents contextualizes the confrontation so that it also contextualizes Kanehsatakere:non's response to the threat the state posed to their territory. The way time and space converged in this political moment brought forth colonial subjectivities fraught with a past that was simultaneously forgotten by the colonizer while insisted upon by the colonized. From this perspective each party mobilized violence in response to the other. That is not to say that the violence was equivalent, however. Rather, Obamsawin's film puts at the forefront the reality that colonial violence is the primary source of violence in a confrontation that birthed a new era of Indigenous refusal and resistance. The violence of one, the colonizer, was one that required a responding violence by the colonized. As mentioned earlier, The Pines still stand as a result of the willingness of Kanehsatakere:non to face death and enact violence in the interests of their peoplehood.

CHAPTER TWO Threat and the Ecstatic: Sensation in Tanya Tagaq's 'Retribution'

> Another aspect of the colonized's affectivity can be seen when it is drained of energy by the ecstasy of dance. Any study of the colonial world therefore must include an understanding of dance and possession. The colonized's way of relaxing is precisely this muscular orgy during which the most brutal aggressiveness and impulsive violence are channeled, transformed, and spirited away…Everything is permitted, for in fact the sole purpose of the gathering is to let the supercharged libido and the stifled aggressiveness spew out volcanically. Symbolic killings, figurative cavalcades, and imagined multiple murders, everything has to come out. [1]
>
> — Franz Fanon

Introduction

In 2014, Inuit and other Indigenous people began posting "sealfies," a play on the idea of the selfie, in order to "confront settler environmentalist antisealing rhetoric demonizing Indigenous cultural practices."[2] The photos depict Indigenous practitioners of and participants in sealing demonstrating their sustainable and respectful cultural practice with pride. One contributor to the movement, Tanya Tagaq, posted a photo of her baby lying next to a dead seal in order to, as she stated: "[show] how much I appreciated the seal for giving its life so we could be happy and eat."[3] Not long after the post, she became the target of violent threats from environmentalists and others who believe sealing is a cruel and barbaric practice. Amidst death threats and calls for her child to be taken from her, Tagaq defended traditional practices and resolved to continue openly advocating for cultural revitalization. After having posted her

---

[1] Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, (New York: Grove Press, 2004): 19-20.

[2] Elizabeth Rule, "Seals, Selfies, and the Settler State: Indigenous Motherhood and Gendered Violence in Canada," *American Quarterly*, vol. 70, no. 4: 741.

[3] Dave Dean, "Tanya Tagaq's Cute Sealfie Pissed Off a Lot of Idiots," Vice.com, Vice Media Group, April 9, 2014, https://www.vice.com/en/article/4w7awj/tanya-taqaqs-cute-sealfie-pissed-off-a-lot-of-idiots.

sealfie, she spoke out about her experiences and the importance of recognizing the consequences of settler colonialism, explaining "I want things to change. That's why I'm talking. I want change."[4]

In addition to advocating for cultural revitalization, Tagaq uses an unconventional version of a traditional cultural practice, throat singing, to bring attention to the threat oil and resource extraction pose to the arctic. As scholar Kate Galloway explains, "A vocal advocate for Inuit and Indigenous rights, Tagaq considers environmental justice to be a pan-Indigenous intersectional social justice issue that requires a polyvocal response from Indigenous and non-Indigenous activism."[5] Performed by two women standing very close, holding onto and facing each other, throat singing has traditionally functioned as a game or entertainment. Tagaq, however, transforms this practice into a contemporary art form that calls attention to the ongoing violence of environmental destruction. She uses "live performance and audiovisual media to engage themes of climate change [and] gives voice to environmental violence"[6] through her performance of embodied multi-vocal sounds.

Furthermore, Tagaq's performance of throat singing brings attention to the centuries long violence colonialism has inflicted upon Indigenous women. This is especially true in the circumpolar north where an influx of workers has posed a particular threat for Alaska Native women. Victoria Sweet, discussing the consequences of human trafficking, notes that, "[w]hen

---

[4] "Tanya Tagaq on the Polaris Prize, the Seal hunt and the Sealfie," YouTube, *CBC News: The National*, published September 26, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4wKRz562MY8.

[5] Kate Galloway, "The Aurality of Pipeline Politics and Listening for Nacreous Clouds: Voicing Indigenous Ecological Knowledge in Tanya Tagaq's *Animism* and *Retribution*," *Popular Music*, vol. 39 no. 1: 141.

[6] Galloway, 123.

large numbers of outside workers with no connection to the community arrive in an area, violent crime rates rise."[7] This is particularly true when it comes to the man camps that form because of extractive industries, like oil and mineral mines. These camps greatly contribute to the alarming rates of sexual violence experienced by Alaska Native women. According to the National Indian Country Clearinghouse on Sexual Assault, Alaska Natives comprise only 20% of the population of Alaska yet represent 54% of all sexual assault cases.[8]

Both of these goals, bringing attention to environmental destruction and the related issue of violence against Indigenous women, are exemplified by Tagaq's 2016 album *Retribution* and its title track. In the press release for the album, she distinguishes it from her previous albums by describing it as "'musically aggressive, more aggressively political, more challenging, more spine tingling, more powerful.'"[9] The music video for "Retribution" depicts the threat of earth's revenge, providing a framework for articulating historical violences and colonial social structures. The depiction of threat ultimately rejects elimination and the historical narratives that portray Indigenous peoples as passive and left behind by the inevitable forces of modernity. Refusal thus becomes a crucial element of "Retribution" and critical for understanding the assertion of anti-colonial power. Retributive violence allows violence to emerge as a primarily productive force rather than an eliminatory tool. Consequently, it positions the viewer to imagine an Indigenous future that refuses and challenges the terms of settler colonialism.

---

[7] Victoria Sweet, "Rising Waters, Rising Threats: The Human Trafficking of Indigenous Women in the Circumpolar Region of the United States and Canada," Michigan State University Legal Studies Research Paper no. 12-01, February 20, 2014: 11.

[8] https://www.niccsa.org/alaska/

[9] Justin Chandler, "Tanya Tagaq announces new 'more aggressively political' album 'Retribution," CBC.ca, published August 17, 2016, https://www.cbc.ca/music/read/tanya-tagaq-announces-new-more-aggressively-political-album-retribution-1.5053081.

My own experience of the refusal in the video occurred most poignantly in viewing it for the first time. Following a meeting where I learned of the video, I went home and sat on my patio, finding a comfortable spot on an outdoor chair. With sun shining and in the shade of a large wisteria vine, I settled into my chair with my computer on my lap. A glass of ice cold water sat on the adjacent table, condensation sliding down. It had been a long day and I was finally home, relaxing, and ready for the visual experience of a song I already knew I liked. I opened a new window in my browser and went to Tanya Tagaq's website. I clicked all the appropriate links and put the video into full screen. Then I clicked play. Immediately, I was enrapt, not yet aware that this would be the first of many viewings. The first sounds echoed as the video showed the lighting of wicks in some kind wax. With the setting illuminated, Greenlandic mask dancer Lakaalukk Williamson Bathory coated her face in what could be seal oil only to change that coating to petroleum oil that she smears across her face and up into her hair. The opening continued as mildly menacing, depicting a transformation by candlelight from light to dark. It then moved into loud and colorful, assaulting my vision with neon chaos and accusatory lyrics. From there the video infiltrated and occupied a place in my visual experience that was unlike any other. When the eight plus minutes were over, I was awestruck. To be honest, I wasn't entirely sure what I had seen, but I knew I loved it – I loved the power it asserted; the confidence of its threat; the way the song and the images, the movement and the sound assaulted my senses; the ways it made me feel what I know about the legacies of colonialism at the same time it made me feel everything I love about being Native. But really, at that point, that first time, I could not have explained exactly why or what about it I found so important and moving. So, I watched it again and again and again. And again, until I felt full of "Retribution," its imagery, sounds, and sense of satisfaction, violation, and revitalization. After those initial viewings, I came to

understand that in an odd way, the music video tells a story of damage and destruction, but, more importantly, it speaks to hope and futurity and survival, refusing the inevitable death that settler colonialism assumes for Indigenous peoples. I still have not tired of watching it.

This viewing of the video speaks to Amber Jamilla Musser's framing of pleasure in *Sensational Flesh: Race, Power, and Masochism*: "Pleasure…offers a frame for thinking about embodiment that exceeds the disciplinary regimes that define modernity, therefore opening up different modes of theorizing resistance and power."[10] In particular, a framework of pleasure offers a way to think about sensation, both from the perspective of the viewer, but also from the perspective of the performers in the video. The visual and auditory sensations viewers/listeners experience upon watching the performers' apparent sensations of pleasure provide an opportunity to represent the transformation of the colonial subjectivity Tagaq identifies through the opening lyrics, "We squander her soil and suck out to her sweet black blood and burn it," stressing the violence that "we" have committed against the earth.

Both Tagaq and Bathory, the performers in the video, convey a particular kind of pleasure and sensation that evokes an affective response in the viewer through their representation of violence as an impending and intimate danger. As an embodied practice in the video, Indigeneity as affect elicits sensations resulting from land loss and settler colonial violence enacted on bodies, land, and water. Centralizing these effects through the violence in the video allows new sensations relative to these realities to emerge in ways that have potential to evoke a desire for decolonization. At the end of the video, the viewer observes the successful transformation to an anti-colonial, action-oriented subjectivity Tagaq anticipates when they

[10] Amber Jamilla Musser, *Sensational Flesh: Race, Power and Masochism*, (New York: New York University Press, 2014): 8.

observe a change to her body tensity and facial expression. Similarly, there is a potential for the transformation of the viewer's subjectivity, as well. These transformations are particularly important, because Musser also identifies sensation as structural, explaining that "This structural aspect of sensation is what gives it its analytic purchase…[it] is both individual and impersonal."[11]

The song and video assert the urgent need for decolonization by presenting an audiovisual representation primarily about the earth's response to settler colonialism and hundreds of years of colonial violence inflicted for the purpose of wealth accumulation, dispossession, exploitation, and consumer capitalism. Visually it juxtaposes shots of the natural environment with indoor industrial space and overhead views of rivers that appear to be polluted with oil, suggesting they are incapable of sustaining life. There are also overhead shots of images of violated land that is polluted, barren, industrialized, and even appears slashed and scarred. These images in concert with scenes suggestive of sexual violence, which will be discussed later, speak to the multiplicity of violences that the structures of settler colonialism create and perpetuate – violence against bodies, violence against land, violence against water. At the same time, the video forces a frightening intimacy on the viewer while Tagaq and Bathory's facial expressions and body language suggest pleasure in the idea of the retributive violence she threatens. For example, in the scene following Bathory's threatening presence in a city, Tagaq is shown in the same environment with an expression of great satisfaction and, perhaps, contentment.

Having been met with much critical acclaim for its creativity and artistry, the intense

[11] Musser, 2.

nature of the album has also been a focus of much discussion in popular press[12] and academia, both for the power and ingenuity of her throat singing and as evoking a powerful emotional response from the listener. Throughout the album, Tagaq fearlessly and aggressively confronts and challenges colonialism on the scale of structure, asserting a connection between the violent assault of Alaska Native and other Indigenous women and the destruction of the environment. As each constitutes a direct consequence of settler colonial violence that plays out on land and bodies, the video also makes a connection between colonial structures on the scale of community and the individual by assigning each of them responsibility for perpetuating those structures. Explaining further how sensation is structural by avoiding the confines of identity, Musser asserts that "[b]y theorizing sensation we acquire a way to understand structures at a level beyond the discursive. We gain access to how these act upon bodies. Though each body reacts differently, we can read a structure as a form with multiple incarnations and many different affects."[13] Accessing structures through sensation opens up possibilities for understanding the effects structures have on people at the level of the body. The shared and individuated experience of sensation presented in the video reflects the realities of settler colonialism as a lived reality of shared and different experiences that expose each subject's relationship to colonial histories, colonial presents, and imagined futures. Through this framework, understanding Tagaq's music as haunting and powerful pulls the listener into a story that exceeds the confines and limitations of language and allows the viewer to hear a feeling that is both palpable and ethereal. It is the

[12] See for example, https://www.npr.org/2016/10/13/497569725/first-listen-tanya-tagaq-retribution; https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-album-reviews/review-tanya-tagaqs-retribution-gives-environmentalism-art-rock-bite-105098/; https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/22324-retribution/.

[13] Musser, 23.

story that occupies Indigenous lives, informs our futures, and more fully realizes meaning and expression through her music precisely because we've already given those things words. Tagaq makes visible and audible what Raymond Williams identifies abstractly as a structure of feeling, which he describes "thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and inter-relating continuity."[14] Williams further explains the importance of feeling as a term that reflects the emergence of a new understanding within an existing social formation. The newness in turn creates a "tension [that] is at once lived and articulated in radically new semantic figures."[15] The feelings and sensations the video evoked for me were not entirely new, but they were part of a continuity of knowing and understanding directly tied to thought processes of meaning-making I *know* as an Indigenous woman.

Dian Million explains structure of feeling with complexity, context, and meaning within settler colonialism in the following way: "Indigenous women [participate] in creating new language for communities to address the real multilayered facets of their histories and concerns by insisting on the inclusion of our lived experience, rich with emotional knowledges, of what pain and grief and hope meant or mean now in our pasts and futures."[16] The emotional knowledges she speaks of reflect embedded Indigenous epistemologies that inform our understandings of colonialism as lived realities that are fraught with the sorrow of loss at the same time we experience the triumph of our existence.

The visceral language Tagaq presents to the viewer feels the pain and grief of colonialism

---

[14] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977): 132.

[15] Williams, 135.

[16] Dian Million, *Therapeutic Nations: Healing in an Age of Indigenous Human Rights* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2013) :57.

at the same time the embodied performance of throat singing provides the opportunity for triumph as it constitutes the evolution of an Inuit tradition that reflects both past and future through Tagaq's performance in the present. Shifting throat singing as a tradition away from a face-to-face activity, Tagaq deploys throat singing on a new scale where she is the performer, and the audience is meant to be the respondent. In that process she creates expression that exceeds the meaning conventional language can produce, moving instead into an affective register for the viewer through the sensation the performance produces. Musser, explaining her particular methodology, what she calls empathetic reading, makes this connection when she claims that "sensation is something internal to the assemblage that articulates a particular essence…[and] sensation is also something that opens onto others through numerous affective and structural connections."[17] The meaning Tagaq presents through her embodied performance asserts emotional knowledge in concert with intellectual knowledge, producing a sensation emblematic of the structural realities behind the violence of colonialism and the subversive nature of Indigenous people's insistence on survival. Throat singing allows Tagaq to embody Indigeneity in a contemporary and modernized context while her movements and gestures enliven that embodiment past a basic understanding of Indigenous survival, placing the viewer in a position to acknowledge the triumph of Indigenous life. She and the video present the viewer with a new manner of language based in sensation that can capture those complexities by evoking an affective response.

The sensational language that Tagaq and Bathory create and perform also reflects Indigenous refusal. Audra Simpson, in *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life across the Borders of*

[17] Musser, 22-23.

Settler States, explains that "refusal is the language that [Indigenous] people use to talk about themselves."[18] More than just refusal, however, Tagaq and Bathory perform what Simpson calls "positive refusal,"[19] which she deploys relative to the Mohawk of Kahnawake's understanding of their own territoriality and nationhood. She states, "If a refusal to recognize [the authority of settler states' jurisdiction] also involves using one's territory in a manner consistent with what one knows then it is an instance of failed consent or *positive refusal*"[20] (emphasis in the original). In the context of cultural production, positive refusal provides and invites, if not demands, action. Which is to say that not only do Tagaq and Bathory evoke affective response through sensation, they perform refusal for the viewer, providing an avenue to experience the video as refusal while also imagining the viewer asserting their own refusal. Tagaq's album and this song/video produce a positive refusal by virtue of its attack on settler colonial structures of destruction as natural and inevitable, but also for those ways it does not conform to typical performative expectations within settler cultural production. In so doing, the song/video produces an alternative structure of sensation and pleasure in defiance of settler narratives offering a reconciliation of the violence of colonialism and the ease with which its violence can be tolerated for the benefit of settlers. However, in the act of failing to consent lies the potential for and sometimes an actual production of an alternative understanding of the self, a kind of embodied refusal. As a particular kind of affective response it moves beyond cultural production, pulling the viewer into a new language that reflects the meaning behind the Mohawk word for

[18] Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life across the Borders of Settler States*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014): 7.

[19] Simpson, 128.

[20] Ibid.

warrior, rotisken'ra:kete, that is those who carry the burden of peace. It is through the performers' embodiments of refusal that the idea of kanikonriio, a good mind, demonstrates for the viewer the importance and significance of anti-colonial action that benefits all whose lives are shaped by colonialism.

Greenlandic Mask Dancing

As described earlier, the video opens with Bathory making herself visible by lighting a fire. The video presents her sitting on the floor wearing a v-neck black tank top and bright white seal skin earrings with much exposed skin. Such a presentation sets up a level of intimacy with the viewer as we are allowed to witness many of the details of the transformation she is about to undergo. For example, we see her as she goes from covering her face with natural seal skin oil to black crude oil, calling to mind the oil extraction that threatens the artic and, thus, the human and non-human inhabitants that comprise the earth. The presentation of the act appears ritualistic as signified by the lighting of a match, the concentration of lighting multiple fires across a single wax structure, then blowing out the match; the intensity of her facial expression and formal movement of her body; and the way she is situated behind the lit fires surrounded by fur pelts. Her demeanor is serious with a haunting chant performed by Tagaq in the background that builds in intensity as Bathory continues her transformation, suggesting to the viewer that Bathory is undertaking an important endeavor. She remains silent throughout this portion and throughout the rest of the video importing the gravity of the situation. The assertiveness of her silence speaks to the purported silence of the land while also refuting that silence as real, particularly in the scenes later in the video where she appears in the middle of a bustling metropolitan area. While presenting the viewer with an image that invokes fear, Bathory works with Tagaq to create the sense of impending violence that is more than an abstract sense of fear; it is a contextually

specific and immediately threatening fear.

At this point in the video, Bathory's facial expressions, alternating between pained, angry, and threatening, invoke an affective response because of the sensations they seem to want to produce for the viewer. Affect, understood as that which is "supposed to be descriptive of the receptors we use to hear each other and the frequencies on which certain subalterns speak and are heard or, more importantly, felt"[21] is a useful approach to understand the relevance of sensation and pleasure. For instance, the expressions that Bathory produces present as aggressive through the widening of her eyes and the upward motion of her neck. She displays her teeth and uses her nails to etch lines into the oil slicked over her face while also painting a single red line down her chin and onto her neck. The scene itself is unclear for the questions it poses: What is the purpose of the transformation? How are we, as viewers, to understand the change that is presented? The presence of Bathory's flesh, underscored through her silence, becomes the focus and it asserts a "logic of sensation [that] is not that which lies on the surface but that impersonal flow which provides the unity for the whole assemblage"[22] the viewer is forced to encounter, an assemblage that continues to speak to the land that provides both the seal oil and the oil extracted from the earth. This confrontation makes the viewer acknowledge the aggression that is directed toward them while Bathory returns the gaze of the camera, thus directing it at the viewer.

Examining her silence and her gaze at greater length is valuable here for the way we understand her self-assertion. Bathory's performance as a Greenlandic mask dancer constitutes

[21] José Esteban Muoz, "Feeling Brown, Feeling Down: Latina Affect, the Performativity of Race, and the Depressive Position," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 31, no.3: 677.

[22] Musser, 22.

an act of Indigenous self-representation which allows her to define the expression of power the dance represents. Locating Bathory in Hortense Spillers's idea of the interstice, "the missing word,"[23] as "both…that which allows us to speak about and that which enables us to speak at all"[24] illuminates the power of her silence exemplary of the new language discussed above produced through the performance. When Bathory stares at the camera wide-eyed, bares her teeth repeatedly throughout the video, and makes aggressive gestures, she "speaks" to the viewer using only her body, forcing them to witness not only the transformation but the consequences and implications of that change. Occupying the interstice, that is the space between what the viewer thinks they know and what they need to understand, Bathory invokes the structures of settler colonialism that produce the settler knowledge which allows the perpetuation of those structures. Such an invocation, however, ultimately challenges that knowledge. As Bathory moves within and across the poorly lit, barren industrial setting of the video, her performance underscores that setting as something the viewer must contend with in the context of a video about the earth taking action against colonial destruction. As a moment where the viewer must rely on their interpretive abilities, it's important to note how Spillers further explains that there is relationship between the interstice and the icon such that they share "a common border"[25] whose encounter forms a particular mode of meaning making. To demonstrate her assertion, Spillers interrogates the representation of Sojourner Truth as a symbol and makes clear that particular subjects located within political and social structures allow us to "discover the ways and means

---

[23] Hortense Spillers, *Black, White, and In Color*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003): 156.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

of power in its intellectual and contemplative fulfillment."[26] Occupying the space of the interstice and being iconic of the earth by way of her silence and performance, the video presents the earth represented by Bathory as anti-colonial, "speaking" at the symbolic level. Furthermore, while being located within settler colonial political and social structures, the performance communicates to the viewer knowledge about violation and betrayal. As a consequence, the viewer must realize the presentation of aggression.

Bathory's expresses anger throughout the video by moving her head from side to side in a confrontational manner, clawing toward the viewer, moving her mouth in ways suggestive of growling, and moving her arms in a threatening manner as she is crouched near the ground. In the context of the video, these actions reflect both the retribution coming from the earth that Tagaq warns about and an anti-colonial subject who is enacting retribution as a process in answer to settler colonialism's structures. She has already undergone a transformation from peaceful to aggressive, or as Spiller's notes in the context of black woman icons, "she is, in the moment of her performance, the primary subject of her own invention."[27] More specifically, Spillers explains the importance of the gaze from this particular subject position: "The subject is certainly seen, but she also *sees*. It is this return of the gaze that negotiates at every point a space for living, and it is the latter that we must willingly name the counter-power, the counter-mythology."[28] As she undergoes her transformation and aggressively asserts her silence, Bathory defines her self (both as an Indigenous woman and as the icon she portrays) by recognizing the

[26] Spillers, 157.

[27] Spillers, 167.

[28] Spillers, 163.

gaze of the viewer and by recognizing them as complicit in the destruction that colonialism has wrought. Returning the viewers' gaze, in turn, appears to provide Bathory with a degree of pleasure, as evidenced by expressions of satisfaction during various close-ups of her face throughout the video. The intensity that Bathory displays, along with the apparent satisfaction, creates a sense that the viewers' comfort is irrelevant and meaningless. It also reminds the viewer that "they cannot easily disavow the presence of contemporary Indians,"[29] a disavowal that is often made possible by typical representations of Indigenous people in mainstream media. The knowledge and sensation that Bathory's performance produces for viewers creates a self-conscious discomfort as sensation and violence converge through her embodied performance of the earth as a living being with agency.

The performance simultaneously evokes sensations relative to the knowledge Bathory has produced while allowing us to "understand structures at a level beyond the discursive…[where] we can read a structure as a form with multiple incarnations and many different affects."[30] The assertiveness of Bathory's silence at the same time her presence asserts itself as absolute conveys to the viewer the stakes of the performance. For example, her presence is most often behind and to the right of Tagaq where her movements follow the rhythm and time of the music. She consistently crouches on the ground, maintaining her performance of aggression as the ever-present potential force for retribution inherent to the earth that humans will have to contend with. In this instance, the intellectual knowledge and sensations work in service to the earth and its presence. As a result, the common border that exists between the icon and the interstice comes

[29] Mishuana Goeman, "Introduction to Indigenous Performances: Upsetting the Terrains of Settler Colonialism," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, vol. 35, no. 4 (2015): 4.

[30] Musser , 23.

together to produce particular sensations for the viewer, perhaps apprehension, fear, and a desire to look away while also being unable to do so. Consequently, the intensity of Bathory's engagement with the camera communicates a kind of desire that exists concurrently between Bathory and the viewer. The purpose of the convergence of sensation and violence, in light of Bathory's embodied performance, suggests that the goal "is a global restoration and dispersal of power."[31] This would entail the crating of an anti-colonial subjectify capable of producing and reproducing a relationship between earth and humans that restores respect and reciprocity, which would necessarily entail a reevaluation of all kpower structures relative to colonization.

As a result, it is important to note that Bathory's performance is part of the video's refusal and the pointed accusation and warning demanding an audience response. In an interview she explains the practice of Greenlandic mask dancing in this way:

> It's a very sexual, idiosyncratic dance—and it's sexual because it's important to celebrate our base humanity. All different genders are there: male, female, both. It's in between, it's neither, and it's something to celebrate—that's a very deep value.
>
> It also plays with the idea of fear, and that is also something every human being experiences. You must be able to live your life in equanimity so you can face a situation where you could panic—and that could be everything from a polar bear ripping through the wall of a tent to dealing with sexual harassment in the workplace.[32]

Her discussion of fear as something to contend with in order to live a life "in equanimity" directly informs the performance she provides for the viewer. Though she remains vocally silent throughout the video, many of her gestures constitute the creation of a performative language. This is particularly true of her arm movements. For example, when she is shown in an urban

---

[31] Spillers, 175.

[32] Janet Smith, "Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory Taps into Fear and Humor for Mask Dance," *The Georgia Straight*, March 14, 2018, https://www.straight.com/arts/1044321/laakkuluk-williamson-bathory-taps-fear-and-humour-mask-dance.

setting she moves forward toward the camera in an upright position, but as she nears it, she begins to crouch. As she does so her arms move from one extended in front of her body while the other is extended behind her to them both behind her and then both extending in front of her. Once she is crouched, she bends her arms at the elbows and draws them in to herself with hands cupped and fingers spread out. The video then cuts to a close up of her face where she might be understood to be growling at the viewer, but all of the motions that precede that close up speak to the fluidity of the earth's movement and the potential it holds to become disjointed to the point that it can pose a threat to the human world. While the significance of this particular dance is made clear by the interview quote provided above, the video also makes clear that the purpose of the dance moves beyond the scope that she describes. Bathory's performance within the video forces the viewer to contend with fear and the implications of its presence.

The role mask dancing takes relative to sexuality is equally important for the relationship it establishes with expressions of Bathory's and Tagaq's sexuality throughout the video. Counter to the idea that Indigenous women are purely victims of sexual assault and are, thus, de-sexualized, the presence of mask dancing and its history assert the power of the Indigenous woman's sexuality as self-written. Each of them, Bathory through Greenlandic mask dancing and Tagaq as an Indigenous woman throat singing, present their sexuality as "precisely the physical expression of the highest self-regard and often, the sheer pleasure [they take] in [their] own powers."[33] There are moments of intimacy between Bathory and Tagaq when they move in tandem or in close relation to each other. As the music and video progress, they often move together in terms of their gestures or in rhythm with each other. This is particularly true when

[33] Spillers, 167.

they are entwined. Legal scholar Sarah Deer states the importance of sexual intimacy for Indigenous women, often associated with sexual trauma rather than sexual pleasure, when she explains, "If sexuality is part of that which defines who and what each of us is, then it is at the very core of our self-identity. I think this is because the very nature of sexuality represents the best of humanity."[34] Through mask dancing and throat singing, Bathory and Tagaq present themselves as Indigenous women and performers who represent both the counter-power and counter-mythology Spillers identifies. The sexuality, an embodied practice throughout the video, is expressed through movement. Related as it is to the practice of mask dancing that Bathory describes, it portrays the power that comprehending sensation as a structure holds to produce an affective response to the positive refusal the video demonstrates for the viewer.

Throat Singing

Once Bathory's transformation at the start of the video is complete, Tagaq appears in the video in a setting distinct from the industrial warehouse where the majority of the video occurs. During this part of the opening sequence, she delivers most of the few lyrics of the song, bringing with her a sense of presence different from Bathory's introduction in the video, one that intends to confront the viewer in a way that makes them self-conscious of their own presence and passive viewing. The haunting echo that accompanies the opening scenes of Bathory begin to change and the song amplifies while also increasing in intensity until Tagaq appears and begins to sing. During this portion of the video Tagaq, through her use of the collective pronouns "we" and "us," directly addresses everyone (as opposed to only an Indigenous or non-Indigenous audience) as implicated in the colonial conditions instigating the retribution soon to come. The

[34] Sarah Deer, *The Beginning and End of Rape: Confronting Sexual Violence in Native America*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015): xvi.

lyrics foretell an impending consequence to the violence that has been inflicted on the land. She tells the viewer, "Our mother grows angry/Retribution will be swift," personifying the earth, making it clear that nature understands its life as self-determined in the same way humans understand their lives. Consequently, we should expect that the violence we have visited upon her will be returned in kind. Having watched Bathory transform by candlelight followed by Tagaq's appearance as bare-skinned from just below the shoulders up, this portion of the video creates a sense of intimacy that begins to evoke particular sensations of anxiety and fear relative to feeling threatened, a threat meant to instigate action on the part of the viewer as she commands them to "conduct yourself like lightning because the retribution will be swift." While delivering the lyrics, Tagaq moves her head from side to side, stares into the camera with her head tilted downward, slightly twists her body, and uses facial expressions to convey the precarity of the current state of relation to nature. She also elongates the articulation of certain letters in words, creating a slow and dramatic delivery that is slightly menacing.

Bathory remains present while Tagaq delivers the lyrics, appearing in the background performing her own threat through facial expressions and clawing, shown only from her bare shoulders up. As they both appear during this portion of the video, Bathory's simultaneous performance can be understood as the threat earth's retribution poses in terms of violence and the inherently intimate and undeniable relationship the viewer has with the earth and colonialism. This works in concert with Bathory's previous performance as Tagaq presents, at this point, an invocation of fear that is auditory rather than visual, thus reflecting "the social and political relevance…dissonant Indigenous music has found."[35] Working outside conventional forms of

[35] Dylan Robinson, *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020): 129.

music and even apparently in opposition to those conventions that rely on a clearly defined chorus relying on a repetitive melody, the song itself creates an unnerving environment for the listener, both through sound and through intermittent shots of a scarred and polluted landscape. It poses questions reminiscent of the ones begged by Bathory's performance described above: How are we, as listeners, to understand the sounds we are encountering, and what purpose do these sounds serve to the meaning-making purposes of the video?

Tagaq's expectation of viewers' response as action speaks to the long-standing tradition of throat singing being a two-person performance where one singer responds to the other. This is significant, because Tagaq delivers her message very directly to the audience in a harsh and unsympathetic manner, directly informing the viewer that they are responsible for the threat they face, even if they did not already understand their own precarity or recognize their participation in environmental destruction and Indigenous dispossession. To return to these particular lyrics, she implicates the viewer, saying "We squander her soil/And suck out her sweet black blood to burn it/We turn money into God and salivate over opportunities/To crumple and crinkle our souls for that paper, that gold/Money has spent us." Simultaneously, these lyrics mark a shift in the traditional practice and purpose of Inuit throat singing because the response is not expected to be throat singing, but literal protection of the earth from further destruction. She commands the viewer/listener, "Demand awakening," informing them that our Mother is responding to colonial conditions, and, in line with the purpose of throat singing, the burden is on us, as colonial subjects (though differently situated), to fulfill our role in the art-form Tagaq presents to us. This expectation becomes apparent through the performance of threatened violence.

The sound of the video presenting itself is in opposition to what Dylan Robinson identifies as an inclusionary model of Indigenous cultural performance. Refusing to adhere to

expectations of musical performance creates what he refers to as "Indigenous+art music,"[36] which "foregrounds a resistance to integration, and signals the affectively awkward, incompatible, or irreconcilable nature" of the viewers' expectations and the auditory experience provided by the performance of throat singing. As a disruptive to the seemingly natural conditions of capitalism and exploitative resource extraction, Tagaq's assertion, "for the path we have taken has rotted" signals to the viewer that their social location within settler colonialism necessarily entails a relationship to both of those things as inherently destructive. In her directive to respond, as stated through the lyrics of the song as well as the nature of throat singing as a kind of call and response format, Tagaq presents a variety of Indigenous musical production that falls outside that which has been a commodifiable version of Indigeneity. That is, the substance and structure of Tagaq's performance confound the listener's expectations of Indigeneity as a consumable product that exists within the bounds of nature where "Indianness" is properly located. As a result, the video and song rupture the naturalness referenced above while situating the viewer to re-imagine Indigeneity as something that is not historical, not a thing entrenched in a past where tradition remains static, but, rather, a modern, active presence.

The video also forces the viewer to consider how "the act of listening should attend to the relationship between listener and the listened-to…conceptualiz[ing] the space of sonic encounter as a space of subject-subject relation."[37] Receiving the performance from the performer's subject position rather than only the producer of sound forces a relationship between them and the consumer of the music. Given this encounter between viewer and performer, sensation again

[36] Robinson, 9.

[37] Robinson, 15.

figures in as the framework that is simultaneously impersonal and individual. It allows understanding "differences [to] become a matter of relationships rather than fixed essences unto themselves."[38] Because of Tagaq's refusal to adhere to the multicultural drive towards integration, the music, by way of its relationship to Indigeneity as an anti-colonial positionality, reframes multiculturalism's definition of difference as that which a subject can choose to reject. By way of the positive refusal that is productive of an outcome, subjectivity can become redefined in relation to non-human forms of life rather than a lens through which subjects understand themselves in relation to other human subjects. As a result, the audiovisual experience of "Retribution" asserts itself as unsettling both to the individual viewer and to the larger structures within which it is situated, particularly capitalism and the environmental destruction it entails.

The importance of this experience for the listener cannot be overstated. As Dylan Robinson explains, the field of musicology has been dominated by white/settler interpretations of Indigenous music that have denied the value and beauty of these performances in their own right. Tagaq's ability to create the subject-subject relation he describes above not only works against inclusionary models of Indigenous musical forms, but also asserts the inherent value of Indigenous music presented on its own terms. That assertion, in turn, becomes part of the importance of the sensation the sound of the video produces for the listener and the sensations and affective experience the video evokes for them. More specifically, Robinson explains, "Inclusionary models of collaboration work to normalize the terms of engagement, producing a set of rules dictated by settler composers, classical music ensembles, and new music groups."[39]

---

[38] Musser, 20.

[39] Robinson, 7.

By presenting a counter narrative of musical production and performance that embraces the history of Indigenous music and its performance, the pleasure that Tagaq and Bathory display operates beyond an individual experience for them as performers and reflects the structural aspects of pleasure and sensation identified by Musser, that is a kind of embodiment that opens up new ways of understanding power and resistance and, in this case, refusal.

The listener's experience of Tagaq's throat singing performs what Jessica Bissett Perea has termed sound worlding, which she defines as "a critical embodied practice that unsettles audible formations of colonial logics and representations."[40] The haunting nature of Tagaq's vocalizations, the pointedness of the lyrics, and the bodily movements displayed by Tagaq (and Bathory) throw the viewer into a sensational experience formed in opposition to the settler colonial logics of capitalism and resource extraction identified by Tagaq. Rather than a "natural" relationship to the land as an object that exists for the benefit of people, the earth becomes a subject inhered with a natural right to life. The moments where Tagaq's movements become suddenly frenetic, that is sped up to the point of blur, along with moments that are severely jerky, her humanness can be called into question so that her embodiment of retribution, full of sounds and movement, evoke a manner of life that is anything but passive and that presents itself as literally unsettling to the viewers' sensibilities. At the same time, it moves to unsettle the settler structures creating the possibilities for the song and video's existence. By representing the earth in this way, Tagaq and Bathory embody the possibility of pleasure through retributive violence at the same time that they evoke a sense of dis-pleasure, an unsettling sensation, in the viewer. As a

---

[40] Jessica Bissett Perea, "Inuit Sound Worlding and Audioreelism and *Flying Wild Alaska*," *Music and Modernity among First Peoples of North America*, ed. by Victoria Lyndsey Levine and Dylan Robinon (Middletown: University of Wisconsin Press, 2019): 176.

consequence, the sound worlding occurring in the song and video work in tandem with the Indigenous+art music identified by Robinson to create a unique experience for both the viewer and the performers.

The Audiovisual Experience

During Tagaq's initial appearance in the video, as explained earlier, Bathory appears in the background as an out of focus, almost shadowy figure, somewhat obscured by neon lighting. During this time Tagaq provides not just the lyrics but the context for the rest of the video. At times, the two switch places so that Bathory appears in the forefront and Tagaq in an unfocused background. There are also very short periods when Tagaq appears alone in a warehouse setting, adorned in a long, black formal gown, juxtaposing an industrial setting against the presentation of beauty. The video shifts from a direct address to the viewer marking a change where they observe Tagaq and Bathory sharing the experiences represented in the video. As a result, they are brought together in physical proximity on a wider "stage" and in the intimacy of their interactions. This intimacy is initially apparent through an exchange of some kind of sustenance from Bathory's mouth to Tagaq's. Beyond that, however, from the very opening portion of and at various points throughout, the video imposes a menacing or threatening intimacy by way of its close-up nature. Visually, the viewer experiences close-ups of both Tagaq and Bathory, often appearing only from just below the shoulders and above, moving, charging, and lunging toward the viewer at several points from beginning to end. At these times, their facial expressions become intense, often menacing, and most certainly angry and threatening. There are also segments where their hands are pointed toward the viewer or make clawing and striking motions suggestive of violent physical contact. At a couple points, and particularly during the time she is shown in an urban setting, Bathory's posture and facial expression even appear predatory as

though seeking out that which has caused harm.

Both elements of the video, Greenlandic mask dancing and throat singing, are particularly important for the affective impact they have on the viewer and on the performance itself. Beyond creating new languages and,thus, new knowledges, Million further explains that Indigenous women "speak from a vital imaginary for a different politic of our times, for our nations, for worlds."[41] Not only do Bathory and Tagaq give us a new language different from colonial desires for multiculturalism and relations to the non-human world with which to express Indigenous knowledges, the song and the performance provide the viewer with a different way of understanding their colonial/colonized/colonizer context. Furthermore, the song and video both speak to a future that they set up as being decided in response to centuries of colonial contamination of the earth. It is not a foregone conclusion, however, so long as the viewer takes seriously Tagaq's directive, "Conduct yourself like lightning" in response to our mother's emerging retribution, taking action to prevent further destruction while also working towards a decolonized world. With this one phrase Tagaq informs the viewer of the urgency of the situation at the same time she clearly places responsibility on individuals as part of a collective in her shift from the plural we/our/us to the use of a singular pronoun, yourself.

As a kind of "story" situated within settler colonial power structures, the music video represents the histories, felt knowledges, and futures Million talks about, but also a particular kind of speaking. Unlike Bathory's location in/as the interstice, Tagaq's vocalizations "[articulate] how power and pleasure circulate in the subject-subject relationship between listener and music."[42] The varying forms of communication present in the video and song

[41] Million, 25.

[42] Robinson, 96.

combine to create a synchronized visual and auditory language by narrating an intimate violence that is both impending and erotic. This is true on two different levels, one being the auditory experience of the video explained above with the urgency it asserts and the other being Tagaq's embodiment of retribution as a bare, sensuous presence. Merging these two states of being, urgent and erotic, together conveys to the viewer the need to alter their understanding of Indigenous forms of existing and narrating.

Jacqueline Shea Murphy explains the relationship between performance, being, and knowledge, in this case what is created in new languages, through embodiment: "Indigenous dancers' bodies, despite the physical effects of colonization, are a location of ways of being and knowing, held in bodies and everyday movements. And movement practices – including contemporary movement practices – are a tool for locating and unearthing these ways of being and knowing."[43] This is demonstrated at several points in the video: wearing a black formal strapless gown densely ruffled from waste to ankle, Tagaq charges at the viewer down the hallway of the industrial building that leads to the open performance space; at several points in the video she leans forward toward the camera, exposing additional cleavage and making the roundness of her breasts as they appear in the strapless gown prominent in the shots, often baring her teeth; she sits on the floor, mouth open, teeth visible in a mildly menacing way, making movements as though she is approaching the viewer by crossing her arms, one in front of the other. Through these movements she asserts a particular kind of relationship to the viewer that is punctuated by the embodiment of violence and its approach.

In these scenes the stunning and elegant framing of Tagaq is juxtaposed with the violence

---

[43] Jacqueline Shea Murphy, *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing: Native American Modern Dance Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007): 10.

she is threatening, suggesting that beauty cannot keep violence away, but that it is not incongruent with violence either. Tagaq sets up the beauty of our Mother with the potential for embodied violence that she holds. This is particularly true at that point where Tagaq charges down a hallway toward the camera clad in the formal gown she wears for the remainder of the video. Her beauty and the violence of her bodily movements exist simultaneously and allow the viewer to put together beauty and violence in a way that prevents the bifurcation or separation of the two. By juxtaposing what is often considered incompatible, Tagaq creates an unsettling sense of comprehension about the performance of Indigeneity. As mentioned earlier, the consumption of Indigeneity that is believed to be both accessible because of its familiarity and static as a result of its location in the past, is directly challenged by the juxtaposition of the beauty and the violence as they are readily and obviously observed. Their coexistence at the forefront disquiets the viewer in a way that enhances the experience of anxiety and/or fear created by the threat of violence and creates a kind visual/musical dissonance for the viewer. The sensations this experience evokes provides the opportunity for a kind of similar colonial-minded dissonance that begins to open the possibility for subjectivity change, that is one that recognizes a destructive structure and begins to identify a need to dismantle it.

Such a need is found in the "language" that Tagaq and Bathory create to "address the real multilayered facets of [colonial] histories," forcing the viewer to contemplate the audio/visual experience of impending retribution as a potential and imminent violence. However, it is also a violence that Tagaq and Bathory convey through a performance interspersed with expressions of delight and pleasure. Their shared pleasure represents a "sharing of joy, whether physical, psychic, or intellectual [that] forms a bridge between the sharers…and lessens the threat of their

difference."[44] Continuing to understand Bathory through a framework of iconography and the interstice, the shared sensation of pleasure lessens the difference between the earth and the human and well as the earth and retribution as represented by Tagaq. This particular aspect of intimacy, imposed upon the viewer, continues the unsettling effect of the video and forces the viewer to confront a choice between a new reciprocity with the earth and the retribution earth has threatened.

While the video does provide a warning of retribution, its repetitive representations of violence also warn the viewer of the possibility that they will be subsumed by their own greed. Returning to the lyrics, Tagaq explains to the viewer that "Money has spent us/Left us in small boxes, dark rooms/Bright screens, empty tombs." The idea of privation is very present and conveys the idea that colonial subjects have become a present absence as suggested by the use of the words, "spent us," "left us," and "empty tombs," existing only as products of the destructive forces of capitalism. This is also apparent through the animated outlines of animals walking through and appearing to graze in the industrial space. Out of place as they are and doing what they would do in their natural environment, they exist as a haunting presence without the appearance of either Tagaq or Bathory in the scenes, though Tagaq's vocalizations remain present. The representation of that which should be present on the land yet is apparent only as a specter underscores the artificial and intrusive nature of industrialization and the capitalism that demands its presence. Avery Gordon explains the significance of haunting when she states, "haunting is one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with…or when

[44] Audre Lorde, "The Uses of the Erotic," *Sister Outsider* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007): 56.

their oppressive nature is denied."[45] The viewer must contend with the privation apparent through the present absence of the animals and "that moment…when things are not in their assigned places…when the people [and other-than-humans] who are meant to be invisible show up…when something else, something different from before, seems like it must be done."[46] The viewer becomes aware of the potential for their own subsumption within the capitalist structures the video presents as all-consuming. Again, these scenes in the first third of the video are interspersed with Tagaq's and Bathory's performances of threat and pleasure.

As the video progresses, however, their performances expand beyond pleasure into states of ecstasy represented through two different, though related states of being. A number of Tagaq's singular appearances and those between Bathory and Tagaq signify one form of ecstasy understood as "a state of heightened awareness of pleasure and elation."[47] At several points during the video the two move their bodies synchronously in erotic fluid and reciprocal motions suggestive of a passionate physical exchange. In fact, the first of these scenes shows Bathory providing Tagaq with some form of sustenance, as mentioned above, which she receives with great delight, and demonstrates the intimacy people live with in relation to land and with each other. The sensation of pleasure is apparent for both in this exchange, but presents, again, questions for the viewer: what is Bathory providing to Tagaq and why? how is the viewer to understand the purpose of this giving? These questions, absent an explicit answer, leave the viewer experiencing more disquiet and tension as a result of an immediate return to the

[45] Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008): xvi.

[46] Ibid.

[47] https://psychologydictionary.org/ecstasy/

performers' confrontation with the viewer through a direct address at the camera. Moreover, the pleasure that the video represents moves into the sphere of the erotic. Lorde explains the importance of the erotic when she states, "When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the lifeforce of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives. "[48] Intimacy between Tagaq and Bathory emerge through the passing of the object from Bathory's mouth to Tagaq's hand and the subsequent expression of delight on her face that follows the giving. As part of the development of the embodiment of earth by Bathory and of retribution by Tagaq, the receiving and the giving between these two women come to represent a kind of life giving that occurs from the land. Furthermore, this scene prepares the viewer for the erotic exchanges between these two women later in the video.

The erotic movements Tagaq and Bathory represent through their performance demonstrate an orality reminiscent of the feeding mentioned above but taken a step further relative to pleasure and eroticism. During a scene sometime after Bathory's feeding of Tagaq, Tagaq kneels on the floor in front of Bathory and moves her head in a back and forth, up and down fashion very suggestive of oral sex. Their bodies move in time with each other, sometimes brushing up against each other, and intertwine to an extent they appear to become entirely dependent upon each other for all bodily sensations while physically entwined. These scenes represent a kind of queer reproduction as a result of the sustenance and physical intimacy to each other they provide. Counter to the idea that there is a separation between the human and non-human world, their respective embodiments, Bathory as the earth through the interstice and

[48] Lorde, 55.

Tagaq, in this moment, as the human, assert a degree of dependency, each upon the other. Through her humanness in these scenes Tagaq evokes flesh and thus sensation and pleasure, "disrupt[ing] heternormativity by illuminating flesh in a nonreproductive mode and as a space of possibility."[49] Furthermore, according to Melissa Nelson "'Sex is a symbol for intimate, visceral, embodied kinship relations with other species and with natural phenomenon. The 'sex'…is an emotional and ethical transaction, an agreement, a treaty of obligations. These often unspoken agreements arise out of the ecotone between the sovereignty of humans and the sovereignty of other-than-human people."[50] Even at the moments when their bodies are entwined, their individual existence remains constant and apparent. As they move in time with each other, their arms are outstretched as though they will embrace yet they never do. Unfulfilled potential in these movements, alongside the contact of their bodies signifies both the sovereignty of each and the ecotone that gives rise to the obligation identified by Nelson. The sex and queer reproduction present in this scene reflect the responsibility people have to sustain Mother earth's human and non-human life.

This erotic exchange between Tagaq and Bathory also speaks to alternative futures relative to that relationship through its representation of a mode of queer reproduction through reciprocity that should exist between the human and non-human world. As an "emotional and ethical transaction" the eroticism being represented in the video displays the absorption of Tagaq and Bathory in each other and asserts a particular kind of relationality between them, one based

[49] Musser, 168.

[50] Melissa K. Nelson, "Getting Dirty: The Eco-Eroticism of Women in Indigenous Oral Literatures," *Critically Sovereign: Indigenous Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017): 252.

on a sexual encounter that cannot lead to the reproduction of humans alone. Tagaq and Bathory provide a performance of pleasure through a representation of sensation that evokes the sensuality of oral sex at the same time that it rises above it. Musser explains that "Sensation resides at the border of reality and consciousness. It marks the body's existence as a perceiving subject and the world's existence as an object to be perceived."[51] Beyond merely physical pleasure, the sensations and pleasure Bathory and Tagaq present reflect an eroticism that can be projected onto the perceiving subject, that is the viewer, through the sovereignty of the individual. The new relationality observed in the video and created from the eroticism positions them to understand the earth as something to perceive in novel ways that suggest reciprocity rather than possession.

The other form of ecstasy expressed in the video by Tagaq occurs during her lone appearances, and is best understood through ecstasy's definition as rapture, an experience often understood as a "transport of the mind" or "mental absorption" as derived from its middle French roots.[52] Rapture also has a derivation in Latin that signifies extreme bodily violence or rape. Bringing these two definitions together creates a rapture signifying transport of mind or mental absorption into historical and contemporary colonial invasion and violence, particularly against Indigenous women that Tagaq embodies as an alternative state of ecstasy ultimately setting up a transformation. This particular ecstatic state is especially apparent during the moments when Tagaq is lying on her back in an industrial space with legs splayed open, appearing to convulse as though in a struggle. As the video progresses this scene is shown several times with the camera finally zoomed in enough to highlight what could be distress on Tagaq's face. Through

[51] Musser, 1.

[52]https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/59423?rskey=xiUB1E&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid.

this performance, not only is Tagaq conveying our Mother's indictment of colonialism for its violation of the land, she is conveying her indictment of colonialism's ongoing violation of Indigenous women's bodies and lives. The context of Inuit throat singing and Greenlandic mask dancing make this scene more poignant as an indictment of the particular sexual violence faced by Native Alaskan women that exist as a consequence of the drive for never ending extraction of natural resources.

Through the performance of both states of ecstasy, Tagaq brings them together by the close of the video to produce a transformation of subjectivity. It is clear in the video that the transformation also involves a reclamation of Indigenous women's sexuality that directly counters settler colonialism's foundational structure of sexual violence and repression. Without denying the sexual violence Indigenous women are made to endure, Tagaq provides a representation that can be read as sexual pleasure outside of her erotic exchange with Bathory. At times during the second half of the video, Tagaq's performance becomes less directed at the camera and incorporates movements that are more sensuous and erotic in their presentation. At one point, she throws her head back and arches her back in an upward movement. She also makes other motions suggestive of oral sexual pleasure, she moves her body in fluid motions suggestive of sex, and she appears against the wall with eyes rolled back, body pulsing. These scenes are not sequential and occur in exchange with scenes described above representing sexual violence. The situating of sexual pleasure and sexual violence become a reclamation of Indigenous women's sexuality that specifically undermines a fundamental aspect of settler colonial violence, asserting an alternative understanding of Indigenous women's subjectivities and suggestive of alternative futures.

A little more than halfway through the video, Tagaq appears in the video alone

performing motions that become more fluid for a period of about a minute and a half. Following this period, the fluidity is mixed together with her more frenzied, abrupt, and aggressive movements. During this time and at points during the remainder of the video, she begins to move in ways that suggest a more inward experience. She no longer appears as confrontational with or threatening to the viewer and seems less interested in conveying the idea of impending violence by way of retribution and more focused on her bodily sensations, sensations that appear to be pleasurable. Returning to the erotic and Tagaq's embodiment at this point in the performance brings the relationship between ecstasy and violence into sharper focus. The movements and apparent sensations she produce evoke pleasure in a way that speaks to the deployment of power. By way of the shift away from a confrontational interaction with the viewer, the video presents a different mode of embodiment the excludes the viewer from the full experience and from full understanding. Faced with the abrupt shift, the video, again, produces questions: how is the viewer to understand the relevance of the fluidity to the rest of the performance? why has the performance become introspective when it has so clearly been about the retribution the viewer will experience? The pleasure already expressed in the video relative to the deployment of violence coupled with this new experience of pleasure suggests the erotics of feeling the doing that Lorde explains and pushes the viewer outside the "disciplinary regimes" identified by Musser.

The sound that follows the moments of introspection becomes chaotic with several different forms of vocalizations performed by Tagaq, becoming reminiscent of the juxtaposition of beauty and violence for the way it positions the music against the fluidity. During the final two minutes, new lyrics are introduced, "Don't die" which are repeated many times. This begins when Bathory picks up what appears to be a bone out of a pile of bones. The camera then cuts to

her holding the bone up to her ear so that she is facing the camera with a pained expression on her face. Tagaq faces Bathory and appears to be yelling through the bone into Bathory's ear as though it is an ear horn. All the while, "Don't die" is being repeated in the background by Tagaq in a low and growly tone. While it's possible to understand this imperative being directed at the viewer, understanding the repetition of phrase as being directed at the earth as it is embodied by Bathory underscores Tagaq's embodiment of retribution. The imperative also evokes rotisken'ra:kete (those who carry the burden of peace), a Haudenosaunee concept translated as warrior and which represents the obligation to protect. Understood this way, Tagaq can be understood as the warrior through her embodiment of retribution and her desire for an anti-colonial future. The significance of this particular demand/request is especially important because it centralizes the woman as protector of the earth. As protectors of the land, women, and, in this instance Tagaq as the performer, represent Indigenous sovereignty understood as territoriality of land and bodies through both her vocalizations and her gendered presence. The interspersing of the frenetic movements described earlier and the sensuous fluid motions depicted at this point in the video, bring together Tagaq's human corporeality and her embodiment of retribution. Having established herself as an intimate and threatening presence, reclaimed Indigenous women's sexuality through eroticism, and asserted power through an obligation to protect, her performance asserts the potential Indigenous sovereignty holds to produce an anti-colonial future.

Toward the video's conclusion, Tagaq and Bathory appear at several points in the final third of the video performing movements suggesting there is a sensuality and eroticism that exists in these interactions, a state of ecstasy that exists between them. This kind of relationality exists in opposition to the opening lyrics of the video when Tagaq informs the viewer of their

isolated and fearful existence: “Left investing our time in the hall of philosophies/To placate the fear of our bodies returning back into our mother.” The reference to the “hall of philosophies” and fearing the natural process of death underscores the lack of relationality people have created between themselves and nature, as well as the requisite separation of themselves from their exploitative relationship with the earth. In contrast, Tagaq and Bathory, in these moments, each appears engrossed with the other in what appears to be an “exalted state of feeling,” an experience that pushes beyond intellectual knowledge of colonialism and emerges, again, from Million’s felt theory as a “new language for communities to address the real multilayered facets of their histories.” The experience also reflects Lorde’s idea of the erotic as an empowering knowledge that requires us to examine our own existence and “forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning in our lives.”[53] This new language and knowledge, however, also reflects the primacy relative to the violence that is expressed. The idea of consumption expressed in relation to violence is revisited as they appear during Bathory’s return to a threatening figure and Tagaq’s return to more abrupt and, at times, even violent movements that conclude the video. Because the idea of retribution is presented as an impending violence and because the performance of the threatening violence is meant to produce action, that is, the positive refusal mentioned earlier understood as a productive force in service to an anti-colonial future, it is also meant to produce for the viewer the sensation of fear, but one that is felt viscerally as a primal response to a threat.

During the final thirty seconds, Tagaq enters a state of frenzy represented through the abrupt and frantic movements which end with her screaming and shrieking. This marks the culmination of transformative potential “Retribution” expresses. As the video progresses to its

[53] Lorde, 57.

conclusion, it consistently shows Tagaq performing particular arm movements approximately half-way through the video that are suggestive of a cleansing or purging of the self. They begin at a point when Bathory is behind and to the right of her, moving in tandem with Tagaq's movements. At several points, she pushes her arms up and away from her chest as though expelling the false relationship to the earth that a colonial subject embodies that lodges itself deep within that subject. She does this several times throughout the video, but she also makes motions pulling down and toward her, suggesting a filling up or replenishing of the self. Given the context, it's possible to read these motions as a removal of a colonial subjectivity expressing the potential for something new, namely an anti-colonial subjectivity.

At the conclusion of the video, Tagaq emerges from her frenzy with a demeanor and facial expression not previously observed in the video. After having delivered her warning against retribution, her physical appearance is transformed from one of threat and a state of frenzy into a subject appearing to experience a third state of ecstasy as it relates to another of rapture's original definitions, "the action or an act of carrying onward."[54] The embodiment of ecstatic pleasure and violence throughout the video represents an embodied transformation of subjectivity that carries the subject, Tagaq, forward towards a future yet to be defined. It is, however, a future which holds new potential when constructed from the perspective of an anti-colonial subjectivity that embodies Indigenous sovereignty. As the video ends, Tagaq is shown alone in the industrial space, standing near the door, able to leave or stay. The expression on her face has changed from menacing and aggressive to one of composure. The absence of Bathory from the ending does not disappear the earth and its threat. Rather the transformation Tagaq appears to undergo underscores the potential of retribution alongside the potential to arrest it

[54] https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/59423?rskey=xiUB1E&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid

manifestation. As a matter of action, her call to the audience to respond to her directive highlights the importance of addressing environmental destruction and colonial violence. Her embodiment of decolonization at the close of the video underscores the futurity of Indigenous people and the value of their sovereignty for their own and others' social justice struggles.

The persistent representation of violence as an anti-colonial act bears a relationship to the goals of sovereignty and self-determination and warrants serious critical thinking and consideration despite mainstream discourses denouncing violence as a legitimate form of action. Tagaq and Bathory's representation of retribution and the violence such retribution would entail rely on notions of Indigenous sovereignty for the ways they represent Indigenous epistemologies about the earth and humans' obligations to it as well as providing an alternative understanding of Indigenous women's sexuality. Despite the collective experience of sexual violence, Indigenous women, as survivors, can continue to live as sexual beings in the world, experiencing sensuality and pleasure. This is particularly important to recognize in light of Jolene Rickard's assertion that "As part of an ongoing strategy for survival, the work of indigenous artists needs to be understood through the clarifying lens of sovereignty and self-determination."[55] If we take this assertion seriously, then the persistent representation of violence resituates violence as an anti-colonial act. Tagaq and Bathory perform a carefully considered violence that demonstrates and demands transformation of all our actions and reliance on oil before retribution becomes too much.

[55] Jolene Rickard, "Sovereignty: A Line in the Sand," *Aperture* vol. 139 (Summer 1995): 51.

CHAPTER THREE Structuring Violence: The State and Gender of Revenge

> My nationhood doesn't just radiate outwards, it also radiates inwards. It is my physical body, my mind, and my spirit.[1]
>
> — Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*

Introduction

Cultural production and storytelling are important sites to represent the sovereignty of Indigenous people and their survival and survivance. Leslie Marmon Silko describes their importance in this way: "I like to imagine that the listeners took solace but also pleasure in these stories [of survival] told by survivors. So they paid rich attention to the survivor's story, and thus stories rich in detail and description became the most pleasurable because they gave the listeners the most information. The association of knowledge with power begins here."[2] Stories are sites of knowledge**,** a way of knowing and understanding oneself and one's community. They are also sites of power. Furthermore, they are sites where the recognition of the political positioning of Indigenous people relative to the settler colonial structures they live with and beside has potential to become visible. Jolene Rickard identifies this possibility and the power they have when she explains, "The incorporation of expanded ideas of sovereignty in combination with contemporary analysis of Indigenous art has the potential to shift consciousness within Indigenous communities and surrounding colonial settler nations."[3] Thinking about sovereignty

---

[1] Leanne Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017): 9.

[2] Leslie Marmon Silko, *Storyteller*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2012): xviii.

[3] Jolene Rickard, "Visualizing Sovereignty in the Time of Biometric Sensors," *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. 110(2) (Spring 2011): 478.

as a multiplicity of expressions defines it in such a way that its analysis in cultural production provides an alternative framework through which to understand its relevance and significance. This chapter will trace the presence/absence of sovereignty in two texts, the short film "A Red Girl's Reasoning" and the novel *The Round House*. Each tells a story of vengeance following the sexual assault of an Indigenous woman and each approaches justice in its own way. The purpose of this comparison is to demonstrate the conditions present in a settler colonial society that either open up the possibilities to realize justice or circumscribe them within current juridical structures.

Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers's ten minute short film, "A Red Girl's Reasoning," debuted at the Vancouver International Film Festival in March 2012. Borrowing its name from the short story by E. Pauline Johnson published in 1906, it opens with its own trailer. During the opening scene, the viewer initially observes the urban landscape from behind a fence and Delia (Jessica Matten) emerges as a helmeted and, thus, unknown/invisible motorcyclist while A Tribe Called Red's "Electric Pow Wow Drum" plays in the background, providing a sense of urgency. The camera moves the viewer out from behind a fence and closely follows a still-helmeted Delia on her motorcycle, apparently in some relation to the pursuit of an assailant by a presumed-to-be-pursuing police officer. She dismounts from her motorcycle in an alley, and confronts both the assailant and the police officer, physically assaulting them as the camera alternates between the two. After successfully violently subduing the assailant, she declares, "This business of revenge is both a calling and a curse." The relationship that the trailer creates between the pursuits presents Delia as the one who is ultimately pursuing justice. The two men involved in the chase scenes represent the settler colonial structures that have placed her in the position of avenger. The call and curse that Delia's actions respond to is the prevalence of sexual violence against

Native women. She reveals her motivation when she says in voiceover in the trailer "The white boys have been having their way with Indian girls since contact. Forget what Disney tells you Pocahontas was twelve when she met John Smith. It's pretty little lies like this that hide the ugly truth."

The centrality of sexual violence to settler colonialism's structures perpetually designates Indigenous women as violable and victims. Delia's refusal to remain within the confines of the structures that would define her in those ways insists that alternative forms of justice exist and can be implemented. Her position in the film as Native woman, avenger, and representative of Indigenous notions of justice reflect ideological positions around Indigenous sovereignty that establish the existence of pre-colonial forms of law and justice within Indigenous societies. In this context, Delia represents the ideological as well as material presence of Indigenous sovereignty on Indigenous lands. By presenting a character whose performance is gendered as a physically confrontational and ultimately violent woman, the film confronts the sexual violence settler colonialism requires to maintain its structures. As a visual narrative it occupies the ocular and imaginative space that Michelle Raheja has called the virtual reservation: "a supplemental arena of the possible that initiates and maintains a dialectical relationship between the multiple layers of Indigenous knowledge systems."[4] Through its storytelling, the film serves the purpose of imagining an Indigenous future that refuses the narrative of the vanishing Native, the perpetuation of gendered violence, and continuation of settler-state structures.

Following the trailer, the film begins with Delia sitting in a bar, the lighting dim and mostly black and white. A newscast in the background reports, "The victim has been identified

[4] Michelle Raheja, *Reservation Reelism: Redfacing, Visual Sovereignty, and Representations of Native Americans in Film* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010): 153.

as an aboriginal female. Foul play is suspected. Police have yet to name any suspects." In film noir style, the camera then cuts to a young woman, Nelly (Ella-Maija Tailfeathers), with Delia in a secluded industrial location. Nelly hands Delia an envelope, which she opens, revealing a picture of a man. Nelly explains that she's been sexually assaulted by this man, but that he has evaded prosecution. In the next scene, the man from the photograph, Brian (Christian Sloan), is seen sitting in the bar, drinking. Delia sits next to him and orders a drink. As she waits for the drink, Brian, with a tone full of arrogance and over confidence and a smug look on his face, begins to attempt to make conversation, but she stoically sits silently in femme fatale fashion. He tells her that he is going to the restroom and not to "disappear." Whether ironic or not, Brian's remark speaks to the settler colonial desire for elimination of Indigenous people, women in particular, who wield power against the settler state for the ways they challenge the legitimacy of the state. Through his statement, Brian comes to represent the state that seeks to realize the disappearance, and his position as a sexual predator exposes a method of elimination.

While he is gone Delia orders a drink for him, sitting in low key lighting with heavy shadows. The bartender (Rose Stiffarm) serves the drink, Delia puts rohypnol in it, and the bartender stirs it into the whiskey with her finger. When Brian returns, he drinks the whiskey. The next scene shows him tied to a railing in what appears to be an abandoned warehouse setting with Delia sitting in a chair facing him obviously waiting for him to wake up. She confronts him about Nelly and then reveals that he assaulted her, too. He moves through a series of reactions beginning with denial and ending with an expression of regret. When it is clear Delia is not going to release him, he begins to yell for help. At this point, Delia picks up a can and douses him in gasoline as "Electric Pow Wow Drum" begins to play again. She steps back, lights a cigarette, and places it between his lips. The camera cuts to her walking away, looking at him

contemptuously. The viewer is shown Brian quivering in fear and beginning to cry while the cigarette burns perilously close to his skin. In his precarious position he can choose to pull the cigarette into his mouth to extinguish it, thus leaving him permanently scarred; he can wait holding very still, hoping that the cigarette will burn down to ash and be cool enough to not ignite the gas; he can try to spit it out, intending for it to land far enough away. Ultimately, it is left to the viewer decide, because the film ends with Delia driving away, helmeted, on her motorcycle while the song continues in the background with its heavy drumming and chanting, this time providing a sense of power and danger.

Delia's actions insist that Indigenous sovereignty is inherent to Indigenous bodies. At the scale of the body, its assertion as a tool of redress establishes its relationship to jurisdiction, law, and justice. At the scale of settler colonial structure, sovereignty figures prominently in the film as that which undergirds the logic behind Delia's extralegal violence. Though often contested as a term, it remains true that colonialism resulted in a partial loss of what can be understood as Indigenous sovereignty that pre-exists the settler state. Joanne Barker explains this when she states, "Removed from the realm of the 'foreign,' 'Indian tribes' were likewise removed from the realm of international law, breaking any implied link between treaties, nationhood, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and jurisdiction that the United States [and Canada] would be obligated to recognize in Indians."[5] The process of settler colonialism that required the denial of "title" to Indigenous lands required the denial of full recognition of Indigenous rights to autonomy in

[5] Joanne Barker, "For Whom Sovereignty Matters," in *Sovereignty Matters: Locations of Contestation and Possibility in Indigenous Struggles for Self-Determination* ed. by Joanne Barker (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005): 10-11.

governance, jurisprudence, and a "body" politic.[6] Treating clearly evidenced and acknowledged the existence of such structures in Indigenous societies; processes of dispossession, however, worked to obscure and obstruct the existence of those systems, leaving tribes subjected to state structures of "justice," which work to the benefit of the settler state.

Continually undermining or denying Indigenous sovereignty historically provided and continually provides a pretext within which settler states make claims to absolute power over people and places. Through outright denial or diminishment of Indigenous structures of governance, "the [western] concept of sovereignty served the colonists in negating indigenous territorial rights and humanity while justifying the right of conquest by claims to national superiority."[7] The negation of territorial rights speaks directly to claims to jurisdiction over stolen lands like those Delia moves across. As a result of the assertion of absolute authority over that space and the people occupying that space, the settler state grants itself the power to determine what is legitimate and illegitimate violence. That is the framework within which Delia exercises the power she creates through extralegal violence, and this occurs both as an interpersonal interaction and as a refusal of the state's claims to authority. Noting that "Native scholars…have recognized that genocide is carried out not just at the economic and political level but on the ideological level,"[8] the discursive work that Tailfeathers's film offers moves the viewer from acknowledging the direct link between sexual violence and ongoing colonization to

[6] Audra Simpson, "The State is a Man: Theresa Spencer, Loretta Saunders, and the Gendered Cost of Settler Sovereignty in Canada," Clark University Video Archive, Clark University, April 16, 2016, https://commons.clarku.edu/videoarchive/235/.

[7] Barker, 5.

[8] Stepahanie Noelani Teves, Andrea Smith, and Michelle Raheja, eds., "Sovereignty" in *Native American Keywords* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2015): 10.

a recognition that other forms of justice exist or, at a minimum, can exist despite current settler state structures.

Leann Simpson, when discussing the bodily sovereignty of Indigenous peoples explains that "every body is a political order and every body houses individual self-determination."[9] Delia's movement as avenger across urban space stakes a claim against that land as always already belonging to Indigenous people. The physicality her vengeance demands demonstrates mastery over her own body, especially because she is a sexual assault survivor. As a matter of sovereignty, Delia's determination to make an accounting of the state's injustice pushes back against "a racially gendered and sexed snapshot, a still image of a movingly malleable narrative of Indigenous womanhood/femininity…that reenacts Indigenous people's lack of knowledge and power over their own culture and identity in an inherently imperialist and colonialist world."[10] In other words, Delia embodies sovereignty through her refusal of the trauma narrative and her assertion of her power and autonomy. Delia's performance of womanhood provides an alternative narrative that produces the virtual reservation. It allows her to embody sovereignty as a physically present, politically charged representation of self-governance and self-determination. She enacts Indigenous knowledge both culturally and as an identity that, while harmed, is self-defined in relation to the colonialist society she contends with.

As an embodiment of sovereignty, Delia presents Indigenous life as an always present and active assertion to the right to self-determination and political autonomy while she simultaneously critiques settler state "justice." Gerald Vizenor in *Fugitive Poses: Native*

---

[9] Simpson, 112.

[10] Joanne Barker, "Introduction: Critically Sovereign" in *Critically Sovereign: Indigenous Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies* ed. by Joanne Barker (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017): 2.

American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence, posits a vocabulary to better comprehend contemporary Native presence and life relative to ideas of sovereignty. Providing new connotations to old words, Vizenor proposes definitions meant to capture the complexity of Native survival. Central to these is the idea of survivance, which he explains is "an active repudiation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry."[11] He goes on to further explain that "stories of survivance are an active presence,"[12] creating a link to "Native *sovenance* [which] is that sense of remembrance, that trace of creation and natural reason in native stories"[13] (emphasis in the original). According to his formulation, both survivance and sovenance constitute transmotion, understood to be "that sense of [N]ative motion and an active presence…*sui generis* sovereignty."[14] Furthermore, Vizenor specifically states that "sovereignty as transmotion is visionary...transmotion is survivance, not an absolute power over people or territories."[15] The main character, Delia, acts as avenger in the film, and, in so doing, embodies Indigenous sovereignty as a unique Indigenous presence of both survivance and sovenance. Her presence in the film constitutes transmotion, which, according to Vizenor, is Native sovereignty. Delia's movement across the urban landscape on the motorcycle along with her movement from the bar to the warehouse location asserts survivance through her physical presence and the power that accompanies it in her domination of Brian as reflective of the failure of the judicial system of the

[11] Gerald Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses: Native American Scenes of Absence and Presence*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000): 15.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Vizenor, 189.

settler state. Located in Native sovenance by recalling structures and systems of justice that pre-exist colonialism, and thus the settler state, Delia's practice of justice, as portrayed in the film, provide an alternative understanding of the workings of justice and what it means in its contemporary context of sexual violence, which is a necessity of settler colonialism in order to further its genocidal aim to occlude the persistence of Indigenous women as threatening, antagonistic, and opposing forces to the colonial project.[16]

"A Red Girl's Reasoning" also makes clear that *refusal* operates more effectively as a response to settler colonization's unjust structures and an anti-colonial analytic in place of what is typically referred to as "resistance." The difference between refusal and resistance importantly frames the character's embodiment and performance of sovereignty. Explaining the importance of refusal, Audra Simpson states, "Refusal comes with the requirement of having one's *political* sovereignty acknowledged and upheld, and raises the question of legitimacy for those who are usually in the position of recognizing"[17] (emphasis in the original). Forcing the recognition of political sovereignty overwrites any inclusion into the political body by way of rights granted by the settler state that a reformist approach can offer. As a political project refusal asserts Indigenous sovereignty as a structure of self-governance and autonomy. Considering justice and its political implications, the question of legitimacy of the settler state brings the structural realities of its existence into sharp focus. Those structures of dispossession centralize the role that Delia plays relative to Indigeneity as an analytic and the promise it holds for alternative forms of justice. In the context of sovereignty struggles in a settler colonial context, such

[16] Simpson, "The State is a Man."

[17] Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life across the Borders of Settler States*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014): 11.

distinctions mark the difference between reform and transformation that holds the potential for true self-determination, a kind of self-determination that Delia expresses and performs. That is, Delia's embodiment of sovereignty represents refusal of colonial social and political structures and sets up sovereignty as the condition of possibility for self-determination and Indigenous justice.

In light of Delia's ambiguous relationship to the pursuit described above, the disruption of the convention alongside Delia's introduction into the scene conjures the history of the settler state as a social construct for the viewer. Paralleling the pursuit of the white assailant by the white police officer alongside the trans/motion of the motorcycle over the road in the trailer further demonstrates this as it removes Delia from, while simultaneously situating her with that motion. This juxtaposition, allowing independence while maintaining relation, keeps Delia in time and space with the "modern" subjects as it also demonstrates her detachment from them; as the pursuit is presented in the trailer, Delia's destination could feasibly be anywhere, visually demonstrating for the viewer the contingency of history, colonization and, thus, its consequent violence. The trailer, however, changes its focus by sharing smaller frames within one frame to present the pursuit as scenes of the assailant and police officer running simultaneously with Delia's movement on the motorcycle across the urban landscape. Her appearance, primarily defined through violence at this point and contingent as it is on her self-understanding as avenger, disrupts the anticipated hyper-masculine confrontation between criminal and officer (again calling the history of colonialism and its inevitability into question) and suggests to the viewer that she is the one in pursuit of both of them. As a result, the chase scene with her at the center becomes apparent as the *sui generis* sovereignty discussed above as embodied by

Indigenous woman. Vengeance, however, does not inherently tell a story of sovereignty; it narrates those conditions in relation to the settler state but not always in opposition to them.

Although not visual cultural production, Louise Erdrich's novel, *The Roundhouse*, also narrates a story of revenge following a violent sexual assault. As a point of contrast for the way it considers matters of jurisdiction and law within the US, the story presents the story of a sexual assault that is not resolved by the victim. Its approach to Indigenous sovereignty presents an interesting opportunity to examine it alongside Tailfeathers's film. The book is set on a fictional reservation in North Dakota, and is a complicated coming of age story about a thirteen year old Native boy named Joe. It centers around his mother's, Geraldine's, violent rape and the pursuit of the assailant. Joe expresses an interest and slight fascination with federal Indian law at least in part because his father, Bazil, is a tribal court judge. It opens with the son experiencing an idyllic afternoon doing yard work with his father. As the day progresses, the mother's absence becomes more and more conspicuous until the two of them decide to search for her. Assuming that she is experiencing some minor predicament that is delaying her return, they drive to her place of work, the tribal clerk's office. On their way they pass her traveling back home and turn around to follow her. When they arrive at home, Joe notices that his mother is frozen in the driver's seat, hands remaining firmly on the steering wheel. Bazil approaches the car to find her covered in blood, vomit, and gasoline. They take her to the hospital where the fact of her rape is confirmed for Joe and its violence is demonstrated through her need for surgery.

The novel continues with Geraldine falling further and further into a deep depression. She wholly withdraws from her community and family, isolating herself in her bedroom and refusing to eat. Joe becomes more and more distressed by his mother's behavior and becomes involved with his father's efforts to discover the assailant in order to pursue justice. As he becomes

frustrated with what he understands as a lack of progress in the pursuit, he begins to investigate independently until he decides a white man, Linden Lark, who lives in the neighboring border town is the rapist. His suspicions are confirmed upon Lark's arrest, but jurisdictional matters complicate the potential for prosecution, including the fact that he is non-Native. As a result, he is released. At this point, Joe decides that he must do something about the injustice and devises a plan to kill him. With the help of his friend, Cappy, Joe eventually shoots Lark, and he dies.

While readers may develop sympathy for Native women and contempt for current failings of the nation state, the transformation of their comprehension of legal issues in Indian Country can only be understood to represent a reformist approach to issues of law.[18] The story makes clear that the central difficulty impeding justice lies in issues of jurisdiction, land and the race of the rapist as a result of current settler law. Because the land the rape occurs on cannot be specifically identified – it could be reservation land, state land, or federal land – the settler state criminal justice system is unable to directly address the crime, and because the rapist is white the Native judicial system is also unable to prosecute. In other words, from the outset, the story presents a circumscribed understanding of the avenues available for Geraldine to realize justice and works against the idea that sovereignty is inherent to Indigenous lands and peoples. In its effort to address a real-life struggle facing Indigenous communities, the story fails to fully

[18] Reform in the context of settler state law poses several problems for Indigenous nations in their sovereignty and self-determination struggles. For a discussion on the importance of assertions of sovereignty relative to reform see Dian Million's discussions on activism and resistance in *Therapeutic Nations: Healing in an Age of Indigenous Human Rights* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013); for a discussion on the importance of the resurgence of Indigenous epistemologies in the context of justice see Sarah Deer, *The Beginning and End of Rape: Confronting Sexual Violence in Native America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).; for a discussion on reform versus resurgence see Glenn Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Poltics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014) and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

account for the carefully constructed nature of jurisdiction and the purposes it has served in the settler state's ongoing dispossession of Native people and its disavowal of political and social structures that had been and continue to be an integral part of Indigenous societies. The story attempts to appeal to a humanitarian sensibility that can see the foundational conditions that give rise to Indigenous women's high occurrence of rape. Despite Julie Tharp's assessment in "Erdrich's Crusade: Sexual Violence in *The Round House*" that "Erdrich creates an approach that seems almost calculated to attract and transform readers," [19] the ultimate effect of Erdrich's framing for social justice limits the reader to imagine it within a nation state framework of reform.

Sovereignty, therefore, remains, at best, undermined in the narrative. It does present the Native judicial system as circumscribed by settler state law, but, through its representation, that system's power is diminished to the point where Joe can condemn his father as powerless by saying "All you catch are drunks and hot dog thieves."[20] At worst, it is denied as the story focuses on the limitations of federal Indian law and nation state justice rather than the possibilities available through contemporary and traditional forms of Indigenous systems of justice. The focus on nation state justice underscores the reality that "American sovereignty may derive from an actual sovereign, secular or religious…Federal and state governmental sovereign immunity may derive from a legal tradition dating back to pre-constitutional eras [but] Tribal law does not necessarily derive from those traditions or realities."[21] As a result, the narrative depicts

---

[19] Julie Tharp, "Erdrich's Crusade: Sexual Violence in *The Round House*," *Studies in American Indian Literatures* Vol. 26(3), 2014: 29.

[20] Erdrich, 226.

[21] Matthew L. M. Fletcher, "Anishinaabe Law and the Round House," Albany Government Law

the reality of nation state sovereignty as natural and inevitable. When it does eventually take up historical and tribally specific means of justice, it does not adequately address the epistemological differentiation between the two. At the moment when Bazil appeases his son's guilt for his role in killing Lark, he continues to think in terms of settler state justice and speak from the position of judge rather than father. He says to Joe, "Lark's killing is a wrong thing which serves an ideal justice. It settles a legal enigma. It threads that unfair maze of land title law by which Lark could not be prosecuted. His death was the exit."[22] He continues to explain to Joe that Lark could have been considered a wiindigoo, a person who consumes other people, and whose killing can be justified. He goes on to say to Joe, "As I did not kill Lark, but wanted to, I must at least protect the person who took on that task. And I would, even to the extent of attempting to argue a legal precedent."[23] Joe is confused by his father's remarks and Bazil responds, "Traditional precedent. It could be argued that Lark met the definition of a wiindigoo, and that with no other recourse, his killing fulfilled the requirements of a very old law."[24] The novel clearly demonstrates that Lark meets the threshold to be considered a wiindigo. It does not, however, assert Indigenous traditional legal systems as legitimate in their own right. Erdrich could have presented Bazil's speech from an Anishinaabe father to an Anishinaabe son which would have allowed for the assertion of Anishinaabe sovereignty, even if not recognized by the settler state. Instead, Bazil speaks to Joe in terms that fit directly with the sovereignty of the settler state and its system of justice demonstrating the extent of his investment in a system that

---

Review 10 (2017): 93.

[22] Louise Erdrich, *The Round House*, (Harper Perennial, 2012): 306.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

will and must fail. In this regard, the novel fails to assert Native sovenance capable of recalling the traditional structures of law that can provide justice to the individual and the community.

Additionally, when Joe's grandfather, Mooshum, tells the story of Buffalo woman and Akiikwe, he first introduces the idea of the wiindigoo. In doing so, the story explains to the reader the threat that a wiindigoo "could cast its spirit inside of a person" at which point the "person would become an animal, and see fellow humans as prey meat."[25] The novel introduces the windiigoo with a story about a husband accusing his wife of being one because "he was tired"[26] of her, knowing the response is to kill the person who poses a threat. He is not successful in his endeavor and the story Mooshum tells is not about justice and so does not present the epistemological differences that have potential to highlight and affirm Indigenous sovereignty. The purpose of the wiindigoo, therefore, does not present itself as an epistemological break from the nation state justice system. The story's important purpose is to set up the creation of the round house and its cultural significance. It does not, however, narrate an alternative and form of justice capable of existing independently of the settler state. Although the story itself does not narrate an alternative form of justice through its treatment of the wiindigo, it does work to create the round house and demonstrate its sacred nature and indicate survivance.

Unlike Delia's story, where she is venerated for her actions in pursuing an alternative form of justice, Joe can be considered "an unrepentant murderer…effectively banned from the tribal community"[27] because of his actions and his apparent unaccountability for them. The story

[25] Erdrich, 180.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Fletcher, 107.

The Round House tells situates violence as only causing inescapable harm. At the conclusion of the novel, Joe has been suffering nightmares and his best friend is killed in a car crash when they attempt to temporarily escape their culpability in Lark's death through alcohol. By his own description, Joe is "broken and fragile."[28] Conversely, Delia is harmed prior to the narration of the story presented in "A Red Girl's Reasoning" and the violence she enacts is not depicted as causing her or her community profound harm. When Nelly meets her in the alley and says to her "I used to think you were just a story, like a legend us urban Indians wished was true. But here you are in the flesh." she affirms the power that Delia wields as an avenger but also as a present and active member of her community. By all appearances she is not broken or fragile. Her acts of revenge empower her to act in accordance with rotiskenra:kete, the very warrior mindset that can provide analogous logic to the killing of the wiindigo. Had she been able to take action, kanikonriio would have been protected and preserved, something Geraldine is ultimately incapable of doing.

Another marked distinction the novel presents over the film is the way it does not represent Indigenous women's right to define their own resolution. Geraldine does not confront the absence of nation state justice that results from the construction of Indian law within the settler state. To storytell in such a way is to narrate in opposition to Byrds's idea of mnemonic reading that provides a way to understand the power and purpose of Indigenous writing. Byrd defines mnemonic reading in the following way: "To read mnemonically is to connect the violences and genocides of colonization to cultural productions and political movements in order to disrupt the elisions of multicultural liberal democracy that seek to rationalize the originary

[28] Erdrich, 317.

historical traumas that birthed settler colonialism."[29] Although clearly demonstrating the way that Geraldine's rape impacts the entire community, Erdrich situates her wholly outside the actions in the story. She is placed in her dark and isolating bedroom for the majority of the story. She is not shown engaging her community, though family members do visit her. Had her non-engagement with them been narrated, the reader would have benefited from seeing her active refusal through her assertion of silence. As a result of her absence in the narration, she is not narrated as embodying the kind of survivance that Vizenor identifies, "an active presence." She returns to the story only when Lark is arrented, but she remains so only until he is released; once that occurs she descends back into her bedroom and absence. That her son is the impetus for Larks' downfall replays an old heteropatriarchal narrative around Indigenous women as victims in need of saving within the structures of heteronormativity that colonialism has imposed.

In the context of heteropatriarchy, Maile Arvin has argued that a "logic of possession" where she identifies possession "as expressing more precisely the permanent partial state of the Indigenous subject being inhabited (being known and produced) by a settler society"[30] reflects settler desire for the Native. It operates such that "an intimate relationship is forged that binds settler and Native, aiming to nullify Indigenous peoples' distinct 'sense of being a people.'"[31] While she is talking primarily about racial mixing through settler colonial structures of heteropatriarchy, I argue that this logic can be applied to sexual violence based on the intimacy violence requires, as established in the previous chapter. In this way, Erdrich upholds a logic of

---

[29] Jodi A. Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011): xii.

[30] Maile Arvin, *Possessing Polynesians: The Science of Settler Colonial Whiteness in Hawai'i and Oceania*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019): 16.

[31] Arvin, 17.

possession of the Indigenous woman. Dian Million notes that the "political and social destruction of Indigenous societies was in part accomplished by…unchecked violence perpetrated on Aboriginal women's bodies."[32] As a matter of sovereignty, the destruction rape has caused to native communities and the power it has conferred to the settler state cannot be overstated. As Sarah Deer explains, "the crisis of rape in tribal communities is inextricably linked to the way in which the United States developed and sustained a legal system that has usurped the sovereign authority of tribal nations."[33] As a result, Erdrich's narration of Geraldine as passive under a logic of possession, the focus on settler state justice as a locus of redress, and the inclusion of Anishinaabe forms of traditional justice into the state system all work to occlude the ongoing sovereignty of Indigenous peoples. Where one character embodies the life inherent to Vizenor's transmotion, described above, the other presents as the transit of empire that, according to Jodi Byrd, has been used to assert colonial control over Indigenous people and perpetuate US imperialism.

"Just Watch Me"

At the end of the film, when Delia douses Brian in gas, he growls at her, "You dirty fucking squaw. You'll never get away with this." Delia casually lights a cigarette and slowly walks up to him. As she does so, he becomes nervous and remains so while Delia blows smoke in his face. She looks at him intently and with disgust angrily replying, "Just watch me" in her Native language. Her use of language asserts Indigeneity in the moment where she appears to hold the fate of his life in her hands, which places him in a position of powerlessness, and

[32] Dian Million, *Therapeutic Nations: Healing in an Age of Indigenous Human Rights*, (Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 2013): 34.

[33] Sarah Deer, *The Beginning and End of Rape: Confronting Sexual Violence in Native America*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015): xiv.

language, often tied to land and people, becomes the absolute site of power that he must answer to. Because "[I]ndigeneity is not just a category determined by racism and colonialism but also by the knowledge and praxis of [I]ndigenous peoples,"[34] her presence as an Indigenous woman embodying sovereignty defines the colonial relationship in this moment of retribution. Brian is a serial rapist whose violence is sustained by the settler state criminal justice system. He represents the ongoing nature of the settler state's colonization and its need for sexual violence against Indigenous women. As a representation of colonial juridical structures, the violence that he experiences at Delia's hands is not simply interpersonal. Delia's story "refuses an interpretation of colonial violence as interpersonal rather than systemic."[35] Her confidence that she will succeed in her act of vengeance while not being held accountable in the same way he was not, signals to the viewer that her actions represent more than an interpersonal confrontation between victim and assailant. Consequently, embodied sovereignty that defines assertions of power and self-determination collides with the embodiment of colonial injustice such that the primacy of Indigenous structures of justice emerge to provide the viewer with a new way to understand the violence of revenge.

Her use of her native language in the face of his gendered racial slur, knowing that he does not know what she is saying, reflects a refusal of the settler structures of injustice that Brian represents at the same time that it demands recognition of her bodily and political sovereignty. She is not seeking recognition for the purpose of validation or acknowledgement, however. The

---

[34] Maile Arvin, "Analytics of Indigeneity" in *Native Studies Keywords* ed by Stephanie Nohelani Teves, Andrea Smith, and Michelle Raheja (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2015): 121.

[35] Allison Hargeraves, "Conclusion: Thinking beyond the National Inquiry: *A Red Girl's Reasoning*," *Violence Against Indigenous Women: Literature, Activism, Resistance*, (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred University Press, 2017): 177.

recognition she forces is rooted in the actuality of the sovereignty of her people despite ongoing colonization. Unlike the recognition that the settler state bestows upon Native nations, Delia displays what Glen Coulthard has termed "*a resurgent politics of recognition*"[36] (emphasis in the original). Decrying current practices of recognition as they are configured through the settler state, he proposes an alternative formulation of recognition that can directly benefit Indigenous peoples. He explains that it is "premised on self-actualization, direct action, and the resurgence of cultural practices that are attentive to the subjective and structural composition of settler-colonial power."[37] The moment of violence is enfolded in her use of language and brings her mission of vengeance full circle to confront and condemn the "structural composition" of the state's juridical system and its historical outlawing of Indigenous languages. It is a process where her political and bodily sovereignty converge through her decolonial subjectivity as it emerges through action and culture.

The use of the Cree language also signifies the sovenance Vizenor discusses in its relationship to pre-colonial structures of justice. That is not to say that the language or the structures exist solely as part of the past. Rather, they recall the historical and ongoing presence of those structures. Indigenous language is significant for the way it is placed in the contemporary moment where Delia acts as avenger. The language does not function, however, as a recollection of something that has been lost but is now available to recover. As a matter of remembrance, the language represents a process of memory rather than a recollection. In other words, the use of her Native language does not gesture towards an historic structure that can be

[36] Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014): 24.

[37] Ibid.

anthropologically identified. Instead, the language is firmly rooted in the moment of its articulation as that which captures the reality of the ongoing violence of colonialism. Delia uses her language at the point in the film when Brian's life is most threatened, and his presence as a settler serially raping Native women recalls the history of colonial violations while her presence demonstrates that "Native sovereignty is sovenance, the immanence of visions, and transmotion in artistic creations."[38] Tailfeathers presents to the viewer a vision of alternative structures of justice as reflected in the process of memory that makes Native sovereignty a continuous presence that threatens the structures of the settler state. Delia's violence signifies the embodiment of sovereignty as expressed through the continuation of the Cree language. As a result, it becomes the very thing that proves the failure of the settler state in its efforts to suppress or eradicate the power of Indigenous women.

"'You're trapped in here'"

The above scene differs greatly from *The Round House* and the moment when Joe declares to Geraldine his intention to seek revenge against Lark. As a singular moment of refusal and participation in the potential resolution of the story, she forcefully tells him no. In response to her protest, Joe tells her, "I'll do it. There is nothing to stop me. I know who he is and I'm going after him. You can't stop me because you're here in bed. You can't get out. You're trapped in here."[39] While she admonishes Joe, she is the most animated she has been thus far, something Joe recognizes when he describes her response: "She sat up suddenly, activated, like

[38] Vizenor, 178.

[39] Erdrich, 89.

rising from the dead."[40] She ultimately tells him, "I have to heal any way I can"[41] and then announces her intention to sleep. In one of the few moments when Geraldine can be said to embody a level of sovereignty she does so as Joe's "before-mother"[42] and not as a character actively demonstrating survivance. Erdrich presents to the reader a sexual assault survivor who remains passive for the majority of the narration and, therefore, presents no active process for healing that might propel her to action. Though it can be argued that Geraldine's actions constitute refusal, it is also true that they are in direct opposition to the positive refusal identified in the previous chapter. The absence of first person narration along with the absence of any personal action from Geraldine precludes the possibility that the reader can witness or experience the form of refusal that demands action and that could represent Indigenous life in the face of grave settler violence. Said differently, Erdrich provides no opportunity for Geraldine to assert her own subjectivity such that the reader encounters an Indigenous woman who demonstrates survivance. Rather, the absences noted above narrate her as an abject victim, playing into existing narratives of Native women as abject victims.

In *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* Leanne Betasamosake Simpson declares "I don't want to be 'healed.' I want to have processed hurt and pain to the point where I can speak back to those words and harness the power of fear, hatred, and love into sustained mobilization – to the point where they don't control me."[43] Erdrich presents Geraldine as having a passive process for her to resolve her hurt and pain, and,

---

[40] Ibid.

[41] Erdrich, 90.

[42] Ibid.

[43] L. Simpson, 103.

therefore, she cannot be said to demonstrate "sustained mobilization." Tharpe asserts that "The attack on her silences her, renders her voiceless…and perhaps there is little political ground to be gained by going through the emotional agony with her."[44] The politics of embodied sovereignty identified earlier and Simpson's assertions around the sovereignty of Indigenous people's bodies demonstrate the relationship between Indigenous women's bodies and the political sovereignty that Indigenous nations hold. As a result, while sleeping is a fully acceptable method to resolve the hurt and pain of sexual violence, Erdrich's presentation of such a character fails to show the reader that connection. It is clear that Erdrich's intention is to present to the reader a Native woman who has survived a brutal attack and who is able to recover from that event. When she narrates her as a "carcass"[45] or "corpse"[46] there is possibility for a future where she can be made over if not made anew. However, Geraldine remains static through the end of the novel, even up to the last action Joe narrates, which is her climbing into the back seat of the car with a pillow and quilt.

Within Arvin's logic of possession, Geraldine represents the "Indian" who is possessable and possessed, produced and reproduced. In light of this, Erdrich's presentation of Geraldine represents "the reproduction of Indianness [which] serve[s] to facilitate, justify and maintain Anglo-American mastery over the significations of justice, democracy, law, and terror."[47] The aftermath of her assault makes her the vehicle by which the settler state's system of laws and justice is invoked and bears itself out, but it is particularly clear in the moment when Lark is

[44] Tharpe, 29-30.

[45] Erdrich, 193.

[46] Erdrich, 90.

[47] Byrd, xx.

released after having been arrested. Joe returns home on his bike to hear his mother's reaction to the news: "I was holding Pearl when I heard my mother scream. And scream again. And then I heard my father's low voice grinding between her shrieks. Her voice veered and fell, just the way I'd just been riding, crashing hard, until finally it dropped to an astonished mutter."[48] Her scream is the result of the failure of the state's criminal justice system to provide Geraldine any form of justice precisely because she is a Native woman. The "astonished mutter" following the screams reflects the resignation with which she ultimately receives the information. This is further demonstrated when, while expressing outrage at his father's inability to act, Joe says, "I yelled at him [Bazil] and went in to be with my mother, but there was nothing to be with when I got there. She was staring blankly at the blank refrigerator and when I stepped in front of her she spoke in a weird, calm voice. 'Hi, Joe.'"[49] The change from active to passive reproduces the narrative that Indigenous women are purely victims. A manner of storytelling that allows a reader to believe, as literary scholar Mary Paniccia Carden does, that Joe "is the only person who can protect his mother by killing her rapist."[50] Narrating Geraldine this way in a story circumscribed by settler law allows for the appropriation of Anishinaabe traditional justice, and effectively creates what Jodi Byrd has termed the transit of empire.

As a framework, Byrd explains that "transit as a concept suggests the multiple subjectivities and subjugations put into motion and made to move through notions of injury,

---

[48] Erdrich, 226.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Mary Paniccia Carden, "The Unkillable Mother: Sovereignty and Survivance in Louise Erdrich's *The Round House*, *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, vol. 30(1), Spring 2018: 111.

grievance, and grievability."[51] In this case, the story of Geraldine's rape and her passivity put into motion the colonial desires of the settler state relative to Indigenous women and power, which is to say that Geraldine exists as a Native woman without the capacity to pose a threat to the settler state. Instead, she provides a relative understanding of Indigeneity and the structures of colonialism that create the conditions of her rape. The relationship between Indigeneity and colonial structures as they are narrated in the book deny Geraldine bodily sovereignty while also denying political sovereignty to Indigenous people. Byrd further explains her concept when she states, "[t]he transit of empire, then, depends upon the language, grammar, and ontological category of Indianness,"[52] which Geraldine comes to represent. Erdrich makes this clear by attending to Geraldine's body and its ontology. Joe repeatedly refers to his mother through words associated with death, like corpse and carcass identified above. These words evacuate life from Geraldine, and in the face of brutal sexual violence this makes sense as a tool to demonstrate the profound nature of that violence. What fails to happen, however, is Geraldine's own re-creation of her body relative to her self. As a result, Geraldine functions as the transit of empire.

Under these conditions, her particular subject position precludes the possibility that she can achieve kanikon:lihne (good mind) for herself, let alone act as rotiskenrakéte (warrior) to protect the good mind for herself or others. From a perspective that centralizes these two epistemologies, expressing the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples becomes possible by allowing an approach that is outside the restrictions that have been placed on them through settler state law. Without an ability to approach the violation of her body, the land, the round house, and her community from this perspective Geraldine's options are limited. Having told Joe to not seek

[51] Byrd, xxi.

[52] Byrd, xxxv.

revenge does not translate into her taking action to prevent such an event. She does not report his intention to Bazil as a means to intervene, she does nothing beyond verbalizing her disapproval, and she does not decide to become the avenger herself. As the transit of empire Geraldine is destined to serve "as the ontological ground through which US settler colonialism enacts itself"[53] relative to its colonial project. The possibilities for her to achieve or to enact justice within the confines of US colonialism become impossible under such conditions. Narrating Geraldine this way inevitably places Indigenous people outside of their own sovereignty and solidly constrains them to the settler state judicial system.

The "ideal justice" or revenge act that Bazil identifies and Joe performs also underscores the impossibility for Native people to experience justice under the conditions of settler colonialism and its structures. Joe's actions are the direct result of laws that do not protect his mother and that inspire him to seek and carry out revenge. Ultimately, however, even in their failure to provide justice, settler law takes precedent over Anishinaabe law through the revenge act itself. When Joe pulls the trigger, he does so trepidatiously. He explains, "I held the rifle gently the way I'd practiced, and tried to control my breathing. But each breath got stuck."[54] After he shoots and misses, Joe describes his distress: "I got the rifle back to my shoulder, reloaded. I was shaking so hard I rested the barrel on a branch, held my breath, and shot again. I couldn't tell where that shot went. Once again I worked the bolt, reloaded, aimed, but my finger slid off the trigger – I couldn't shoot."[55] In the end, Joe does not deliver the lethal shot; Cappy emerges and calmly pulls the trigger, killing Lark. Rather than experience confidence and surety

[53] Byrd, xix.

[54] Erdrich, 282.

[55] Ibid.

in his decision to enact revenge, Joe remains fearful from the moment he realizes he is in a position to kill Lark. The steady presence of his fear of being found out for the remainder of the book proves the level of deference he has to settler law and the religious teachings he has been. That is, Joe does not accept his extralegal violence as wholly justified. Instead, he understands his actions as wrong for violating the very legal system that allows his mother's rapist to evade prosecution. When Joe seeks out the advice of Bugger Poirier about dreams he'd been having, he comes to realize that he knows where the body of Mayla Wolfskin had been buried by Lark after he killed her. He says, "I spun around thinking I should go to the police, then stopped. I could not let the police know I was even thinking this way. I had to get off their radar entirely, with Cappy, disappear."[56] He fears that he is on their "radar" relative to Larks's killing, but more than that he is willing to let the remains of a young woman also brutalized by Lark to remain buried, potentially forever. There are no intense interrogations or official suggestions that Joe is the killer but his words clearly convey his fear of being discovered. Unlike "A Red Girl's Reasoning," the moment of violence in the novel does not assert Native sovereignty or Indigenous justice. As explained above, the folding in of traditional Anishinaabe law to the settler state judicial system undermines Indigenous sovereignty and creates a hierarchy whereby the "law of the land," so to speak, is the settler law that prevails in the next generation.

Sovereign Im/possiblities

The moments of violence in each text demonstrate the central role that sovereignty plays in the narratives. Asserting the importance of intellectual sovereignty as a process of doing, Robert Warrior states, "if our struggle is anything, it is the struggle for sovereignty, and if

[56] Erdrich, 310.

sovereignty is anything, it is a way of life."[57] Delia lives her life in the space and time of sovereignty. She asserts her power through her body as a physical and political presence that acts as the arbiter of justice. Geraldine exists in the text without movement and lacks the characteristics necessary to exhibit sovereignty of her body or of any political order. The two texts, as points of contrast, demonstrate Warrior's argument that sovereignty is a way of life.

Geraldine's rape occurs at the round house where "the jurisdictional maze of Indian country jurisdiction requires federal prosecutors to prove to a jury of non-Indians beyond a reasonable doubt that the crime occurred in Indian country."[58] The rape is a violation of her body and of sacred space that cannot be redressed by overcoming a requirement for reasonable doubt to an audience of settlers. That the novel ends without a return to the round house by Geraldine, Bazil, or Joe places priority on a relationship to settler law rather than traditional Anishinaabe justice or its tie to land beyond a jurisdictional framework. The story about the creation of the round house at the direction of Buffalo Woman that Mooshum tells to Joe becomes lost as a point of reference able to demonstrate the sovereignty of Indigenous people, in this case the Anishinaabe. In her discussion about the centrality of sovereignty to cultural production Jolene Rickard explains, "[s]overeignty is the border that shifts indigenous experience from a victimized stance to a strategic one. The recognition of this puts brains in our heads, and muscle on our bones."[59] Obviously, her statement about the Indigenous body is not literal, but it is important to think about in terms of our relationship to imagining and acting in ways that open

---

[57] Robert Warrior, *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995): 123.

[58] Fletcher, 108.

[59] Jolene Rickard, "Sovereignty: A Line in the Sand," *Aperture* 139 (Summer 1995): 51.

the possibility to realize justice. The story that Erdrich presents to the reader, however, is one that circumscribes land as wholly related and limited to settler ideas of law and jurisdiction. In so doing, she creates a character and a narrative that functions as a transit of empire. Rather than present a relationship to land that provides a structure of meaning that can benefit Geraldine, the novel refuses the possibility that "thought, or the mind, meets and merges with the physical [world]."[60] The denial of that relationship effectively denies the possibility that Indigenous sovereignty is inherent to the land and to Indigeneity itself.

Unlike *The Round House*, "A Red Girl's Reasoning," through its presentation of visual sovereignty, "permits the flow of Indigenous knowledge about such key issues as land rights, language acquisition, and preservation, which narrativizes local and international struggles."[61] More specifically, the short film presents the key issue of sexual violence in a way that does not relegate Indigenous women to a state or category of victim. Her movement across the urban landscape claims that space and place as always already Indigenous land, sovenance, and demonstrates command of herself. As a result, the violence she enacts asserts an extralegal structure that works in opposition to the settler state in that it provides justice to Indigenous women. It also creates a relationship to urban space that reflects the contemporary relationship Indigenous people have to those spaces. Deborah Doxtator argues that even though traditional relationships to land may appear to have been disrupted by colonialism, women continue to access meaning from the land that ties directly to a way of thinking about and understanding the self. She explains, "[t]he women's mind…is and always will be inextricably connected to land

[60] Deborah Doxtator, Lynn A. Hill, Patricia Deadan, Shelley Niro, Jolene Rickard, and Kelly Greene, *Godi'nigoha': The Women's Mind* (Brantford, ON: Woodland Cultural Centre, 1997): 34.

[61] Raheja 196.

and 'earth.'"[62] The relationship to land that the film makes clear provides a framework through which to understand her actions as asserting Indigenous structures of justice. By way of that assertion, Delia embodies the sui generis sovereignty Vizenor identifies.

[62] Doxtator, 32.

CHAPTER FOUR Refusing Death: The Fierceness of Communal Retributive Violence

For the colonized, life can only materialize from the rotting cadaver of the colonist.[1]

— Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

Introduction

Harkening back to the horrors of residential boarding schools, Jeff Barnaby's *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* (2014), about two-thirds through the film, places the main character, Aila (Kawennáhere Devery Jacobs), in a space of subjection within the school. Upon being locked in a small, stone cell, Aila stumbles back against the farthest wall from the small window on the thick wooden doors. She begins to cry and clutches her stomach. She slowly slides down the wall and looks around with a lost expression on her face until the camera fades to her using a rock, presumably found in the cell, to draw on the walls urgently and determinedly. The camera cuts away to show her asleep in what appears to be a prone position, but the viewer comes to learn that she is, in fact, leaning against the same wall she had been drawing on. A young boy, Jujijj (Shaka Mattawa Jacobs), arrives and frees her as she says in a voice over, "I wonder how many ghosts wander around down this hole. How the devil doesn't let them go. Or how many got out that were ruined all the same." She walks out of the cell but not before turning around to look at the seven white ghosts with large black eyes that she has drawn on the wall during her imprisonment. The implication is that she may have been ruined, as well, but the trajectory of the rest of the film rejects that possibility.

One evening, during Chris's (Daniel Kaluuya) stay at the Armitage's house in Jordan Peele's *Get Out* (2017), he is coerced into his girlfriend's mother's den. As he walks by the room

[1] Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox, (New York: Grove Press, 2004): 50.

to return to bed, Missy (Catherine Keener), eerily switches on a light revealing that she had been sitting in the dark seemingly waiting for him. She says to him, "Come in and sit with me. Please? Just for a little while. Please," and in response he hesitantly agrees, appearing to be somewhat uncomfortable with the idea as he slowly sits down in a large leather chair. The camera cuts away from Chris and shows Missy picking up a teacup and saucer. After asking him if he's comfortable in his stay, she begins to stir the tea with a metal spoon with an overly sweet smile on her face. Chris looks around the room hesitantly and Missy begins to talk to him about hypnosis under the pretense that she can help him quit smoking. At this point, she begins to slowly stir her tea while continuing to talk to him about smoking and hypnosis. Switching the topic she asks Chris, "What about your mother?" Chris responds, "What about her? Wait are we…" but Missy cuts him off asking where he was when she died, all the while continuing to stir the tea so that the spoon against the cup becomes ambient noise. Shaking his head and looking at her a little askance, Chris indicates that he doesn't want to talk about it. She stirs the tea and smiles at him in a way that is not totally sinister yet conveys a sense of danger to the viewer. Still stirring the tea, she continues to look at him until he answers her initial question and then carefully walks him through the details of the evening his mother was killed. As she does so, the viewer becomes aware that she is in the process of hypnotizing him. Taking him back to that evening and the feeling of helplessness he had as a boy she tells him, "You can't move," to which Chris responds, "Why can't I move?" She tells him he's paralyzed and with a malevolent smile tells him to "sink into the floor." The viewer watches as Chris descends into a place of darkness from which he cannot escape, the "sunken place."

Both scenes present ideas about how space and place function to relegate racialized subjects to spaces of containment and places of violence – the stone cell and the Armitage's

house – meant to produce abjection. They produce space as a geography where racialization becomes a material reality and whiteness is made and asserted. In so doing, each of these instances presents how conditions of settler colonialism reflect the dark realities of its history for Indigenous and Black people. Consequently, the films, at their outset, also map out these locations as colonial spaces and places while situating them as points of Indigenous and Black subjection. Recognizing the mapping of colonial spaces is crucial to thinking about how those spaces work towards or against decolonization, particularly when understanding the foundations of contemporary settler colonial social and political formations as derived from genocide, slavery, and dispossession. To that end, the space of the reservation and the space of the plantation that each film presents are usefully understood as spaces of containment and oppression.

In this chapter, the remapping of spaces in the films is centralized in order to imagine how a different future can emerge from that remapping. This remapping is both literally through their contemporary purposes and metaphorically through cultural production that reclaims the meaning of those spaces as Indigenous and Black, respectively, rather than places of subjection and/or abjection through the lens of white supremacy. Mishuana Goeman, speaking about the alternative mapping Leslie Marmon Silko provides in *Almanac of the Dead*, explains that "How we approach and interpret writing is important in understanding not only the way that territories and places emerge, converge, and diverge, but also how they continue to reproduce asymmetrical relationships producing new identities."[2] To examine the conditions under which new identities emerge, this chapter will how examine both films, *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* and *Get Out* deploy

[2] Mishuana Goeman, *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2013): 173.

violent revenge. This interrogation of colonial spaces and the different forms of violence they can produce highlight the intersections found through their comparison. This is not to say that they tell parallel stories or that their approach to narrative is similar. Rather, examining the violence represented in each film as serving the interests of decolonization, the promise of futurity, and communal participation in the violence illuminates some ways that cultural production can identify commonalities that extend beyond those prescribed in a settler colonial, white supremacist context.

The relationship between violence and communal identity and involvement in its deployment is a distinguishing feature of each film. Rather than understanding violent revenge as an interpersonal interaction bearing consequences for the participants only, the vengeful violence enacted in the films comprehends the interpersonal nature of the revenge act as representing an assault on colonial structures. Whereas violent revenge is thought of as a person-to-person event that functions to vindicate an individual experience of insult or harm, the nature of the violence in these two films aims to vindicate historical trauma and settler colonialism's legacies. Because the structures in the films undergird the logic at play in the oppression the main characters' experience, the relationship between structure and event emerges as the films progress. In *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* the harm is inflicted directly on Aila yet follows centuries of similar torture and abuse committed at the behest of the Canadian settler state and the churches conspiring with it. In *Get Out* Chris's banishment to the sunken place, while reflecting the theft of his personal subjectivity also represents centuries the state spent upholding the idea that the enslaved were not fully human along with the impact that has had on their descendants. Each film presents culminating confrontations that arise from the antagonists' interpersonal participation in ongoing colonial structures. The characters that perpetuate systems of oppression

and racial violence experience retributive violence, but as representative of settler state structures they are targeted as such. The communal nature of the retributive violence also serves to prove this point, which is to say that violence is always experienced at an interpersonal level, but particular people acting to achieve a particular end shape the meaning of the violence. The characters in each film rely on other members of their respective communities to successfully complete their revenge, and the cooperation necessary for such an outcome alters, if not the substance of the violence, the meaning behind the consequences the violence produces.

Rhymes for Young Ghouls, set on the fictional Mi'gMaq Red Crow reservation during the 1970s, tells the story of Aila, a young Mi'gMaq woman, negotiating her way through corrupt settler colonial structures, more specifically residential boarding schools run by immoral settlers within a violent Indigenous-settler dynamic. This framework defines the colonial relationship to the state that Indigenous people experience, along with the power that the state claims to hold over them. Furthermore, this framing puts together the realities of settler colonialism and white supremacy reflected in the film while also reflecting the ways that Indigenous people refuse the absolute nature of settler state and white supremacist power. Aila demonstrates this when, to avoid attending the school, she pays a "truancy tax" or bribe to the reservation's Indian Agent, Popper (Mark Antony Krupa), an active agent of the settler state whose purpose is to enforce oppressive and assimilationist policies. The "tax" effectively pays him off to avoid the school and demonstrates the role of racial capitalism, which will be taken up later. When, however, Popper breaks their arrangement by stealing the money in advance of the tax's due date, Aila, along with other members of her community, devises a plan for revenge. The remainder of the film shows the development and implementation of Aila's plan, along with the many personal violations Popper commits against her family and larger community. These plot twists are

complicated by her father's return home from prison which serves as an excuse for Popper to not only increase his surveillance of the community but the father and Aila's family, in particular. These circumstances result in severe physical and psychological harm on Aila, which sets revenge up as the most viable option. During the planning for and implementation of the revenge act, the viewer becomes intimately acquainted with the brutal violence, state corruption, oppressive and arbitrary policies that have pushed Aila to a point where operating within the system, even at the level of supporting Popper's corruption for her own and her friends' benefit, no longer makes sense as a survival mechanism.

The film represents the history of boarding schools as they were conceived and implemented through Canada's Indian Act, which mandated attendance at these schools for all Indigenous children. It opens with a reference to this reality with a quote from the Indian Act as an introduction to the film: "Her Majesty's attendants, to be called truant officers, will take into custody a child whom they believe to be absent from school using as much force as the circumstance requires. A person caring for an Indian child who fails to cause such a child to attend school shall immediately be imprisoned, and such person arrested without warrant and said child conveyed to school by the truant officer." Originally enacted in 1876 and modified in 1920 in order to compel the attendance of Native children in residential schools, the Act functioned, among other things, as a settler colonial tool claiming jurisdiction over Indigenous people, in the case of the film, parents and children. Employing many forms of oppressive structures meant to eliminate them as peoples and as threats to the political order of Canada, the effects of these schools on students and community members cannot be overstated. The historical and generational trauma they produced arose, in part, through the production of spaces of terror and incarceration, both of which of are central themes in the film. This is evidenced in the way

the characters reflect both the trauma of the schools and a refusal to adhere to state policies regarding them and the terror they were meant to produce. By introducing the Indian Act at the start of the film to contextualize the history of boarding schools, the struggles that Aila, her parents, and her community face become apparent as a structural consequence rather than personal failings of a group of abject racialized subjects. The efforts her particular generation, at this point in the history of the schools, made to enact change around the existence of these schools and also the impact they had on Indigenous communities becomes apparent and fundamental to the story.

In an interview about his film, writer and director Jeff Barnaby explains the reasoning behind the setting of the film:

> It's set in 1976, which is the year I was born, and it was with the idea that these people, at that time, set the rest of us free. And although we are still dealing with that legacy, if they didn't do what they did, we wouldn't even have the opportunity to even have a voice about residential schools, colonialism and the kind of oppressive nature of Canada in general. It had to happen at some point, we have to defend ourselves as human beings.[3]

In many ways, this statement makes sense of the violence the film portrays. While he is speaking about the role of actual residential school survivors defying a horrific assimilationist policy that brutalized generations of Indigenous people, Barnaby's assessment of a "line in the sand" kind of era resonates throughout the film. It speaks specifically to the ways a generation born out of the historical trauma the schools produced were positioned to respond in novel ways not available to previous generations. While it is most apparent at the moment where Aila declaratively proclaims "We're gonna break into St. D.s and rob Popper," it is also present through the community involvement the film portrays. Her declaration expresses a refusal to continue to

[3] Jamais DeCosta, "Interview with Filmmaker Jeff Barnaby on *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*," Muskratmagazine.com, February 1, 2014, http://muskratmagazine.com/interview-with-filmmaker-jeff-barnaby-on-rhymes-for-young-ghouls/.

accept the colonial conditions that support the school. This chapter primarily focuses on the actions of Aila as the main character in the film but also as a subject who is gendered both as a target of violence and as an enactor of violence. It is important, nonetheless, to note that the act of revenge in the film is successful as a result of community engagement and support from Aila's friends. In other words, Aila hatches and carries out a plan, but she does so knowing that she is not alone in her desire or her ability to see it through – she knows her friends, Sholo (Cody Bird), Maytag (Kenneth D'Ailleboust), and Angus (Nathan Alexis), are more than willing to be complicit in her desire and attempt to "escape" the structures of settler colonial violence.

Having reached a breaking point, violence against Popper, as representative of the state and church, becomes an option for Aila and her friends precisely because their well-planned act of revenge makes an accounting of the state's violence while also providing Aila with a way out. At the start of the film she states, "I've dreamt of nothing but getting out of this place." Taken literally, Aila's assessment of her colonial geography becomes a place to escape. Metaphorically, her desire to break free from colonialism speaks to the limits of her willingness to withstand not just geography but the circumscribed subjectivity that colonialism has allowed her to express. Consequently, the site of the reservation as the chosen location for this film, is central for understanding the events that unfold in the story. That the reservation, historically, was a place of actual confinement centralizes the racialized violence of these spaces. When Popper and his goons physically assault Aila and other community members, the viewers observe the reservation as a particular space with particular consequences for those occupying it. Through that lens they must confront the settler colonial conditions that produce it for Aila and her community.

While Barnaby's intention to produce this experience for the viewer is present through the actual structural and physical violence the film produces, the landscape of the film also has this effect. The choice to set the film during the fall season creates an association with processes of death and decay, which is especially apparent during Aila's visit to her mother's unmarked gravesite where the ground is overwhelmingly blanketed with fallen leaves. Furthermore, the location of the school produces a threatening presence. Barnaby uses the lake as site of restriction rather than a natural element with its own life and movement. Popper's policy to prohibit the use of the water prevents it from being experienced as a place of departure and/or return, which underscores the circumscription that Aila laments. Restricting access to water profoundly transforms people's relationship to it so that it ceases to become a source of life. Rather, it becomes a site of colonial power and oppression experienced by Native people as a violation of treaty rights and sovereignty.[4] In the context of the film, Popper's enforcement of the policy, whether it exists by his own making or as a directive from the settler state, reveals itself most acutely when Aila and her father reconnect after his incarceration. The reconnection they experience undermines Popper's power even when he arrives and violently confronts them for their transgression. All of the above come to mark the reservation as a location of constriction, degeneration, and settler violence.

Although not entirely analogous, the film *Get Out* tells a similar story of escape from colonial geography and generations of the historical trauma of slavery and its afterlife. When the young, talented Black photographer, Chris, agrees to a weekend visit to his preppy white girlfriend, Rose's, parents' house, he has his reservations because she supposedly has not told

[4] For a recent example see, https://indiancountrytoday.com/news/the-fiery-clash-over-mikmaq-treaty-fishing-rights; see also, https://www.grunge.com/804265/the-native-american-fish-wars-of-the-1960s-and-1970s-explained/.

them that he is Black. She instead explains, “They are not racist…I would have told you.” Later in the film, Chris’s rambunctious and seemingly paranoid friend, Rod, warns him of the potential for harm when he responds to Chris telling him he had been hypnotized: “Bruh, how are you not scared of this, man? Look they could’ve made you do all types of stupid shit. They’d have you barkin’ like a dog, flying around like you’re a fuckin’ pigeon lookin’ ridiculous, okay? Or, I don’t know if you know this, white people love makin’ people sex slaves and shit.” Laughing off his friend’s warning as ridiculous, Chris fails to see any potential for actual threat, physical or otherwise. Chris nonchalantly finishes the call after laughing at him for his reaction to being told that Chris was hypnotized and goes on with the visit. Rod’s warning to Chris functions as foreboding, but it also speaks, given the outcome of the film, to the idea that denying the existence of racism has potential to place certain subjects in harm’s way, and is likely reflective of a desire to deny accountability for the racist structures underpinning the ideas that lead to Chris’s peril. As a story about the ongoing danger of racism unfolding in what is considered a post-racial era, the film speaks to the falsity of multiculturalism in its assertion that the absence of overt racism does not diminish the structural reality of its existence. More specifically, that inter-racial relationships, like Rose and Chris’s, are socially acceptable in a post-racial framework, allows the Armitage’s to unquestionably believe that Black people have genetic differences as a biological truism, hearkening back to slavery, without them actually having to account for that history. That lack of accountability underscores the setting of the film.

Upon arriving at the Armitage’s house, Chris is presented with a sweeping landscape and stately house, reminiscent of a plantation, thus setting up a Black-settler dynamic. The parents greet the couple at the front door and immediately begin to welcome Chris in ways that make him uncomfortable. For example, Rose’s father, Dean, tells Chris proudly that he would have

voted for Obama a third time, if he had been able, a nod to the idea of a post-racial society; the mother is quiet yet overly watchful of Chris, projecting an air of eeriness. Shortly after arriving, the parents remind Rose that their yearly party is that weekend. Rose feigns surprise saying "Wait holy shit! That's this weekend?" The parents assure her it is, noting that it is the same day every year. As the guests begin to arrive the next day, Rose continues to behave as though the party is an inconvenience to their trip saying to Chris as they watch cars arrive, "Oh man. It begins. Are you ready for this?" Chris responds, "Yeah, I am," and she replies "I'm not." The film then cuts to Walter opening car doors for the arriving guests and cuts again to Chris and Rose walking around the party. It becomes apparent very soon after that there are ulterior motives for their attendance with Chris experiencing several racist interactions with the white party goers. As the party continues, the viewer learns the real purpose of the party, which is the sale of Chris and his talent to the highest bidder, a transaction carried out in a gazebo in a fashion very reminiscent of the auction block. After the party, when Chris is feeling desperate to leave, he learns that he is, in fact, a prisoner. In order to escape, Chris must resort to violence, killing the entire family. The film concludes with Rod arriving to rescue him after consistently being unable to reach Chris and after having been rebuffed by the police. His reliance on his intuition and his consideration of the history of Black subjection leads to his conviction that Chris is in danger. His arrival marks an important point in the film where it is unclear whether Chris will face immediate consequences for the events that have transpired. Upon Rod's arrival, the viewer realizes that Chris is not in danger and that Rod has correctly anticipated the rescue that Chris needs. The unquestioning support that Rod provides Chris upon his arrival, not even questioning the scene he encounters, makes him complicit in and supportive of the violence Chris has committed.

A premise that each film shares is how the antagonists understand the racialized people in the films through savagery. Central to the deployment of this category of the inhuman is that Indigenous and Black people exist outside the bounds of the civilized. To be uncivilized is to live outside the proper spheres of life and, therefore, to be subject to death, particularly when located in a place of racial degeneracy for Indigenous and Black people, such as the reservation and the plantation, respectively. Katherine McKittrick makes an association between these places and savagery stating, "the right to kill targets those 'without' while reifying that to be 'without' is to embody savagery."[5] Her reference to "without" speaks specifically about particular states of being that reflect Euro-centric norms and "civilization." To be "without" is to inhabit a space of systematic settler violence distinguished from spaces of whiteness that are within the bounds of "civilization." She goes on to further explain this connection when speaking about urbicide as a specifically racially motivated attack against city spaces and Black geographies: "These black geographies…are classified as imperiled and dangerous,"[6] associating these spaces with racialized bodies. Furthermore, she asserts that the construction of such spaces creates "a linear tale of white survival"[7] wherein spaces that embody whiteness naturally reproduce themselves where "some live and some die because that is what nature intended."[8] Applying her logic to Indigenous geographies as well as Black geographies exposes an intersection between these two films relative to place and savagery, but it is also important to note that the conflict in each film

[5] Katherine McKittrick, "On Plantations, Prisons, and a Black sense of Place," *Social & Cultural Geography* 12(8), 2011: 953.

[6] Katherine McKittrick, "On Plantations, Prisons, and a Black sense of Place": 951.

[7] McKittrick, "On Plantations, Prisons, and a Black Sense of Place," 955.

[8] Ibid.

demonstrates the goal of white survival at the expense of the Indigenous and Black characters under attack.

As spaces "without," the plantation and the reservation both express places where Aila and Chris embody savagery through their racialized and colonized bodies that are also "imperiled and dangerous" in the way McKittrick describes above. Each film presents to the viewer the way Aila's and Chris's bodies are understood as not being properly civilized and thus savage. Aila's body is understood this way by the nuns in the film when she is taken to the boarding school. The acts of stripping her of her clothing, forcing her to bathe, and cutting her braids off demonstrates the way settlers viewed the Indigenous body as requiring transformation. This scene is reminiscent of Richard Henry Pratt's famous declaration "kill the Indian and save the man" through proper containment and education within boarding schools. While the boarding school is meant to transform Native people into proper citizens and thus civilized yet racialized populations, the exterior transformation Aila undergoes speaks to the need to enact an internal change that can be expressed outwardly through the body, the goal declared by Pratt. Because she is placed in a school uniform with her hair sheared after having been forced to bathe and, thus, "cleansed" by the nuns, her physical transformation marks the beginning of what is expected to become an internal conversion reflective of a move from savage to civilized.

Similarly, Chris's body is also understood to be in a state of savagery. At the party, several attendees presumptively touch Chris or ask inappropriate questions. For instance, after squeezing and stroking Chris's arm one woman says to her infirmed husband, "Not bad. Eh, Nelson?" She then goes on to ask Rose, "So, is it true? Is it better?" while suggestively eyeing Chris up and down. When Rose's contentious brother, Jeremy, makes claims to Black people being inherently physically superior, supposedly in regard to sports, he says "Cause with your

frame and your genetic makeup, if you really pushed your body and I mean really train, you know? No pussyfooting around. You'd be a fucking beast." He goes on to further dehumanize Chris when talking about the martial art he practices: "The thing about jiu jitsu is strength doesn't matter, right? It's all about this," using his index finger to gesture to his head, going on to say, "It's a strategic game like chess. It's all about being two, three, four moves ahead." The two statements Jeremy makes to Chris indicate a particular way of understanding his physicality and his mental acuity. Where one is focused entirely on what Jeremy sees as Chris's inherent advantage relative to physical exertion, the other focuses on a lack of intellectual prowess. Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* identifies this way of thinking about Black people when he states, "Black Magic, primitive mentality animism, animal eroticism…All of it is typical of peoples that have not kept pace with the evolution of the human race. Or, if one prefers, this is humanity at its lowest."[9] What Jeremy's remark demonstrates is that the process of removing Chris's subjectivity and replacing it with a white consciousness suggests that changing the interior can bring civilization to the exterior. By appropriating and reforming the body, the Armitages at once identify the body as a space of savagery at the same time they assert whiteness as a defining category of civilization. Of course, this is not the same transformation that Aila is forced to undergo, but the goal of each transformation remains the same.

Get Out very carefully sets up a Black-white racial dynamic. However, reframing that as a Black-settler dynamic identifies the ways the film reflects the founding principles of settler colonialism. While very clearly identifying the racial structures within the US, the film also relies on the ideas of savagery outlined above and the appropriate response to that state of being,

[9] Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann, (New York: Grove Press, 1967): 126.

particularly in the scene where Chris and Rose share with her father that they hit a deer on the way. The father declares, "I'm telling you I do not like the deer. I'm sick of it. They're taking over. They're like rats. They're destroying the ecosystem. I see a dead deer on the side of the road, I say to myself that's a start." Justifying the death of that which is not human, Dean expresses the settler desire to control the constituent elements and limits of proper civilization. Furthermore, this sentiment clearly expresses the desire for elimination at the same time that the goal of Missy and Dean's project is the wholesale appropriation of Blackness. Because that appropriation involves the banishment of Black consciousness in order to seize the Black body, the logic of elimination for all but whiteness comes into play. Though not generally thought of in these terms, I am using social death as theorized by Orlando Patterson to establish the logic of elimination expressed in the film. The constituent elements of social death include natal alienation and the absence of "any independent social existence."[10] Through this framework the eliminatory drive is the appropriation of the Black body for the benefit of a white consciousness such that the Black subject no longer has access to his communal identity or to the outside world. Though in service to whiteness in that the Black body becomes inhabited by the white subject, the de facto effect of such appropriation is elimination of Black subjectivity.

Similarly, *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* sets up an Indigenous-settler dynamic as evidenced by Popper's condemnation of Aila and her community when he invokes the idea of savagery following their unsanctioned trip onto the water. He says to Aila and her father, "Fucking heathens – bring out the worst in me." Furthermore, the films parallel each other in their representation of an eliminatory desire. In the case of *Rhymes*, the boarding school is a site of

[10] Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 10.

deadly violence. At the outset of the film, the school is shown illuminated in an otherwise dark background, defining it as separate from the rest of the scene in the foreground, giving it an eerie and foreboding air. Burner explains the violence when he tells Tyler, "They cook Indian kids up there for that zombie priest." He continues to explain to him, "See they throw the kids down this hall to the cooker. And every time they clang out through that chimney. Why do you think so many kids go missing at St. D's, huh?" While the scene conveys the idea of an ominous and gruesome urban legend, it also represents the communal knowledge that Indigenous people have about actual boarding schools.[11]

Popper also reveals the racial structures of elimination through his expressions of white supremacy, most obviously when he condemns the use of Indigenous language at the school. He threatens the children with beatings should they speak it, telling them, "Oh and, uh, from here on in, it's the queen's fucking English. Relish it." The eradication of culture, particularly through the suppression of language evidences that "assimilation is one of a range of strategies of elimination that becomes favoured in particular historical circumstances,"[12] boarding schools being one of them.

What the act of revenge accomplishes in these contexts is removing the enactment of violence from an association with the uncivilized by placing the violence of modern civilization at the forefront. This, in turn, emphasizes the reality that civilization has always deployed violence in order to define itself against the racialized other. The violence these films represent therefore cannot be comprehended through the logics of the settler-state where the state holds a

[11] Discovery of boarding school graves

[12] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Studies* 8, no. 4 (2006): 401.

monopoly on violence. Rather, that the racialized other enacts an answering violence highlights not only the extrajudicial violence that occurs in the films, but also how it is necessarily deployed as a tool of racial survival and a refusal of the "linear tale of white survival" mentioned above. Enacting this violence then comes to defend kanikonriio, a good mind, wherein the goal is individual but also community survival. The characters' respective acts embody rotisken'ra:kete, warrior, where each character creates power where little existed as a last resort, freeing them from the settler colonial logics and racial capitalism that seek to destroy them.

Noting these similarities is crucial to rethinking the way we understand the relationship between Indigenous and Black people relative to colonialism, white supremacy, and racism. While the conditions of each film reflect settler colonial structures, the characters do not experience these conditions in the same way or with the same consequences. Understanding these two conditions as Indigenous-settler and Black-settler relations allows for the emergence of a kind of relation that does not center the settler or settler colonialism itself as the relationality. By disrupting the Indigenous-Black-settler triad that has been used to describe historic and contemporary social relations in a settler colonial context, the particularities of the racialization of Indigenous and Black people that occurs through settler colonialism emerge in ways that reframe colonial processes experienced by each group. By understanding these conditions as parallel a new relationality can be formed that allows the two communities to imagine a relational future free of the colonial structures that continue to circumscribe subjectivities but also social and political relations, even if the goals for an anti-colonial future are not precisely the same. Speaking of the violent conditions settler colonialism creates for Indigenous and Black people, Kristen Simmons reminds us that "In a porous relationality – attuning to how others

(cannot) breathe, our haptics are enhanced and we develop capacities to feel one another otherwise."[13]

Just as importantly, however, both films demonstrate the necessary role violence plays in not just the actual survival of the main characters, but also their transformation of subjectivity from a colonized subject to an anti-colonial subject. This holds true for Aila and for Chris, but because of community involvement it also holds true for their respective communities. As Franz Fanon explains, "At the individual level, violence is a cleansing force. It rids the colonized of their inferiority complex, of their passive and despairing attitude. It emboldens them, and restores their self-confidence. Even if the armed struggle has been symbolic…the people have time to realize that liberation was the achievement of each and every one."[14] At the close of both films, Popper is shot and Chris kills Rose's family as a result of their active participation in and perpetuation of the founding logics of settler colonialism, namely genocide, slavery, and dispossession. Both films also leave open the future of Aila and Chris, as well as their communities, placing the burden for imagining an alternative future squarely on the shoulders of the viewers. The burden of futurity on the viewer then creates potential for the viewer to experience first-hand an anti-colonial subjectivity.

Colonial Space of the Reservation

Near the beginning of *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* Aila tells the viewer while riding a bike, "For seven years I've dreamt of nothing but getting out of this place. But my world ends at the borders of the reserve where dirt roads open up to dreams of things you can never be here." Her

[13] Kristen Simmons, "Settler Atmospherics." Member Voices, *Fieldsights*, November 20. https://culanth.org/fieldsights/settler-atmospherics.

[14] Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox, (New York: Grove Press, 2004): 51.

declaration reveals that she understands the reservation as a place that limits her chances for life and as a place of containment, reflecting a colonial understanding of her relationship to its people and to the land. By focusing on the borders of the rez, Aila evokes the nation state as the arbiter of her possibilities and reveals how "through imposed spatial ideologies and its narration in popular culture, land and [Native] people become seemingly bound and fit into tight containers."[15] Additionally, her declaration reflects a colonial understanding of what removing herself from the space of the reservation can bring. Her reference to dreaming speaks both to Aila's desires and to the limits of her imagination at this point in the film. Clearly, she has dreams for herself, though it is only dreaming of escape, as she asserts that her and, presumably, her community's dreams are circumscribed by the space of the reservation itself.

As a reflection of a colonized subject, the presentation of this idea at the outset of the film is crucial to understanding the role violence plays in how Aila and the viewer come to understand the space of the reservation. Though initially meant to contain, as the settler state's strategies to deal with the ongoing presence of Indigenous people evolved, reservations also become places of inclusion and exclusion. As a result, when Aila speaks of leaving her home, she also speaks of her relationship to her sense of self and community. It becomes important to consider that "Borders map out artificial constructs that limit our sense of self and connection to others, because of the way in which they make meaning by excluding certain relationships. Borders, both material and cognitive, limit the possibilities of Native existence."[16] Demonstrating these limitation, about a third of the way through the film, Aila expresses a desire for distance from her people as implied during a party thrown in order to make money. As she

[15] Goeman, 171.

[16] Goeman, 94.

rolls various preparations of the weed being sold, she wears a gas mask in order to avoid inhaling any of the smoke, thus symbolically separating herself from the community. As the camera switches between focusing on the work of rolling cigars and the party, showing passed out attendees and a house littered with empty bottles, Aila narrates the goal of each preparation, tinged with a touch of judgment: "We have whiskey, wine and cognac cigar blends for those princes and princesses who wouldn't lower themselves to smoke unless they thought they were doing something no one else could afford. We have honey dipped blends for the drum and feather Indians who want to keep it au natural, to smoke down close to the great spirit or whatever. And then you have broken rez rats who want nothing more than to get fucked up for bottom dollar." Following this description she explains to the viewer, "This is what brings my people together. The art of forgetfulness," establishing the party as a collective experience. Though understood literally as a means to forget, as a communal event, forgetfulness symbolizes the loss experienced by the tribe as a result of the violence of settler colonialism. Land, language, family all become points of loss in the film, but the acts of violence committed serve as a way to remember or at least regain access to the knowledge that had and continues to exist about these aspects of Indigenous life.

Though Aila also has experiences and circumstances she could justifiably seek to forget, her simultaneous presence with and separation from this response to violent settler colonial structures places her dreams within an individualistic understanding of the self at this point in the film. Though not entirely condemning – she does after all recognize the consumption of alcohol and drugs as a response to generational trauma and violence and not a lack of personal responsibility – she still understands her self as distinct from her community. That distinction is made within a particular economic setting that reflects the tension that exists between her desire

to be separate from and her undeniable connection to her people that is apparent through the transactional nature of her drug dealing. Michel Foucault has pointed out that the greater the participation in the economy "the more the individual is isolated by the economic bond he has with everyone and anyone."[17] According to Dian Million, however, "It would be very wrong to present neoliberalism, then, as only a set of economic projects; it produces surprising new ways of life across multiple societies."[18] Understood from this point of view, Aila's participation in a capitalist endeavor, i.e., drug dealing that brings together her people, in order to escape a violent settler colonial structure, is a complex participation in capitalism, particularly as it relates to the state and the truancy tax she pays to Popper to avoid attending St. Dymphna's. As a state funded institution, the school exists as a site of racialized capitalist exploitation because it funds genocide for the benefit of the churches it assigned to run the schools. As a result, Aila's truancy tax or bribery that she pays to the state's agent presents a problem to neoliberalism and racial capitalism. While Aila uses the drug money to pay the state agent, her actions also protect herself and her friends from the violence of the school, if not the violence of the reservation. Although her sense of self presents as individualistic at the outset of the film, particularly during the drug dealing scene, her resolve to use violence later in the film during the break-in because of the theft, directly contravenes racial capitalism's desire to extract value from Indigenous bodies on the reservation. At the close of the film Gisigu ("the old man") (Steward Myiow) forbids her from continuing her drug business, to which she responds, "Good." Her turn away from that particular economy marks another component of her transformation from an individual,

[17] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College De France 1978-1979*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2008): 303.

[18] Dian Million, *Therapeutic Nations: Healing in an Age of Indigenous Human Rights*, (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2013): 18.

colonized subject to an anti-colonial subject with an altered understanding of her communal identity.

While the quote on the bicycle most obviously expresses Aila's desire to flee a bounded area that she experiences as oppressive, her later association between drug use in her community as the "art of forgetfulness" bringing her community together, her wearing of the face mask, and the judgement meted out while working, also reveals her desire for a separation from her people. This analysis is not to condemn Aila for her desires. In fact, it's easily possible to argue that they are justified given the circumstances of her life – a mother dead by suicide and a father incarcerated after confessing to the killing of a child that he did not commit, thus leaving her in the care of an uncle, Burner, rarely capable of seeing beyond his own goals and desires. Rather, this framework for understanding the violence which follows is to demonstrate Aila's later transformation and a different relationship to community, land, space, and place that emerges following retributive violence. This is also not to say that Aila has no sense of community with her people or has no desire to be connected to them. It is clear that she does. These moments are very pointed when she is speaking Mi'gmaq and when she is spending time with her grandmother, Ceres. The importance in thinking through Aila's complex relationship to her people and to her reservation is to understand the depth of the transformation that follows and the implications that has for the violence that leads her there. A useful way to see that transformation is to understand the place of the reservation as a colonial map that creates knowledge about the land and social relations.

Restricted access to land and resources on the reservation arises when Aila tells her father that they are not allowed out on the water at that time of year. She approaches her father who was recently released from prison and who is sitting near the water's edge. He tells her that he

plans to get his boat back from "the old man." She and Burner explain to him that at that time of year, the people are not allowed on the water. Demanding to know why, the father observes, "No fish in the water anyways. What, you're not allowed to fish with no fish in the water?" Impassively and quietly, Aila responds, "Just not allowed." Insisting he's going to get his boat regardless the implication is that he also intends to take the boat out on the water. As he walks away to go get the boat, Aila calls out to him but he doesn't respond. She calls out louder and more forcefully to which he impatiently replies, "What Aila?" Growing quieter she tells him, "It's the other way." That her father cannot remember how to get to the location of his boat suggests to the viewer that his incarceration has disconnected him from the knowledge he has about the terrain of the reservation. More importantly, however, Aila's colonized sense of self is unemotional in the face of the arbitrary prohibition against going out on the water at that time of year. Speaking about the temperament of the colonized, Franz Fanon explains, "The first thing the colonial subject learns is to remain in his place and not overstep its limits."[19] The limitation placed on access to the water becomes a kind of dispossession that has superimposed itself as a limitation on Aila's subjectivity such that she discourages her father from transgressing those limitations. Her place has become cemented in her imagination, and though she understands that her father's desires would bear serious consequences, she also does nothing to try to convince him to adhere to the prohibition.

The water as a site of colonial mapping becomes crucial to understanding Aila's transformation, because it is where the start of her transformation becomes most apparent and whose remapping is associated with acts of violence that end with her being placed inside the boarding school. Immediately after learning from Burner that her father plans to go out on the

[19] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* 15.

water, a character she refers to as "the old man" arrives to tell her that she needs to get her father. He drives her back to the water and tells her, "Sometimes courage, Aila, just means gritting your teeth and moving forward, not paying attention to the consequences." She joins her father, telling him, "Come on. I'm gonna help you." Together they take the boat out on the water where they are shown off-center through a long shot so that the landscape of the water is more prominent than the boat with them in it, framing them in a way that suggests the prominence of the water, along with its significance to both the characters but also the story itself. Their shared transgression onto the water indicates a new sense of relationality to each other and the water, thus remapping the colonial terrain in ways that shift Aila's sense of self. Because "human identity and relationships are tied to the land,"[20] the change from warning her father to joining him even while aware of the potential for dire consequences indicates a change in understanding her self relative to the space of the reservation. This proves even more poignant when they return to the shore and Popper is waiting for them. After a verbal confrontation, a physical confrontation begins with Aila joining her father in the fight. The change from her resigned compliance to the water restrictions to defending her and her father's transgression of colonial laws is indictive of the beginnings of the change Aila undergoes. Once the fight is over, however, she learns that Burner informed Popper of their whereabouts and her plans for revenge. Popper then tells her that he is taking her to the school, to put her into the "darkest, deepest hole."

Perhaps the most obviously colonial space in the film is the boarding school, St. Dymphna's. At the time of the film's setting, residential boarding schools were an ongoing project of violent assimilation, causing generation after generation of trauma, and, in the film, the

[20] Goeman, 201.

likely experience to seek escape from through the art of forgetfulness. Though initially a place for Aila to avoid rather than escape from, it looms large in the film, sitting on a hill overlooking the reservation, as a space of colonial violence. Although boarding schools enacted unthinkable physical, sexual, and psychological violence on its students, I am interested in considering how the space of St. Dymphna's can "expose domination as a visible spatial project that organizes, names, and sees social differences…and determines *where* social order happens."[21] Understanding domination happening through space is important for understanding the landscape of the reservation and the ways that the territory has mapped out a colonial, as well social terrain for Aila and her community to negotiate. The implications of that territorial mapping are not lost on the viewer as Aila is shown at several points walking across various prescribed locations. For instance, after she's been thrown into the confines of the school, a dream sequence shows Aila walking across the campus, following the ghost of the boy, Tyler, accidentally killed at the outset of the film. Another long shot foregrounds the landscape with Aila appearing in front of one of the school's buildings. Her size relative to the building and the land suggests a location that overwhelms the character placing her within a large and oppressive frame.

As mentioned earlier, however, the school is not initially a place to escape from but a place to avoid. To accomplish this, Aila has made an arrangement with the Indian agent, Popper, the state official to enforce the residential school requirement, to avoid attending the school. In exchange for her absence from the school, Aila pays Popper a monthly "truancy tax" to allow her Sholo, and Angus to not attend. It is only after Popper steals the tax money in advance of its due date, leaving Aila without the necessary payment, that the plans for revenge emerge before she is

[21] Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*, (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2006): xiv.

taken to the school. At the point where she escapes from the school the implementation of the plan begins. Through those plans and the retributive act, a "(re)mapping that addresses the violent atrocities while defining a Native future"[22] occurs that begins with being out on the water with her father and continues when she walks out of the "hole" to seek vengeance.

Aila's well developed plan to enter St. Dymphna's in order to steal back the money stolen at the beginning of the film, along with "his [Popper's] collections," reflects a hyperawareness on her part of the role exploitation plays in the everyday machinations of colonialism. The reclamation of their money along with the theft of additional money works to counter that exploitation by reversing the direction of the flow of capital. So long as Popper continues to collect truancy taxes from Aila and others, the resources of the community unintentionally uphold the corrupt system the settler state has constructed and perpetuates. Once, however, that money is no longer in the hands of the state's agent, the resources are no longer able to continue in the same way. This is not to suggest that Aila and her friends operate in the vein of a modern Robin Hood – there is no intent or attempt to return the collections to the community. Rather, the important aspect of the disrupted flow is the articulation of "modes of subjectivity and community that are different from those privileged by the US [and Canadian] nation-state…bringing to light the ways that racialized property relations disavows the conditions that occasion the emergence of alternative modes of knowing, other ways of organizing human life."[23] This does not make Aila a hero or necessarily position her as somehow empowered, but it does reflect a way of knowing that understands the limits of her ability survive under the

[22] Goeman, 13.

[23] Grace Hong, *Ruptures of American Capital: Women of Color Feminism and the Culture of Immigrant Labor*, (Minneapolis: Unviersity of Minnesota Press, 2006): xxviii.

conditions of colonialism and the need to deploy an alternative of way of knowing, namely rotisken'ra:kéte that promotes a kanikonriio

As the revenge plans develop, additional plans to "fuck this man up" are formulated in collaboration with Sholo, Angus, and Maytag. The most striking of these plans is the pressurization of the plumbing with urine and feces collected around the reservation. The process of acquiring the human waste proves a willingness on the part of Aila's community to not only support the plan but to participate in it, turning the act into something of a communal experience – a different kind of event that brings her people together. While everyone won't have the same level of culpability, there will be shared knowledge and story that outlasts this and every Indian agent that follows. Moreover, this act demonstrates the support system inherent to the reservation and the ways it functions to uphold its people. Although Aila laments the boundaries of the reservation and the supposed limitations they impose, her community shows her, whether she acknowledges it then or not, that there is a set of fundamental systems and forms of knowledge that also bring her people together. This is especially important when thinking about the act of revenge and the violence that it requires. Leslie Marmon Silko speaks to the importance of stories and storytelling when she explains, "stories rich in detail and description became the most pleasurable because they gave the listeners the most information. The association of knowledge with power begins here."[24] In other words the story becomes a kind of power that circulates through the people.

The goal of the pressurization, however, is to shower, literally, Popper in human waste, something that occurs precisely as Aila is stealing keys to take the money out of the safe. As Popper realizes what is happening to him, he calls out, "I'll kill you," which after the level of

[24] Leslie Marmon Silko, *Storyteller*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2012): xviii.

violence he and his henchmen have displayed throughout the film, cannot be understood as an idle threat. After Aila, Sholo, Angus, and Maytag successfully execute their plans, Popper shows up at Aila's house the next morning to possibly make good on his promise. Brandishing a gun on both Aila and her father, Popper quickly renders the father unconscious with a blow to the head and threatens to shoot him should Aila decide to flee. In his anger he also assaults Aila, hitting her in the stomach with the butt of the rifle, going on to repeatedly punch her after throwing her across the garage. As Popper prepares to rape her, Jujjij, a young student at St. Dymphna's and instrumental to the break in, comes up from behind and shoots Popper in the head, thus saving her from the sexual assault. With Popper's death comes the guarantee of Aila's future but also the promise of a different future for her community. Ultimately, that future is left open for the viewer to imagine as the film simply ends with Jujjij asking Aila, "What do we do now boss?" In response Aila simply closes her eyes, laying her head back slightly with a look of satisfaction on her face.

Aila and her co-conspirators' movements across the space of St. Dymphna's and the reservation more broadly, along with the prevention of her rape and Popper's death, come to define those spaces differently. Those movements and actions effectively remap those spaces such that they become sites "to deconstruct colonial spatiality and power structures [that have] rested in protecting tribal stories that center nations and recall the ethics and center of the people."[25] The story of remapping begins with Aila's construction of the plan and becomes a tribal story as the people participate. So, while it may be a story that is yet to exist at the outset of the film, it becomes a narrative about retribution and the death of the state, situating the future of the reserve and its people as a constant site of anti-colonial violence. Although the viewer and

[25] Goeman, 161.

the characters know that another Indian agent will come, it is also true that the altered space reflects the reality that "if the spatial is always in process then so too is decolonization."[26]

Colonial Space of the Plantation

Similarly, *Get Out* leaves the viewer with the promise of futurity through the remapping of colonial space. Beginning with what takes on the appearance of a long-standing romantic relationship between the main characters, Chris and Rose, the viewer becomes aware that the couple is planning a trip to Rose's parents' house. As they embark on their journey, driving to the house, the film moves from an urban to a rural setting. The drive itself occurs down a long and winding road with camera shots that show the movement of the car against a densely treed background, an image that parallels many literary depictions of roads leading into and out of plantation estates. The movement itself creates a trail for the viewer to follow that raises the specter of colonialism through its association with slavery, an association that continues to develop as the story unfolds. Although it comprises only a short part of the film, this movement is important to note for the set-up it provides for the viewer and the relationship it begins to build with slavery and, thus, the foundations of settler colonialism.

During the wooded drive, a deer runs across the road, getting hit by Rose. This encounter provides the context for an eliminatory desire the film expresses, a desire rooted in the foundations of settler colonialism. Though largely considered a consequence for Indigenous people, in this context the elimination desire expresses itself through eradication of Black agency at the moment the Black subject is expelled from their consciousness to the Sunken Place, a psychological space that physically incapacitates. There is a moment where Chris seems to identify with the deer, and others have noted this as a moment of helplessness that is later

[26] Goeman, 158.

associated with the killing of his mother.[27] For my purposes, however, in this moment, before the viewer is aware of the death of Chris's mother, the somber encounter between a human and a non-human animal represents a shared experience whereby the presence of immediate death exists between them as an existential reality. Because this moment immediately follows Rod's warning mentioned earlier, it can also be understood through its imminence and foreboding.

The mapping that takes place through the move from urban to rural results in Chris's isolation, particularly from his best friend, Rod, who appears to be his primary support and takes on the meaning of family. The film uses the movement across the landscape to have the viewer understand the separation that Chris is undergoing and the implications of the separation. There are a couple of phone calls with Rod that occur throughout the film, but the first happens during the drive to the parents' house and establishes the importance of their relationship. It is initiated by Chris calling to talk with Rod about caring for his dog while he is out of town, a task that often falls to a family member, thereby establishing Chris's reliance on Rod to receive that kind of support. Toward the end of the call Rod gives Chris what he calls "advice": "Like, don't go to a white girl's parents' house." Because it reflects the potential for threat that such movement and encounter involve, his advice becomes another marker for the colonial space Chris is moving across. That Chris dismisses the advice matters less to the story than the way it operates to mark a moment in time across space that suggest different stages of isolation and removal from Chris's primary and current understanding of his self in relation to family.

His movement away from Rod into isolation begins to establish the state of social death for Chris that is the goal of Rose's parents and their party attendees at the their house which is the plantation. At the end of the film, while Chris is being held captive, he learns about the

[27] See, for example, https://thecinemaholic.com/get-out-movie-explained/.

process he is meant to undergo, the Coagula, whereby a white consciousness is transplanted into a Black body while their consciousness is banished to the Sunken Place. Chris's intended recipient explains the three phases: hypnotism for the purpose of sedation, psychological preparation to ensure the best outcome, and transplantation. While speaking directly to Chris, he goes on to specifically lay out the details of transplantation: "The piece of your brain connected to your nervous system needs to stay put, keeping those intricate connections intact. So, you won't be gone, not completely. A sliver of you will still be in there, somewhere, limited consciousness. You'll be able to see and hear what your body is doing, but your existence will be as a passenger. An audience…Now, I'll control the motor functions so I'll be [you]." As noted earlier, the transformation of the recipient from a white body to a Black body is less important than the eliminatory fate of Black subjectivity and the way the process establishes itself in relation to the conditions of enslavement. At this point in the film, Chris has been made as isolated from Rod as possible, establishing what Orlando Patterson famously termed natal alienation, "the loss of ties of birth in both ascending and descending generations… [with] the important nuance of a loss of native status, of deracination"[28] His severe separation from Rod and the urban space he was removed from, demonstrates a loss of "attachment to groups or localities other than those chosen for him by the master."[29] Furthermore, Chris becomes "alienated from all 'rights' or claims of birth, he cease[s] to belong in his own right to any legitimate social order."[30] Additionally, the confinement of the Black subjectivity to the Sunken Place while the white consciousness controls the Black body reflects another of the constituent

[28] Patterson, 7.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Patterson, 5.

elements of slavery identified by Patterson: "Because the slave had no socially recognized existence outside of his master, he became a social nonperson."[31] When Chris refuses these conditions and avoids them through the violence that acts as revenge against the family, he stakes a claim over the plantation, particularly in the destruction of the house caused by a fire that ignites as a result of Chris killing Dean.

Upon his arrival to what functions as the plantation, however, Chris is confronted with a stately house situated on a sweeping lawn surrounded entirely by trees. Before the car even fully pulls up to the Armitage house, Chris sees Walter, later described as the groundskeeper, in the yard holding a rake. Although it's eventually revealed that Walter is a Black body inhabited by Rose's grandfather's consciousness, at this point in the film, Chris is unaware of this and simply sees a Black body performing labor for the benefit of the white homeowner. When Chris encounters Georgina (Betty Gabriel), supposedly the Armitage's housekeeper who turns out to be inhabited by Rose's grandmother's consciousness, in the kitchen the space of the plantation becomes even further defined. Walter's presence and his suspicious wave upon the couple's arrival, along with Georgina's distant greeting in the kitchen makes clear that "the plantation uncovers a logic that emerges in the present and folds over to repeat itself anew through black lives and the ways the plantation is a meaningful concept that, at least in part, launches postslave/contemporary theories of violence."[32] Even though Chris doesn't imagine himself entering a plantation, the visuals making a direct connection to that space and place inform the narrative in ways that situate the house and the land it sits upon as a site of contemporary racial violence. As a result, the house becomes spatialized as a site for the expression of white

[31] Ibid.

[32] Katherine McKittrick, "Plantation Futures," *Small Axe* 17(3), 2013: 4.

supremacy. The viewer later comes to find out that Walter is in fact Rose's grandfather occupying a Black body, and this scene becomes even more poignant for the way it portrays a racialized and colonial space, particularly given the level of violence carried out to realize Black dispossession.

Considering how Chris and the viewer later learn that the grandfather lost to Jesse Owens while trying to qualify for the 1936 Olympics, a story that Dean shares with Chris shortly after his arrival, the possession takes on great significance in terms of what motivates white desire for the Black body. When Dean tells Chris about the loss, he explains the context by saying, "I mean Hitler's up there with is perfect Aryan race bullshit. This Black dude comes along proves him wrong in front of the entire world. Amazing." Referencing his father, he goes on to say, "He almost got over it," smiling at Chris and laughing quietly. This occurs during the tour of the house that Dean leads Chris on, and, as they move across the space, Chris is presented with many signs of white supremacy in terms of material possessions, particularly the cultural objects, like those from Bali that Dean claims to have collected during his travels, explaining "I'm a traveler, and I can't help it. I keep bringing souvenirs back." The collecting of these objects, along with the lament about the loss demonstrates how the possession of the body becomes a logical aspect of white supremacy. Dean makes clear in his comments that he understands the loss to be proof of the inherent physical superiority of Black athletes. This perspective of the loss to Jesse Owens and the later revelation that Walter is the one who experienced that loss provides a different understanding of Chris's act of revenge where white supremacy provides a direct contrast to Chris's revenge act. The grandfather claiming a Black man's body as his own represents a singular act that can be interpreted as an interpersonal, violent act of revenge that upholds the structural logics of enslavement, dispossession, and elimination. Chris's actions, however,

operate toward a collective benefit that moves beyond interpersonal interaction. Although the violence itself is carried out on an interpersonal level, it is situated within the larger power structures presented in the film.

Following the Jesse Owens story, Dean gestures for Chris to enter the backyard, calling it the "piece de resistance, the field of play." As they continue down the lawn, Dean informs Chris that "the nearest house is across the lake. It's total privacy." This description solidifies for the viewer the extent of alienation Chris has undergone even though it is not yet apparent to him. Significantly, as mentioned above, the presentation of the house and the movement across the land it is situated on provide the viewer with a very distinct image of a plantation. Because slavery is one of the foundational violences of settler colonialism, whether the viewer is consciously aware of the association between the presentation of land and colonialism matters less than the way the scene is presented as a natural state of affairs and race relations. There is nothing spectacular or particularly striking about the scene, nothing that seems out of place or peculiar – it is a common presentation of inherited affluence and whiteness. Chris's presence disrupts that landscape to the extent that for most of the film he is a Black man possessing a Black subjectivity, but it is only meant to do so for the purposes of the Coagula. His cessation of that process ultimately works to disrupt the historical relationship with land that has been established between whiteness and settler colonialism.

This mapping continues as the film progresses. Notably, when Chris learns about the party that will be held during his visit, he sits on an elaborate patio at the back of the house, again invoking the scene of the plantation. Once the party has begun, Chris moves through the space of the yard surrounded nearly entirely by a sea of strange white people. Chris becomes overwhelmed by the irregularities he is confronted with along with a disturbing interaction with

the only other Black guest, Logan (LaKieth Stanfield). Chris sees him from a distance, standing with his back facing Chris. Looking at him in a mildly confused manner because of the nature of his dress – a straw hat, tan pants, and a brown suit jacket – Chris approaches him with an air of solidarity and tells him, "Good to see another brother around here." Logan responds as though he has just realized something saying, "Hi. Yes, of course it is." Rather than being greeted in an expected way, Chris experiences cultural dissonance between what he anticipates and what transpires. He stares at him with a confused look on his face, remaining silent until Logan's wife, Philomena (Geraldine Singer) appears shortly after. In a moment where Chris anticipates a communal experience with another Black man attending a party afloat in whiteness, his expectations are confounded by an interaction that seems to participate in whiteness rather than stand in contrast to it. His reaction to the circumstances demonstrates for the viewer that Blackness is defined beyond skin color, emerging from a place of consciousness and will.

Having been inundated with racism and the overwhelming presence of whiteness, he and Rose "take a walk." While they are away, Dean holds an auction for Chris's body. Significantly, the auction occurs at a gazebo, functioning as a plantation auction block. Relative to mapping and spatialization, McKittrick asserts that the "auction block can be understood as one of the primary sites where spatial differentiation takes place. It publicly displays different racial bodies and communicates racial hierarchies beyond the auction block. The meaning of blackness, and race in general, are reinforced, spatially and ideologically, by the process of socioeconomic exchange." [33] The exchange itself cements the mapping of the plantation space as colonial by virtue of its participation of ongoing dispossession, in this case of the Black body, along with the historical mechanism by which the body is dehumanized as commodity. The process of

[33] McKittrick, *Demonic* Grounds, 73-74.

transforming Chris from person to object, makes clear that "property references not only the actual objects that are owned but the way that social relations are organized around ownership, and the way narratives by which these social relations are both legitimized and contested."[34] In other words, who gets to do the owning and who will be owned, but also the tensions that arise within and against this dynamic. At this point in the film, the scene in the gazebo underscores the processes of racial capitalism that uphold white supremacy and provide the conditions that present the sale of the Black body as logical when it is to the benefit of the white subject.

In this case, the benefit is monetary for Rose and her family, but also for the benefit of the elderly blind purchaser, Jim Hudson, a well-established art dealer, who stands to gain access to additional life. This is true on two levels, both physically, in terms of his body, and metaphorically relative to white supremacy. During the party Chris meets Jim who tells him that when he was younger he had attempted, unsuccessfully, to forge a career as a photographer focusing on "wilderness." Jim then tells Chris that he is an admirer of Chris's photography. Following his purchase of Chris and before Chris is to be taken to have the Coagula completed, Jim tells him that his motivation for taking Chris's body is to get his eye for photography. He explains, "I want your eye, man. I want those things you see through," claiming that race is not a factor. Having seen samples of Chris's photography, however, early in the film, the viewer knows that his subject is Black and urban life. The overwriting of Chris's subject matter with Jim's subject matter provides a metaphor for the "life" of white supremacy that underwrites the logic of the Coagula. In *Racial Formation in the United States From the 1960s to the 1990s*, Michael Omi and Howard Winant explain that "A racial project can be defined as *racist* if and only if it *creates or reproduces structures of domination based on essentialist categories of*

[34] Hong, 4.

race"[35] (emphasis in the original). Consequently, as a "racial project" the Coagula is inherently racist whether Jim understands his actions as being motivated by race or not. Thus, the elimination of Chris's photography speaks to the elimination of his subjectivity at the same time that it guarantees Jim his desired future as a white man viewing the world through a white supremacist lens regardless of his motivation for choosing Chris. Because the Armitage's actions are racist in that all their targets are Black is enough to make his actions racist and contributing to the logic of elimination.

Following the auction, Chris and Rose return from their walk, during which Chris decides he needs to leave, and Rose agrees to leave with him. When they return to the house, Chris begins packing his belongings. During this scene he notices an open cupboard door and is horrified to find pictures of Rose and a multitude of Black people, two of whom are Walter and Georgina. At this point, it is becoming clear to him that he faces an immediate threat, though he is not fully convinced. Once ready to leave, he asks Rose for the car keys, but she insists she cannot find them. As Chris begins to more forcefully demand the keys, Jeremy swings a lacrosse stick at him, threatening him physically. In response, Rose says, "What the fuck?" in a distressed voice. Chris's unease about the keys culminates in his calm question to her, "Where are those keys, Rose?" At this point her complicity as a white woman who has seduced a Black man for the benefit of white supremacy becomes apparent through a drastic change in her countenance, moving from distress to calm. With a look of authority, she pulls the car keys out of her bag and says, "You know I can't give you the keys, right, babe?" Only after Rose's complicity in holding him captive becomes apparent does Chris ultimately come to fully understand the threat he faces.

[35] Michael Omi & Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States From the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2nd edition (New York: Routledge, 1994): 71.

After incapacitating Chris and restraining him in the basement, the process for the Coagula is put in place. Knowing, however, that the hypnosis is meant to render him unconscious, he plugs his ears with cotton from the chair he is tied to, using a resource historically associated with enslavement. As a result, he is able to escape his confinement and seek his freedom. This is the point at which Chris begins using violence to secure his future. After assaulting Jeremy and believing him dead, Chris begins to seek out Dean. He uses deer antlers from a head mounted on the basement wall to kill him. The deer antlers take on particular significance when considering Dean's early remarks about the elimination of deer as necessary. Aside from the violence, Chris weaponizing them stakes a claim over the house which, in turn, lays the groundwork for the wholesale destruction of the white supremacist endeavor situated in the architecture of the relationships between Black and settler. When Chris stabs Dean in the throat he staggers into a pillar holding a large candle, knocking it over and igniting a bed sheet. This scene accomplishes two things, the first being the refusal of elimination, expressed as it is through the use of the deer antlers. The second is the way it works to resituate the space of the plantation as a place of white death and destruction rather than Black death and subjection.

Once Chris has made his way up the stairs, he encounters the mother. Missy's role, arguably the most sinister, in the process of the Coagula is to hypnotize Chris in order to render him unconscious and sent to what she calls the sunken place, a place deep within human consciousness that allows the white possessor to control the body while also becoming the primary consciousness that can freely interact with the outside world, consequently removing the Black subject's free will. As he passes through the kitchen, he notices her on the far side of an adjacent room. Seeing her tool of hypnosis, a tea cup, on the table and knowing that if she reaches it before he does she will be able to make him unconscious again, he races her to it,

breaking it by swatting it away from the table so that it crashes on the floor. For a couple seconds they stare at each other impassively, but she grabs a letter opener and attempts to stab Chris with it. He moves his hand as though to stop it and she impales his hand. Overpowering her, though, and with the letter opener still in his hand, Chris turns it on her and stabs her in the head, killing her. Noteworthy about this scene is the lack of aggression that Chris shows despite ultimately killing her. The violence that he enacts is a direct response to the threat that she poses for him, thus leaving open the question of whether he intended to kill her at all. Given that he sought Dean out, it's possible he did, but it is also possible he did not, as suggested by him not seeking out Rose.

Rose's death, however, is more complicated and worth exploring for the relationship it establishes between Chris's violence and the social participation her death stands for. As Chris is making his way off the plantation, Rose becomes aware that things are not going as planned. She begins to pursue him with a rifle and attempts to shoot him several times. The grandfather, however, comes running up from behind her, and, as he passes, Rose tells him, "Get him, Grandpa." The grandfather tackles Chris, and Rose begins to advance upon them with the rifle at the ready. As the grandfather is trying to gouge out his eyes, Chris uses the flash on his cell phone camera to disrupt the effects of the Coagula's theft of the Black body, something he inadvertently accomplished with the Black party attendee earlier in the film. The man who had been the grandfather asks Rose for the gun, saying to her, "Let me do it." Believing he is still her grandfather, Rose gives the rifle to him trusting he will shoot Chris. Instead, the freed Black subjectivity turns the gun on her and shoots her in the abdomen. She does not die right away, however, languishing instead on the driveway, and when Chris attempts to strangle her, she grins at him perversely and he is unable to kill her. Although her death does not ultimately come at the

hands of Chris as the other family members do, her death is remarkable for the way it involves another Black man in the film whose actions secure Chris's future. During the short time this character appears he defends Chris, becoming complicit in the violence that Chris began while also enacting his own form of vengeance. Choosing to end his own life, tragic as it is, represents another instance of the demise of white supremacy. The reclamation of his subjectivity for the purpose of killing white consciousness works in tandem with the violence that Chris has enacted against the Armitages, contributing to the obstruction of white linear survival.

Remapping at the Intersections

In 2017 Jordan Peele was interviewed by the New York Times about *Get Out* and its commentary on contemporary racism. The interviewer asked whether the film was influenced by the 2013 murder of Trayvon Martin. In response Peele had this to say:

> It did. I was making the movie in that period when Trayvon [Martin] was [killed]. What originally started as a movie to combat the lie that America had become post-racial became a movie where the cat is out of the bag, and now we're having this conversation. I realized I had to shift it a little bit. It became less about trying to create wokeness and more about trying to offer us a hero out of this turmoil, to offer escape and joy.[36]

The moment at the end of each film where Aila rests her head back with eyes closed and Chris sits with relief in Rod's car signal more than survival. The narratives' movement towards the endings they present provide the viewer with an experience that binds the contemporary and historical structural conditions of the settler states. What their triumph over the colonial conditions evokes for the viewers is the "escape and joy" that Peele hoped to produce. As viewers, we know and we know that the characters know that another Indian Agent is coming and the police will show up at Chris's door eventually. But it is that moment of relief where the

[36] Zinoman, Jason. "Jordan Peele on a Truly Terrifying Monster: Racism." *The New York Times*. February 16, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/16/movies/jordan-peele-interview-get-out.html.

colonized subject emerges victorious after the use of violence that presents potential for understanding ourselves differently in relation to the conditions of settler colonialism. In that moment, our knowledge of "what would really happen" is suspended in favor a new way to understand the possibility of decolonization and that understanding happens through the representation of violent revenge that we recognize as justified.

The recognition that the violence is justified arises in response to what Aileen Moreton-Robinson calls "possessive logics,"[37] which she defines as "a mode of rationalization, rather than a set of positions that produce a more or less inevitable answer, that is underpinned by an excess desire to invest in reproducing and reaffirming the nation-state's ownership, control and domination."[38] Moreton-Robinson is speaking specifically about the state and how it benefits from while making invisible the dispossession of Indigenous people in a settler colonial nation state. In this case, her "possessive logics" reflect the ways that the structures that present themselves at the outset of each film demonstrate an excessive desire to reify "ownership, control, and domination" of Indigenous and Black people while they are represented and expressed at an interpersonal level. This is more obviously true in *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* where Popper is a literal representative of the state. His role in reproducing the logics of Native peoples as savages, as justifiably dispossessed, and in need of elimination is very easily identified. In *Get Out*, however, this process can be understood as having been established at the level of the family. In so much as the film imbricates structures of slavery as contemporary phenomena rooted in the foundations of US settler colonialism, it expresses those structures at

[37] Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015): xii.

[38] Ibid.

the family level which provides the logic for its narration. Discussing the role that family plays in upholding social structures of domination and control, Foucault explains, "the family organization, precisely to the extent that it was insular and heteromorphous with respect to the other power mechanisms, was used to support the great 'maneuvers' employed for Malthusian control."[39] Understanding family as a tool for social/population control in *Get Out* illuminates the ways that the structure exists within the site of the plantation but also as it relates to the Armitage family, both as a thing they seek and as a thing they reflect on a structural level. Thus, they reproduce the same logics that Popper does, namely that Black people are savages, can be justifiably dispossessed, and are in need of elimination.

Given the spaces of containment – the reservation and the plantation – that the films present as their context, the movement across them at the outset of each, marks them as colonial. When the viewer meets Aila on the reservation and when they experience the journey to the Armitage's estate and the estate itself, they are confronted with the social and historical realities of those spaces and their relationship to settler violence. After having spatialized the body as savage, the justification for dispossession and the logic of elimination follows as the foundational reasoning of settler violence. At the point where settler violence is deployed, the idea of possession arises once again. As a racially motivated action it represents "White possession [that] operates socio-discursively to produce the racial contract as a regulatory ideal that enables, constrains, and disciplines subjects in various ways."[40] In the case of the films, the discipline emerges in relation to the land that provides the space and place for violence. This becomes true

[39] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Vol. 1*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1990): 100.

[40] Moreton-Robinson, 54.

on two levels, one being the settler violence just discussed but also the acts of revenge that emerge in response. Consequently, the revenge act itself becomes a vehicle that claims a re-possessive logic in direct confrontation with and refusal of the logic identified by Moreton-Robinson as the underwriting reasoning for land dispossession of Indigenous peoples and the racialization of Black people. Expanding those conditions as shared, however differently expressed and experienced, brings together the struggles of Indigenous and Black people through the historical understanding of an Indigenous-settler and Black-settler dynamic. After all, those Indigenous people from the African continent who were enslaved endured a process of land dispossession by virtue of being violently abducted from their homelands, while Indigenous people of North America experienced a violent at-home dispossession of their homelands. Likewise, the space of the plantation provided an ideal environment not only for settlers to possess Black people as property, but to racialize them in particular ways, while the space of the reservation and the boarding schools that followed also provided for the actuality of settler possession and the particularities of Indigenous racialization. The refusal in the films of these settler colonial conditions through the use of violence remaps the space of the reservation and the space of the planation bringing the past into the present to imagine a different future.

That the remapping occurs at the moment of violence is important because it speaks to what McKittrick calls "plantation futures." Discussing the implications of the discovery of the New York African Burial Ground, a place where those who were enslaved had been interred before the development of lower Manhattan, and its direct relationship with contemporary experiences of Blackness, particularly in relation to city life and imprisonment, she explains her theory of "'plantation futures': a conceptualization of time-space that tracks the plantation toward the prison and the impoverished and destroyed city sectors and, consequently, brings into

sharp focus the ways the plantation is an ongoing locus of antiblack violence and death that can no longer analytically sustain this violence."[41] She goes on to explain that "a plantation logic characteristic of (but not identical to) slavery emerges in the present both ideologically and materially. With this, differential modes of survival emerge…revealing that the plantation, in both slave and postslave contexts, must be understood alongside complex negotiations of time, space, and terror."[42] The plantation's inability to sustain its violence while also allowing different modes of survival to emerge, provides a method to contextualize cultural production in a way that allows the convergence of the past, present, and future. Examining the space and terror in *Get Out* as part of an ongoing project of settler colonialism that represents both the past and the present relative to Blackness and Black people propels the viewer into a conceptualization of futurity for Chris and Rod that is outside the planation (because it's been destroyed through Chris's violence) and thus pushes beyond one of the founding structures of settler colonialism.

The space of the reservation also reflects McKittrick's theorization of time, space, and terror, albeit in a different historical context with a different outcome reflective of the settler state's particular goals relative to Indigenous people. Although still in existence, the histories of dispossession as both in the past, part of the present, and a goal of the settler state for the future, the reservation also remains a place "that must be understood alongside complex negotiations of time, space, and terror" that ideologically cannot "analytically sustain [its] violence." One major and very important distinction to be made is that the literal sites of plantations have not been able to be appropriated as sites of life for Black people, whereas the formation of reservations has

[41] McKittrick, "Plantation Futures," 2-3.

[42] McKittrick, "Plantation Futures," 3.

allowed Indigenous people to enjoy the privilege of appropriating what was meant to be settler space in order to defiantly claim it as their own. Nonetheless, an intersection that arises when examining these two sites together exists through a different though deeply significant relationship to land as understood in a contemporary context. Using Sylvia Wynter's idea that the development of the plantation occurs alongside the development of the novel such that a particular relationship between plot, as both a story and a bounded territory, and the plantation emerges, McKittrick observes that "the plot illustrates a social order that is developed within the context of a dehumanizing system as it spatializes what would be considered impossible under slavery: the actual growth of narratives, food, and cultural practices that materialize the deep connections between blackness and the earth and foster values that challenge systemic violence"[43] Though, again, not reflecting a perfect comparison, using this framework to analyze the films demonstrates the unique and ongoing relationship to land that both Indigenous and Black people experience as a result of the historical realities of settler colonialism. Goeman also expresses this relationship when she explains the historical and contemporary relationships to "plots" of land identified as reservations: "Even though set aside as a space separate from 'civilization'…and a space of surveillance and control, Native people made the space of the reservation their home and place from which to ground community and the tribal self. This grounding, even while considered abject space by the settler state, is of utmost importance to the imaginative geographies that create the material consequences of everyday existence for Native people."[44] The analytics of both McKittrick and Goeman, speak to the unique and profoundly important relationship to land that Indigenous and Black people share as a result of settler

[43] McKittrick, "Plantation Futures," 10.

[44] Goeman, 87.

colonialism. This is not to say that the relationship is the same and that Black people are Indigenous to North America, but, rather, that each community has a particular relationship to settler nation "plots," both as story and territory, of land currently understood as the United States and Canada that is deeply rooted in their insistence on creating life in the face of settler violence. The remapping of these spaces in the films demonstrates the intersections that can be understood through historical and contemporary relationships to land and their significance across time and space in response to settler state terror.

Having considered above how Popper and the Armitage family were able to terrorize in ways that reflect the structural conditions of settler states, contemplating the motivation behind those efforts keeps attention focused on the structural realities represented in the films while also seeing the ways that the conditions faced by Aila and Chris evoke a violent response that was necessary to guarantee a future not just for themselves but for their larger communities. Tiffany Lethabo King in *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies*, discusses the ways that cartography works to create the white subject through the use of violence and the threat that Black and Indigenous subjects pose to the project of white subjectivity formation, asserting that "Black movement and fugitivity, as well as Indigenous resistance and place making, made the map a nervous landscape and forced the cartographic subject of conquistador humanism to remain…forever anxious."[45] Popper's need, as an agent of the settler state, to control Indigenous movement across Indigenous space and place through the use of violence not only reflects his own anxiety, but also the state's. The Armitage family reflects, structurally, the desires of the settler state, and their anxiety is apparent through their belief in the inherent

[45] Tiffany Lethabo King, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019: 86.

superiority of Black movement embedded in Black physiology and a desire to possess it for the benefit of white subjects. Establishing the space of the reservation and the space of the plantation as having been mapped as colonial, the perpetual anxiety that the antagonists represent demonstrates the structural realities of the anxiety King describes, while the connection the films make between past and present exhibit its ongoing nature. Consequently, the violence Aila and Chris enact in response to such conditions provide the viewer with the opportunity to experience the re-possession previously described in ways that make sense of the films' open-ended nature. The end of the films is the start of the remapping that is finalized through the moment of relief in ways that can disavow the "what would really happen" precisely because Aila and Chris's violence in the films has foreclosed the possibility of white/state anxiety by removing the white subject from its relationship to state power and, consequently, its ability to enact settler violence.

This is an important turn the films make in demonstrating how and why Aila and Chris prevail in their respective struggles against settler violence through the deployment of violent revenge. In doing so, they confound the savagery that Popper and the Armitage's marked them with at the start of each film to the extent that they refuse civilization as the locus of proper redress. However, that Chris and Aila had been marked as savage and have responded to the violence of "civilization," exposing its lies, moves neither into the realm of the "civilized." Their actions, as a rejection of the dichotomy savage-civilized, embody an alternative state that reflects neither empowerment nor moral superiority. Rather, by way of the violence, their bodies are remapped through a decolonial lens that re-creates them as the unsavage body. Speaking about abolition geographies and critique, Ruth Wilson Gilmore in "Abolition Geography and the Problem of Innocence," asserts that "Abolition geography starts from the homely premise that

freedom is a place."[46] Thinking about Chris's and Aila's bodies as places that had been mapped through a settler colonial lens dependent on its founding logics, the unsavage body emerges as a new yet complicated place of freedom that "shows how relationships of un-freedom consolidate and stretch, but not for the purpose of documenting misery. Rather, the point is not only to identify central contradictions—inherent vices—in regimes of dispossession, but also, urgently, to show how radical consciousness in action resolves into liberated life-ways, however provisional, present and past."[47] The actions that each character takes to secure their own and communities' futures, along with the futurity those actions represent, demonstrate the "racial consciousness in action" that Gilmore describes. Again, the moment of relief arises in its provisional nature but, because of the knowledge viewers are willing to suspend, their consciousness holds potential to understand their own relationships to savagery, dispossession, and eliminatory drives as radically altered.

Independently, each film provides a context for understanding how settler colonialism maps colonized and racialized terrains, both in terms of place and bodies. What they share, however, is a relationship to a geography of settler violence meant to dispossess and eliminate by deploying a logic of savagery. Without centering the settler or settler colonialism, they relate to each other through this geography in the unique ways that Blackness and Indigeneity have formed as a result of the foundation of the settler states within which they are situated. That is, by understanding each film encompassing an Indigenous-settler and Black-settler dynamic the relationship between Indigeneity and Blackness emerges as logically relational formations in

[46] Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "Abolition Geography and the Problem of Innocence" in Futures of Black Radicalism ed. Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin (New York: Verso): 226.

[47] Gilmore, 227.

response to violent conditions of settler colonial dispossession, enslavement, and genocide. Refuting the idea that the US is a nation of immigrants, Jodi Byrd explains the primacy of this relationship when she states, "Though the historical violences of slavery and colonization still compete with each other to claim primacy as the original sin of this nation's founding…the lasting repercussions of slavery, Jim Crow racism, and the hypervisible subjections of quotidian antiblackness, police brutality, poverty-to-prison pipelines on the one hand and the ongoing colonization of Indigenous peoples and lands that render American Indians statistical nonentities erased within the archives as the contemporary moment on the other, work in tandem."[48] This dynamic is evident simply in the existence of the films where one, *Get Out*, is a high profile box office hit and the other, *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*, is, in mainstream media, a relatively little known title. In the non/competition to claim the "original sin," the working in tandem should be prioritized. While the films diverge in many way – their use of violence throughout the films, their settings, the gendered nature of their stories, the actual settler states they are set in – the stories they tell are, at heart, stories of settler colonization and the particularities of that colonization on Indigenous and Black peoples. Without all the elements, these settler states could not have taken hold the way that they did, and each film, understood together and relationally, reflects both foundings at the same time that they reflect a new way of understanding Indigenous and Black futurity as a kind of relationality outside of settler colonialism and white supremacy.

[48] Jodi A. Byrd, "Not Yet: Indigeneity, Antiblackness, and Anticolonial Liberation," in *Antiblackness* ed. Moon-Kie Jung and João H. Costa Vargas, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021): 314.

CONCLUSION Stories that Sustain Us

In May 2021 Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc announced that approximately 215 unmarked graves at Kamloops Indian Residential School had been detected by ground-penetrating radar.[1] As of July 2021, more than 1,000 unmarked graves have been detected at several boarding school sites and the investigation is only just beginning.[2] The detection aligns with decades old stories in Indigenous communities about the disappearance of children at residential schools. In other words, the discovery of the bodies confirmed *for settlers* what Indigenous nations in Canada and the US have known and voiced for generations. The level of violence experienced in these schools is immeasurable and the impact they have had on generations of Indigenous people is unimaginable in its scale. Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission has estimated that approximately 4,100 students perished at the hands of government run boarding schools and given the current rate of discovery this number appears to be higher.[3] In June 2021, Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland announced the beginning of the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative, an investigation into the atrocities of US residential schools. As of this writing, the results of that investigation have yet to be reported, although it was originally scheduled to be released by April 1, 2022.

---

[1] "215 Bodies Found at Residential School in Canada," Indian Country Today, Associated Press, May 29, 2021, https://indiancountrytoday.com/news/more-than-200-bodies-found-at-indigenous-school-in-canada.

[2] Mindy Weisberger, "Remains of more than 1,000 Indigenous children found at former residential schools in Canada," Live Science, July 13, 2021, https://www.livescience.com/childrens-graves-residential-schools-canada.html.

[3] See https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1450124405592/1529106060525.

Since its founding in 1893, Kamloops has been a truth of colonialism and race for Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc and, in its symbolism, for all racialized peoples. The truth of boarding schools necessarily means that Kamloops exists as a site of genocide, and that is the story that Indigenous people have been telling about colonial institutions for centuries. It is a story of survival as much as it's a story about death and destruction. Stories of refusal, triumph, and survival have sustained us. *Rotisken'ra:kete: Violence and the Anti-Colonial* has shown how racialized peoples living under the violent conditions of settler colonialism do not accept those conditions. However, the real-life circumstances that inform these stories circumscribe the possibilities that are present and available to experience any sense of relief from colonial conditions. Said differently, liberal sensibilities preclude the possibility of violence as a reasonable response. With the limitations placed on violence in mind, this dissertation has considered what kinds of stories exist to counter while also respecting stories of historical and day-to-day colonial violence. To do so, it has focused on retributive violence and explored various texts as sites to learn about the power inhered to representations of violence within a colonial context. The motivation behind it has been the simple question: Why do racialized people tell stories about revenge?

Framing retributive violence as occurring from a particular epistemological point of view, rotisken'ra:kéte, has allowed for an examination that prioritizes the circumstances behind and motivation for such acts without descending into and being overcome by discussions about the morality of violence. Warriors having peace as the priority that underwrites revenge defers discussions around morality and the idea that all violence is bad or wrong. The absence of such discussions makes room for the second epistemological lens, kanikonriio. As a way of relating to the world on an individual level while also being part of a larger community relationship,

protecting the good mind takes on significance that opens up new ways of understanding the motivation to seek retribution and to enact revenge. More particularly, it provides a place from which to argue that this particular violence has meaning beyond simple interpersonal interaction when it is deployed against colonial systems of dispossession and colonial violence. Always operating simultaneously, the two epistemologies, rotisken'ra:kéte and kanikonriio, exist discursively. The good mind is the position from which the warrior decides to commit violence in order to maintain their own, while also protecting the communal good mind.

Examining Alanis Obamsawin's documentary about the Oka Crisis, the first chapter presented a historical conflict between the Canadian state and Kanehsatake Kanien'kehá:ka. By framing the conflict as necropolitical in nature, the film depicts the power dynamics of each group. Centralizing the idea of time and continuity that the film presents provided an opportunity to examine the colonial versus colonized subjectivity relative to the conflict. The film makes clear that the Mohawk people have an investment in protecting The Pines that might require loss of life and they demonstrate a willingness to make that sacrifice. I argued that the loss of life in this instance is better understood as a sign of life for Kanehsatakere:non. Through death, they guarantee a future for The Pines and for their descendants to be Mohawk people, thus establishing a connection to the protection of land and life via violence as necessary for resistance.

Continuing to think about the relationship between land and violence, focusing on the music video for Tanya Tagaq's song "Retribution," chapter two considered the role of pleasure and eroticism when recognizing the intimacy of violence. The intimate nature of their performances demonstrated the intimacy of violence and created an affective response that created an experience of, among other things, pleasure and eroticism. It approaches the video by

thinking about pleasure as structural rather than an individual experience. In its analysis, Tagaq's embodiment of retribution and Bathory's embodiment of the earth work together to convey to the viewer a sense of urgency to the threat the earth's retribution poses. It also posited two different states of ecstasy that when experienced together allows an anti-colonial subjectivity to emerge. An emergent subjectivity would, in turn, be able to consider ideas of justice differently and on an earthly scale.

To imagine alternative forms of justice, chapter three took up questions of sovereignty as it is reflected in narratives of revenge in response to sexual violence against Indigenous women. The comparison of two narratives about sexual violence provides the context within which to observe different degrees and understandings of Indigenous sovereignty. In one text, *The Round House*, the story, however unintentionally, undermines exercises of sovereignty through its limited focus on federal Indian law and allowing the settler state to be the arbiter of justice. As a consequence of the revenge act, it also narrated the wholesale appropriation of a traditional Anishinaabe form of justice into the settler state justice system, thus preserving the settler state's claim to jurisdiction and justice. Conversely, the other text, "A Red Girl's Reasoning," provided a story about extralegal revenge carried out by an Indigenous woman who had been sexually assaulted. Through her actions, sovereignty is purposefully asserted so that alternative forms of justice can be imagined. These other imaginings through the self-defined sovereignty of Indigenous peoples lays out the groundwork for thinking about the structural implications of retributive violence as justice.

Through the comparison of two films, *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* and *Get Out*, the final chapter demonstrated how the retributive violence represented in the films was deployed against structures and not just individuals. In other words, the colonial conditions that compelled the

violence superseded the interpersonal nature of the violence such that the characters came to represent the structural realities of settler colonialism. Highlighting that the films are Indigenous and Black, respectively, asserts a relationship between Indigeneity and Blackness that is observable through the revenge acts depicted in each film. I argued that it allows a change in the way Indigeneity and Blackness can be understood together. In particular, the two positionalities can be understood relationally through land in such a way that settler colonialism and the settler are not the point of contact between the two.

Since the conception of *Rotisken'ra:kete: Violence and the Anti-Colonial* I have been interested in thinking about revenge and retributive violence as providing a space to imagine an anti-colonial future. Unlike conventional approaches to violence, I have worked to consider the discursive and material work that violence has produced relative to colonialism and race without deconstructing the morality of violence. My method has been to understand violence originally emerging from the settler state and colonialism. As a result, I approach violence that emerges in response to colonial and racial violence from an Indigenous epistemological perspective that prioritizes the wellness of colonized and racialized people. Through an examination of land as a site of contestation in ongoing land claims and as an embodied presence in cultural production, I demonstrated that the presence and threat of violence advocates for land's protection from the destructive forces of colonialism. After examining fictional works, I have determined that visual and narrative sovereignty figure prominently in discussions around the possibilities available in imagining alternative futures relative to justice. I also postulate that retributive violence operates at the level of structure and not at the level of the individual while also allowing different relationalities between differently racialized communities to emerge that prove useful for thinking about creating an anti-colonial future. Throughout, I have sought to theorize violence

differently as a source of protection and as generative of anti-colonial justice. Understanding the purpose these stories serve in cultural production as a site of radical resistance and refusal can provide a start to thinking differently about the violence committed by, rather than against, racialized and colonized communities.

Bibliography

18 U.S. Code § 16 2012, July 20, 2018, https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/granule/USCODE-2011-title18/USCODE-2011-title18-partI-chap1-sec16.

"215 Bodies Found at Residential School in Canada." Indian Country Today. Associated Press. May 29, 2021. https://indiancountrytoday.com/news/more-than-200-bodies-found-at-indigenous-school-in-canada.

Arvin, Maile. "Analytics of Indigeneity" in *Native Studies Keywords* ed by Stephanie Nohelani Teves, Andrea Smith, and Michelle Raheja. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2015.

— *Possessing Polynesians: The Science of Settler Colonial Whiteness in Hawai'i and Oceania*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2019.

Barker, Joanne. "For Whom Sovereignty Matters" in *Sovereignty Matters: Locations of Contestation and Possibility in Indigenous Struggles for Self-Determination* ed. by Joanne Barker. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005.

— "Introduction: Critically Sovereign" in *Critically Sovereign: Indigenous Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies*. Ed. by Joanne Barker. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017.

Byrd, Jodi A. "Not Yet: Indigeneity, Antiblackness, and Anticolonial Liberation" in *Antiblackness* ed. Moon-Kie Jung and João H. Costa Vargas. Durham: Duke University Press, 2021: 309-324.

— *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

Carden, Mary Paniccia. "The Unkillable Mother: Sovereignty and Survivance in Louise Erdrich's *The Round House*. *Studies in American Indian Literatures* vol. 30(1) (Spring 2018): 94-116.

Chandler, Justin. "Tanya Tagaq announces new 'more aggressively political' album 'Retribution." CBC.ca, published August 17, 2016. https://www.cbc.ca/music/read/tanya-tagaq-announces-new-more-aggressively-political-album-retribution-1.5053081.

Coulthard, Glen. *Red Skin White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014.

DeCosta, Jamais. "Interview with Filmmaker Jeff Barnaby on Rhymes for Young Ghouls." Muskratmagazine.com. February 1, 2014. http://muskratmagazine.com/interview-with-filmmaker-jeff-barnaby-on-rhymes-for-young-ghouls/.

Dean, Dave. “Tanya Tagaq’s Cute Sealfie Pissed of a Lot of Idiots.” Vice.com, Vice Media Group. April 9, 2014. https://www.vice.com/en/article/4w7awj/tanya-taqaqs-cute-sealfie-pissed-off-a-lot-of-idiots.

Deer, Sarah. *The Beginning and End of Rape: Confronting Sexual Violence in Native America*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

Doxtator, Deborah, Hill, Lynn A., Deadman, Patricia, Niro, Shelley, Rickard, Jolene and Greene, Kelly. *Godi’nigoha’: The Women’s Mind.* Brantford, ON: Woodland Cultural Centre, 1997.

Erdrich, Louise. *The Round House*. Harper Perennial, 2012.

Fanon, Fanon. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Trans. by Charles Lam Markmann. New York: Grove Press, 1967.

— *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Richard Philcox. New York: Grove Press, 2004.

Fletcher, Matthew L. M. "Anishinaabe Law and the Round House." Albany Government Law Review 10 (2017): 88-111.

Foucault, Michel. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College De France 1978-1979*. ed. Arnold I. Davidson. trans. Graham Burchell. New York: Picador, 2008.

— *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Vol. 1*. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.

Gabriel, Ellen. sovereignvoices1. January 5, 2014. “Those Who Carry the Burden of Peace.” https://sovereignvoices1.wordpress.com/2014/01/05/those-who-carry-the-burden-of-peace/.

Galloway, Kate. “The Aurality of Pipeline Politics and Listening for Nacreous Clouds: Voicing Indigenous Ecological Knowledge in Tanya Tagaq’s *Animism* and *Retribution*.” *Popular Music*, vol. 39 no. 1: 121-144.

Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. “Abolition Geography and the Problem of Innocence” in *Futures of Black Radicalism* ed. Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin. New York: Verso: 225-240.

Goeman, Mishuana. “Flirtations at the Foundation: Unsettling Liberal Multiculturalism in Helen Lee’s “Prey.”” *Critical Ethnic Studies*, 1(1) Spring 2015: 117-144.

— “Introduction to Indigenous Performances: Upsetting the Terrains of Settler Colonialism.” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, (35)4 (2015): 3-18.

— *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014.

Goodleaf, Donna. Entering the Warzone: A Mohawk Perspective on Resisting Invasions. Penticton, B.C.: Theytus Books, 1995.

Gordon, Avery. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

Hargreaves, Allison. "Conclusion: Thinking beyond the National Inquiry: *A Red Girl's Reasoning*." *Violence Against Indigenous Women: Literature, Activism, Resistance*. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred University Press, 2017.

Hong, Grace. *Ruptures of US Capitalism: Women of Color Feminism and the Culture of Immigrant Labor*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

Jamilla, Musser. *Sensational Flesh: Race, Power and Masochism*. New York: New York University Press, 2014.

Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance (The Oka Crisis). Dir, Alanis Obomsawin. National Film Board of Canada, 2003. Google Video, <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=8939345967488327634>.

Khanna, Ranjana. *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.

King, Tiffany Lethabo. *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2019.

Lorde, Audre. "The Uses of the Erotic." *Sister Outsider*. Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007: 53-59.

Mbembe, Achille. "Necropolitics." *Public Culture*. 15(1), 22.

McKittrick, Katherine. *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

— "On Plantations, Prisons, and a Black sense of Place." *Social & Cultural Geography* 12(8), 2011: 947-963.

— "Plantation Futures." *Small Axe* 17(3), 2013: 1-15.

Million, Dian. "Felt Theory: An Indigenous Feminist Approach to Affect and History." *Wicazo Sa Review* 24(2), 2009: 53-76.

Million, Dian. *Therapeutic Nations: Healing in an Age of Indigenous Human Rights*. Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 2013.

Moreton-Robinson, Aileen. *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

Morrill, Angie, dir. “187 Superman.” 2010, San Diego, CA. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8F-kbF4qYmo&t=2s.

Munoz, José Esteban. “Feeling Brown, Feeling Down: Latina Affect, the Performativity of Race, and the Depressive Position.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 31(3) 2006: 675-688.

Murphy, Jacqueline Shea. *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing: Native American Modern Dance Histories*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

Nelson, Melissa K. “Getting Dirty: The Eco-Eroticism of Women in Indigenous Oral Literaures.” *Critically Sovereign: Indigenous Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017: 229-260.

Nichols, Robert. “Theft is Property! The Recursive Logic of Dispossession.” *Political Theory*.” Vol. 46(1): 3-28.

Omi, Michael & Winant, Howard. *Racial Formation in the United States From the 1960s to the 1990s*. 2nd edition. New York: Routledge, 1994.

Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and Social Death*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018.

Perea, Jessica Bissett. “Inuit Sound Worlding and Audioreelism and *Flying Wild Alaska*.” *Music and Modernity among First Peoples of North America*, ed. by Victoria Lyndsey Levine and Dylan Robinson. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2019: 174-197.

Raheja, Michelle. *Reservation Reelism: Redfacing, Visual Sovereignty, and Representations of Native Americans in Film*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010.

Rickard, Jolene. “Sovereignty: A Line in the Sand.” *Apeture* vol,139 (Summer 1995): 50-59.

Rifkin, Mark. *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination*. Durham: Duke Univeristy Press, 2017.

Robinson, Dylan. *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020.

Rule, Elizabeth. “Seals, Selfies, and the Settler State: Indigenous Motherhood and Gendered Violence in Canada.” *American Quarterly*, vol. 70, no. 4: 741-754.

Salaita, Steven. *The Holy Land in Transit: Colonialism and the Quest for Canaan*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 2006.

Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Storyteller*. New York: Penguin Books, 2012.

Simmons, Kristen. 2017. "Settler Atmospherics." Member Voices, *Fieldsights*, November 20. https://culanth.org/fieldsights/settler-atmospherics

Simpson, Audra. "The Chief's Two Bodies." RACE 2014 Keynote. October 2014. University of Alberta. Audio Recording, 57:47.

— *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.

— "The State is a Man: Theresa Spence, Loretta Saunders, and the Gender of Settler Sovereignty." April 16, 2016. Clark University. Audio Recording, 59:17. https://commons.clarku.edu/videoarchive/235/.

Simpson, Leanne. *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017.

— "Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg Intellience and Rebellious Transformation." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 3(3) 2014: 1-25.

Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Storyteller*. New York: Penguin Books, 2012.

Smith, Janet. "Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory Taps into Fear and Humor for Mask Dance." *The Georgia Straight*. March 14, 2018. https://www.straight.com/arts/1044321/laakkuluk-williamson-bathory-taps-fear-and-humour-mask-dance.

Spillers, Hortense. *Black, White, and In Color*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Swamp, Jake. "*Kanikonriio*: "Power of a Good Mind" in *Alliances Re/Envisioning Indigenous-Non-Indigenous Relationships*. Ed. by Lynne Davis. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010: 15-24.

Sweet, Victoria. "Rising Waters, Rising Threats: The Human Trafficking of Indigenous Women in the Circumpolar Region of the United States and Canada." Michigan State University Legal Studies Research Paper no. 12-01, February 20, 2014. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2399074 .

Tagaq, Tanya. http://tanyatagaq.com/visuals/#official-music-video.

"Tanya Tagaq on the Polaris Prize, the Seal hunt and the Sealfie." YouTube, *CBC News: The National*. Published September 26, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4wKRz562MY8.

Teves, Stephanie Noelani, Smith, Andrea, and Raheja, Michelle eds. "Sovereignty" in *Native American Keywords*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2015.

Tharp, Julie. "Erdrich's Crusade: Sexual Violence in *The Round House*." *Studies in American Indian Literatures* Vol. 26(3), Fall 2014: 25-40.

Veracini, Lorenzo. *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*. New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2010.

Vizenor, Gerald. *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000.

Warrior, Robert. *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995.

Weisberger, Mindy. "Remains of more than 1,000 Indigenous children found at former residential schools in Canada." Live Science. July 13, 2021. https://www.livescience.com/childrens-graves-residential-schools-canada.html.

Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Wolfe, Patrick. "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native." *Journal of Genocide Research* 8 (4) 2006: 387-409.

Zinoman, Jason. "Jordan Peele on a Truly Terrifying Monster: Racism." *The New York Times.* February 16, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/16/movies/jordan-peele-interview-get-out.html

Žižek, Slavoj. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. New York: Verso. Ninth Impression, 2002.