Atlantis

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Fish (ceramic study, 2024) by Tanja Harrison

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In Memory of Tanja Harrison

by Donna Bourne-Tyson, Jacqueline Gahagan and Bernadette V. Russo

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Tanja Harrison, the beloved University Librarian at MSVU for eleven years, was a graduate of the Dalhousie School of Information Management. She was a dear friend and colleague, and a highly respected member of the library community in Atlantic Canada and beyond. One can open any number of professional sites associated with the Maritimes and likely come across her numerous accolades and contributions to community within local, regional, and academic settings and sectors.

Tanja was an active member and leader of various key committees and organizations including the Dalhousie University School of Information Alumni Association, the Atlantic Provinces Library Association, the International Association of Library Associations, the Canadian Library Association, Novanet, the Council of Atlantic University Libraries, the Canadian Research Knowledge Network, the Ex Libris Association, and the Nova Scotia Library Association. As noted on Acadia University's memorial page for Tanja, among her numerous contributions was her central role in the development of the "*You Quote It, You Note It* tutorial, a tool that revolutionized how students approached citation and academic integrity" (https://www2.acadiau.ca/about-acadia/newsroom/news-reader-page/acadia-mourns-tanja-harrison.html). Further exemplifying the magnitude of her contributions, in 2021, Tanja was awarded the Atlantic Provinces Library Association (APLA) Merit Award.

Tanja's dedication to and passion for *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice*, which is a Diamond Open Access, peer-reviewed, scholarly journal in publication since 1975, and her commitment to open access in general, were exemplified by her continued efforts to support *Atlantis.* Even through her most challenging moments, Tanja consistently worked hard to navigate *Atlantis* through the difficult processes of funding an open access journal, including stepping up to assist wherever needed to support the journal. While she was transitioning out of her role as University Librarian before her passing away, Tanja made it clear that she was very much looking forward to having more time to devote to her work with *Atlantis*. She was passionate about open science, institutional support for open access journals, and historical research focusing on the Maritimes; her strong contributions to the success of *Atlantis* demonstrated this commitment.

Donna Bourne-Tyson, retired Dalhousie University Dean of Libraries, writes of Tanja that "Tanja always went that extra mile, not only organizing interesting events but also adding a creative spark to them—her energy and innovative ideas were always welcome. Meetings were always a little more fun and productive when Tanja was in the room. Whether working on a silent auction together, or a governance, copyright, or 2SLGBTQIA+ digital archives committee, the experience was that much more rewarding when Tanja was a partner in crime."

Jacqueline Gahagan, MSVU Associate Vice-President Research reflects on the many interactions with Tanja: "I first met Tanja in September, 2021, shortly after joining the Mount in my role as Associate Vice President Research (AVPR). Through that connection, we explored a partnership between the MSVU Research Office and the Library to share the cost of our membership in *The Conversation with Communications* to increase the visibility of the worldclass research being conducted at the Mount. We also looked at other partnerships to augment research awareness through Research In View, various training events, and webinars."

Bernadette V. Russo (mixed Indigenous ancestry), Assistant Professor at MSVU recalls, "I met Tanja on June 22, 2021 on a tour of MSVU as a newly hired faculty, just as the Mount was preparing to reopen. Tanja was where she always was: the library. Meeting her felt like reuniting with an old friend, and that feeling never waned. Her positive, kind, and generous spirit touched everyone she met. Equally true, Tanja was a strong, steadfast, and staunch supporter of social justice and EDIA as well as an activist-advocate-ally for Indigenous initiatives, always appreciating and respecting the land and its people."

A rock hound, ceramicist, photographer, traveller, lover of whales and all other animals, and avid Manchester United fan, Tanja will be forever missed. To know Tanja was to love her—her zest for life, her easy laughter, her love for her family, and the joy she found in people, art, music, research, writing, and sharing ideas.

Donations to *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice* may be made in her memory.

Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice
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Editorial

A New *Atlantis*? Shifting Shorelines and Salt Marshes: Between Third and Fourth Wave Feminism in the Twenty-first Century

by Tegan Zimmerman

Author: Tegan Zimmerman is Chair of the Alexa McDonough Institute at Mount Saint Vincent University and Chair of the International Comparative Literature Association's Comparative Gender Studies Research Committee. She specializes in women's writing, with a concentration on Caribbean and Canadian literature and historical fiction, as well as contemporary gender theory that centralizes the maternal and mother-daughter relations. Her work has appeared in journals such as *Feminist Theory*, *MELUS*, and *Women's Studies*, and she is the author of *Matria Redux: Caribbean Women Novelize the Past* and *Chronotropics: Caribbean Women Writing Spacetime*, a co-edited collection with Odile Ferly. Zimmerman also serves as Editor of *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture, and Social Justice*.

The road to Atlantis is neither straight nor narrow. It, may, however, have been paved in gold. It depends on which Atlantis you are talking about; there are as many Atlantises as there are geopolitical positions, symbolic-historical references, and philosophical-literary discourses claiming to be authentic, authoritative sources. In celebration of the 50th anniversary of Mount Saint Vincent University's women's studies journal *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture, and Social Justice*, this essay endeavours to bring together three unlikely bedfellows: Plato, Shirley MacLaine, and *Atlantis*. I reflect on the references each of these sources make to the infamous lost city of Atlantis as a means to make sense of the tumultuous, conflict-laden, and volatile political situations feminists are currently facing. I believe that feminism finds itself once again in a murky, transitional period and is experiencing an ever-shifting/eroding shoreline. Contrary to my previous claims in *Atlantis* (Zimmerman 2017), I now sincerely doubt whether a fourth wave of feminism emerged, and I have pivoted to thinking that we (in the Global North) have witnessed instead the tail end of the third wave. But it's precisely the gap in between waves or feminist movements (some might say backlash) that I'd like us to imagine differently—as a saltmarsh. At the risk of cliché, environmentally-charged imagery is used throughout this piece to articulate what I am calling marsh feminism. Coding feminism with ecologically-rich language and vice versa is far from discursive originality, but the specific image of the saltmarsh does illuminate new paths for understanding different women's movements and activisms in terms of a deep, rich, and murky subversive space where timelines and goals overlap and intermingle whilst continuing to compel us to confront the risks and threats we, like all species, all face on our planet in crisis.

The concept of Atlantis as a fictional utopian island is typically traced back to Plato's dialogues *Timaeus* and *Critias*. But upon close reading (which is the methodology I employ here), it becomes increasingly clear to me that Plato's Atlantis is far from ideal. In *Timaeus*, Critias tells Socrates (as told by old Critias and as reported by Solon who received the story from priests in Egypt long before that) about the great island of Atlantis, which was once ruled by royal power (Plato 1997b, 25a, 1232). After extending its rule to several other geographic locations, Plato writes how this formidable power set out "to enslave all of the territory inside the strait [of Gibraltar, or 'the Pillars of Heracles']" (Plato 1997b, 25b, 1232). Remarkably, Athens withstands this military assault and triumphs: "She prevented the enslavement of those not yet enslaved, and generously freed all the rest of us who lived within the boundaries of Her

acles" (Plato 1997b, 25c, 1232). In the next eponymous dialogue, Critias continues his tale of Atlantis and the ensuing war between its rulers and the city of Athens.

Critias elaborates on the genealogy of Atlantis's rulers starting with the Greek God of water, Poseidon, and how he, and later his sons, including his first one Atlas (begot with the mortal Clito_) received the island as their domain (Plato 1997a, 113c, 1299; 114b, 1300). Atlantis's rulers observe primogeniture and Plato describes the empire of Atlantis as amassing more wealth than any previous region, hence "paved with gold" (Plato 1997a, 114d, 1300). Initially this wealth benefits all its citizens, for in addition to imports, the island's resources provide much that is needed. Critias names next the mines "that produced both hard and fusible ore" and a copper/*oreichalkos* that was nearly as valuable as gold (Plato 1997a, 114d-e, 1300). Moreover, the sacred island provides lumber, abundant flora and fauna (with access "to graze in marshlands" (Plato 1997a, 114e, 1300) and "sweet smelling roots and greens, herbs, trees, and gums from flowers and fruits as well, and they flourished there" (Plato 1997a, 115a, 1300-1301). Critias continues to describe the establishment of palaces, temples, canals, bridges, and other marvel constructions like a shrine to Clito and Poseidon. Yet, Plato notes that as Atlantis became increasingly obsessed with possessions the "divine portion" waned (Plato 1997a, 121a, 1306). Compromising their virtues, the empire became "disordered." Interestingly, Critias remarks that to the untrained, undisciplined, or ignorant eye, Atlantis would appear at its zenith but to those committed to higher truths and virtues, Atlantis was "hideous…losing the finest of what were once their most treasured possessions…filled with an unjust lust for possessions and power" (Plato 1997a, 121b, 1306). The dialogue ends with Critias describing Zeus's determination to punish the deeds of the Atlantis empire but what follows next requires turning back to the *Timeaus*.

The *Timeaus* fills in the gaps left by Critias's earlier story. We are told that after Atlantis's failed militarized naval attempt to seize and destroy Athens, an earthquake erupted and the island "sank below the sea and disappeared" (Plato 1997b, 25d, 1232). Submerged, Atlantis remains known only by its unexplorable, impassable mud shoals—this fate is also mentioned in *Critias* (Plato 1997a, 108e, 1295). Plato's depictions of Atlantis as a lost imperialistic, monarchal land and its failed attempt to overthrow the new democratic polis of Athens proves to be a cautionary and punitive tale. So how, if at all, does this concept of the island relate to feminism in the twenty-first century? Why should a women's studies journal be named after a war-loving ancient island, one known from its brief citations by a Greek philosopher whose writings on women are at best ambivalent? The discussion of women and wombs alone at the end of *Timaeus* should make anyone cringe. So, I find myself asking: Why wouldn't a feminist journal want to distance itself from both the patriarchal polis and the island of kings and the "language of Atlantis" (Plato 1997a, 114b, 1300)? Plato, too, casually remarks upon comparing "ancient laws with ours today" writing, "You'll discover many instances that once existed among you, existing among us today" (Plato 1997a, 24a, 1231). For isn't it reasonable to say that the likes of Donald Trump and Elon Musk in the United States are new Atlantean figures boldly amassing wealth and power? That they are putting democracy at risk with their repeated threats to subsume nations like Greenland, Canada, Panama, and Gaza into America's national fold?

But the story of Atlantis precedes Plato; pre-Socratic writers like the historian Hellanicus and the poet Hesiod, for example, both mention the Titan Atlas's daughters, specifically the eldest, Maia. O.R.H. Thomas claims that Hellanicus was likely working from Hesiod's *Catalogue of Women* (Thomas 2007, 15, 22) since in his Atlantis, Hellanicus names a genealogy of daughters on the "islands of the blessed" (as qtd. by Thomas 2007, 15). While the literary, historical, and philosophical origins of this island are not my main concern here, what strikes me about these earlier pre-Socratic texts is their focus on women. A genealogy of women is centralized by both Hesiod and Hellanicus, whereas in Plato's dialogues women often seem peripheral at best. Instead, Plato offers us a story of kingship and the deeds of men.

Now consider the epigraph to the very first issue of *Atlantis: A Women's Studies Journal* published in fall 1975:

> Atlantis was an ancient kingdom, an island in the Atlantic which disappeared during an earthquake. Fabulous stories are told about the beauty of the people who lived there and the kind of civilization they

> created. We take Atlantis as a symbol of the lost kingdom which women are striving to rediscover by discovering themselves.

If feminists are to reclaim the lingering layers of land and deep shoals of mud then the legacy and the logos of the patriarchy (*patros*: pater=father; patriot=countrymen) must be discarded. Monuments to our mothers are comprised of sand and silt, tethered to the banks by threadbare roots. They rise for a time, then sink with the tides. This shifting, unstable, disturbed ground shares affinities with the pre-Socratic recognition of the power and agency of women; the maternal-feminine must be revived as an alternative foundation for Western thinking.

We cannot replicate the errors of the old vanguard (replete with armadas and battles at sea or military occupations and invasions). The disembodied Atlantean masculine, (neo)colonial-hyper-capitalist subject—selfish, dangerous, and violent—accelerates human-made climate disasters, catastrophes, and cataclysms; turns time upside down; celebrates a logic of theft; and threatens to bring to heel vulnerable and/or disobedient communities. We also know that "[w]omen, girls, and gender-diverse people often face harsher impacts of climate change, especially when marginalized by racism, poverty, and other forms of inequality" (The Canadian Women's Foundation 2025). Climate justice is conditional upon gender equity. Atlantis for me therefore invites a continuous process of reflection (watery pools and puddles facilitate and necessitate self-reflexive critiques of feminism, the limits of women's and gender studies, as well as my own overt references in this essay to the Western tradition and white feminists, too). You can't discipline water into a binary of 0 or 1. There are other codes (languages of hysteria?): wool, blood, ooze, milk, tides, rivers, moons, some call this stream of consciousness. The work we do is overflowing: there is no done, only doing. We must seek beyond. We must search for something else that lays hidden, buried, a messy Eleusinian mystery that is subterranean, submarine, rivulets and droplets, bones and pellets, scat and urine, caves, and the places where the reeds lay flat because an animal has been sleeping. All of this is a part of marsh feminism: to let things seep, drip-dry, flood, and evaporate. Reciprocity. A marsh can be shockingly cyclical but it too escapes that grasp. There is no map to marsh feminism but a marsh wants to write. It wants to give itself up to writing every morning (confessional poetry preferred) and inscribe itself in the chatter of stillness, embracing the perfumed stench of decay and rot A marsh has a biography in the strictest sense of the word's etymology: bios, for life, graphia for writing. We can write the life of a marsh if we read the earthy red mudflats dotted with filamentous algae and trace sandpiper tracks and bill-holes as marking the place where third and fourth wave feminist goals coalesce and co-mingle. Distinctions, like linear timelines, are difficult. Yet, it is in this sticky, messy, richly diverse, and thriving place that feminists must dwell. As those seeking to make sense of third and fourth wave feminism, we must learn to embrace the contradictions and contrapuntal aspects of marsh feminism.

Marshes are therefore often associated with the feminine. For instance, in Margaret Atwood's poem "Marsh Languages," she writes, "The dark soft languages are being silenced:/Mothertongue Mothertongue Mothertongue/falling one by one back into the moon" (Atwood 1995, 1-3). For doesn't the Greek poet Sappho also tell us, "The moon has set and the Pleiades/Have gone"? (Sappho, The moon has set and the Pleiades). The languages of the marsh are plural, sibylline. They express a certain kind of fecundity that is closely linked to the feminine/maternal. Marshes are wet, moist, dense, deep womb-like locales that harbour an innumerable number of species and vegetal life and whose shores are constantly in flux and motion. High tides and low tides reveal a wetland always in transition; a marsh by definition is never static. Marsh feminism is unapologetically performative. To survive against the war-machine, that persistent, pernicious polis, is to dance and sing underwater or to "trample the hyacinths/Upon the mountain-side until they stain the earth" (Sappho, Purple Earth).

In 2017, I published an article in *Atlantis* called "#Intersectionality, The Fourth Wave Feminist Twitter Community." It examined the Twitter hashtag #intersectionality and attempted to trace the transition from third wave feminism to a new fourth wave. To summarize, the third wave was predominantly ushered in by Black, anti- and post-colonial, and 2SLGBTQIA+ feminist thinkers such as Alice Walker's daughter Rebecca Walker, Audre Lorde, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Kim Anderson, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Judith Butler as well as Jack Halberstam among others. I argued that although the third and fourth wave shared some overlapping goals like emphasizing difference, applying intersectional frameworks, and putting LGBTQ+ rights at the forefront, e.g., the legalization of gay

marriage in Canada (Bill-38, 2005), one major distinction was the inception of social media and its ubiquity by the end of 2010. This is when we switched to smart-phones and apps. Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter were all media platforms that were readily being taken up—but Twitter, I argued, proved to be the most useful and widely used for disseminating feminist discourse. I was especially interested in how Twitter users were introducing hashtags like #intersectionality to call out white feminism for racism and to put forth an agenda of inclusivity. It was this activism that signaled to me at that time—and, then, shortly thereafter—solidified with the Women's March on Washington (2017) and the viral #Metoo hashtag (indebted to activist Tarana Burke who used the term in 2006 and was revived by actress Alyssa Milano on Twitter)—that indeed we were in a new wave of feminism, aptly called the fourth wave.

Many gender theorists (e.g., Judith Roof 1997 or Linda Nicholson 2013) have critiqued the wave metaphor for oversimplifying complex feminist movements, generalizing or universalizing women's experiences, and advancing white feminism by misrepresenting or excluding those in the Global South as well as women's and people of colour's perspectives. As I reflect on feminist activity, social media, and our current socio-political milieu, I find myself leaning towards believing that a fourth wave did not happen ... (marsh feminism is infatuated with ellipses) ... instead, we are in a transitional period, one that marks a shift between third and fourth wave feminism. I still find the wave metaphors helpful, especially for understanding the first and second wave, but like Nicholson who questioned when the third wave began and ended, I too have been asking myself this question and whether there was or is a fourth wave. Several interrelated events have prompted this crisis in thought: 1) In 2022, the US Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade, effectively ending abortion as a fundamental right in the United States.[1] This right has traditionally been marked a major achievement of the second wave. As a follow-up, Olivia Rodrigo also caved into backlash and stopped handing out free contraception at her concerts. 2) In 2022, Twitter devolved into X, the once left-friendly space is now owned and operated by Elon Musk, an until recently fervent Trump supporter. 3) Donald Trump was elected as President of the United States in late 2016 after defeating Hilary Clinton and was re-elected in 2024, after defeating the Democratic Party leader Kamala Harris. Trump has publicly affirmed the gender binary, essentially erasing or denouncing the existence of trans and non-binary lives.

Turning to the award-winning actress and writer Shirley MacLaine can be unexpectedly helpful. I learned about this strange reference while out horseback riding with my second-wave feminist aunt (a la Woolf, let's call her Mary Beton). She studied at Acadia University, but unfortunately not in 1975 when *Atlantis* came into the world through a homebirth: the estuary and tidal landscape of the Minas Basin. In her memoir *Walking the Camino: A Journey of the Spirit* (2000) MacLaine, recounts one of her past lives in Atlantis. After having lived as an "androgynous soul" (MacLaine 2000, 242), MacLaine describes, in ways that echo Aristophanes' speech in Plato's *Symposium* (minus the extraterrestrials found in MacLaine's account), how the complete self was separated into two bodies according to a binary of sexual difference. MacLaine claims she lived in Atlantis as a male, while her soul mate (born from her own body) lived as her female counterpart. MacLaine remembers in ways that resonate with Plato's dialogues how the island, which had once shown Edenic promise, became increasingly corrupt. Consumed by materialism and technology as well as the self, Atlantis turned away from spirituality (MacLaine 2000, 232). The result was the island suffering destruction at the hands of its own greed and godlessness. Yet, it is not Atlantis that MacLaine witnesses crashing into the sea but rather her original spiritual motherland Lemuria. The result is that she is "forbidden reincarnation until the end of the Atlantean civilization" at which time she will be reborn and "remain earthbound until the end of the Adamic Age at the turn of the twenty-first century" (MacLaine 2000, 281). MacLaine thus combines her present experiences of walking the Camino, her past memories of *another* Atlantis, and her search for spirituality to offer a scathing critique of our hyper-capitalist, techno-driven, celebrity-obsessed, anthropogenic, androcentric world in the twenty-first century.

Incidentally, fourth wave feminism, strictly speaking, has roots in the new millennium, circa MacLaine's pilgrimage, with E. Anne Kaplan's 2003 article "Feminist Futures: Trauma, the Post-9/11 World and a Fourth Feminism?" Kaplan references the 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States and a feminist response by American psychotherapist and activist Kathlyn Schaaf as inaugurating the fourth wave. Schaaf began organizing women on her website "Gather the Women" as a call for world peace. Shaaf 's website on 9-11 likewise prompted journalist Pythia Peay to claim, "the long-awaited 'fourth wave' of feminism [is]—a fusion of spirituality and social justice reminiscent of the Amer-

ican civil rights movement and Gandhi's call for nonviolent change" (Peay 2005, 59). It seems to me that if peace was heralded as a founding principle of fourth wave feminism, we have lost that focus in the twenty years since. When one thinks about humanitarian crises, as a result of militarized conflict, in Gaza, Sudan, or Ukraine, for instance, peace does not spring immediately to mind. It also strikes me that feminists in the Global North have drifted away from considering class as a meaningful category of feminist inquiry. Is the influence of celebrities on feminist issues and our society's idolization of the rich and famous to blame? A confluence of celebrity, politician, and feminist has arguably dampened the socialist agenda that seemed to go hand-in-hand with second wave feminism. And despite the achievements of recent online movements like #MeToo, might it also be true that social media is an anathema to feminism? A handful of technocratic men own the means of communication, the means of (re)production: Mark Zuckerberg (Meta,formerly Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp), Elon Musk (X, attempting to purchase Sam Altman's OpenAI) and, Zhang Yiming (Bytedance, TikTok) not to mention Jeff Bezos, Amazon founder who purchased the *Washington Post.*

In 2025, how do we make sense of the original raison d'être of *Atlantis,* the women's studies journal? The lost kingdom of Atlantis surely cannot be that described by either Plato or MacLaine. This is to say, *this Atlantis* advances gender studies and social justice by rejecting the founding fathers of the philosophical tradition in the West that begins, primarily, with Plato and ends with the patriarchy-plutocracy (Pluto was the Roman god of the underworld after all) of the twenty-first century. This *Atlantis* offers an alternative feminist space, a wet-land premised on equity, empowerment, diversity, consciousness-raising, anti-capitalist struggle, and peace. Such a flooding, overflowing, vibrant ecosystem celebrates the exchange of ideas and critical dialogue, yet, there are no philosopher-kings—only kingfishers chasing wind patterns through narrow channels and steep cliffsides. It's easy to envision *Atlantis* as a utopic feminist space but this is too simple and it teeters on escapism and/or bio-essentialism.

Still, an old Atlantis remains. Isn't the real catastrophe that the earthquakes, global warming, and natural devastation are neither events in the past nor in the future but are here and now? Is this not why *Atlantis* dearly matters to our slowly sinking (ethical-philosophical-bios) Atlantis? This is how history folds and unfolds. Two parallel bloodlines. Atlantis's mythic origins in Ancient Greece and the journal's birth from an estuary, led by Donna E. Smyth and the members of the Editorial Board: Maureen Baker, Margaret Conrad, Carrie Fredericks, Lethem Sutcliffe Roden, Lorette Toevs, and Lois Vallely-Fischer. These feminist scholars and the many others who have kept the journal afloat have, through continually striving to rediscover and discover themselves, re-created and re-imagined Atlantis as a veritable catalogue of women and gender studies in the form of the journal *Atlantis*, encapsulated by Suzanne MacKay's stone sculpture "Emerging Woman" featured on the first cover in 1975. To answer the call of embracing plurality and intersectionality, we are diving into the archive to rediscover our beginnings and all the polyphonic feminists we have been and all the voices and lives still waiting to resurface in the next 50 years to come. We are still living in the time of Atlantis but it's up to us to decide which one.

Origin stories can be born in a cave or a marsh. In Spring 1979, *Atlantis* dropped its signature description: "We take Atlantis as a symbol of the lost kingdom which women are striving to rediscover by discovering themselves." A year later, *Atlantis* took root at Mount Saint Vincent University (Volume 4, Number 2, 1980). *Atlantis* inspires traitors, those who dare to skirt around in the dirt, get stuck in the weeds, and practice spodomancy. It is probably far-fetched and sentimental (twee?) but picture the Mount as Mount Helicon, the home of the Muses or Mount Cyllene, the home of the Atlantides—a mythopoetic endeavour to conflate and alchemize daughters, Muses (who breathed divine song into Hesiod for his *Theogony*) and Pleiades (whose catasterism is marked by fleeing the sexual advances of Orion)—or as Mount Saint Vincent University, the current home of *Atlantis* (incidentally, like the journal, I started my journey at Acadia and managed its student literary magazine *estuary* before arriving here). A university, overlooking the harbour and basin, historically a safe haven for women and the queer community but not without clear colonizer-settler ties; MSVU is located on unceded ancestral Mi'kmaq territory.[2]

The type of critical thought employed here is indebted to feminist borderland theory and decolonial thinking like that by the late twentieth-century writer Gloria Anzaldúa. Anzaldúa's (1987) anticolonial mestiza consciousness meant embracing her pluriculture heritage as an inhabitant of the contested Mexico-Texas (US) border. In the spirit

of Anzaldúa's disruptive narrative warning against rigid and limiting national or cultural identity markers, marsh feminism is predicated on plurality, webs, rhizomatic roots and shoots systems, plant communities, upward-rising botanical branches and leaves, and (sub)marine and (sub-) and (extra)-terrestrial life. Marsh feminism shares deep affinities with transnational feminist thinking: see how its elasticity stretches it from the fringes of a shoal to the depths of a nest concealing eggs within. Notice the name change in 2013—when one *Atlantis* ends, (*Atlantis: A Women's Studies Journal*) another *Atlantis* comes into being: *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Justice, and Social Justice*. Marsh feminism moves beyond land imagery—it seeps and saturates; it flourishes; it floods; it cracks; it replenishes; it binds; it protects; it safeguards; and beckons for us to "wreathe lovely garlands in your hair,/Weave shoots of dill together, with slender hands" (Sappho, But you, O'Dika, 1-2) For as Sappho reminds us "the Graces prefer those who are wearing flowers,/And turn away from those who go uncrowned" ("But you, O Dika", 3-4).

Not exactly jumping from a Leucadian cliff *a la* Sappho (a heteropatriarchal spurious claim anyhow), feminist philosopher and psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray was nevertheless exiled from the polis—she lost her position at the Sorbonne —for critiquing the origins of the phallocentric Western tradition e.g., Plato, Freud, Lacan in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985). Irigaray has in recent years increasingly turned towards a kind of marsh feminism that is significantly predicated on ecological and social justice in what she calls "she – nature, woman, Goddess" (2013, *In the Beginning She Was*, 2).[3] She has returned to Nature and the pre-Socratics as a means to resurrect the importance of the maternal/feminine and to contest the loss of women's voices under the Master's logos, e.g., Plato or Aristotle. Her work further invites us take the earth, sometimes given that maternal appellation Mother, seriously. Thus, "a return to the marsh, replete with excess, *jouissance*, fluids, blood, milk and an 'undefined flow that dampens, wets, floods"(Irigaray 1995, 64) offers an alternative feminist perspective. Because "Western culture associates the mother with contagion and contamination […] madness and death" (Irigaray, cited in Murphy 2001, 59), the marsh's abject position ensures it remains subversive: a refuge from the patriarchal Western polis, inclusive of its colonial and imperial exploits, which is certainly threatened by a feminine wild(er)ness; hence the need to tame, to drain, to consume, to draw hard lines, and to contain her, if not expel her.

In the first essay published in *Atlantis*, Margaret Andersen writes of the need for a feminist literary tradition of women writers ranging from Christine de Pisan to Margaret Lawrence to destabilize this male-dominated field. Atwood figures prominently in this piece but Andersen revises a well-known paragraph from Atwood's *Survival*: *A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972) to reflect the "the significance of the discovery of 'their' [women's] literature":

> What a lost woman needs is a map of the territory, with her own position marked on it, so she can see where she is in relation to everything else. Literature is not only a mirror; it is also a map, if we can learn to read it as <u>our</u> literature, as the product of who and where we have been. We need such a map desperately, we need to know about here, because here is where we live. For the members of a sex [*sic*] or a culture, share knowledge of their place, their here, is not a luxury but a necessity. Without that knowledge we will not survive. (Andersen 1975, 9)

Saltmarshes are key to our survival too. Belatedly, recognized as buffers, salt marshes prove to be a place of necessary resilience. Scientists and poets alike know that saltmarshes can provide a "better coastal defense over conventional engineering, but project realization is often hampered by practical and governmental obstacles" (Baptist et al. 2021). And, yes, there are active efforts not to just to appreciate saltmarshes but to restore and even create them. But creating new ("artificial") ones is difficult, i.e., they need to grow organically.

Saltmarshes, the places where feminists, women, queer folks write and dwell, are under increasing threat by right-wing politics; despite sustaining life in significant ways, marshes are often taken for granted, used-up, exploited, extracted, eroded, polluted, and threatened. A loss of autonomy (bodily, politically, ecologically) ensues. This reality of course maps onto the erosion of gender and sexuality rights we are witnessing such as the reversal of Roe V. Wade and the abolishment of DEI policies in the old-made-new-again Atlantis. This essay therefore encourages those of us in *Atlantis* to embrace the marsh, to be comfortable with getting dirty and to see the beauty in a submerged tangled mess of rushes and reeds. For it is in these murky depths and secret cavernous dens that feminism not only lives or survives but also thrives.

Endnotes

1. Abortion became legal in Canada in 1988.

2. In 2021, MSVU's then President Dr. Ramona Lumpkin MSVU apologized on behalf of the University to the survivors, their families and communities, as well as all Indigenous Peoples, for the University's role in the tragedy of residential schools in Canada. The Sisters of Charity Halifax, the founders and previous owners of Mount Saint Vincent University, had members who staffed the Shubenacadie Residential School in Nova Scotia, which was open from 1930 to 1967, and the Cranbrook Residential School in British Columbia, which was open from 1890 to 1970.

3. Irigaray's advocacy for sexual difference has resulted in her being regarded as a trans exclusionary radical feminist, however, a careful reading of her work, especially of the "other woman," in works like *Speculum* resists bio-essentialism.

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Of Two-Spirit and Indigenous Queerness: Indigenous Queerness Today

by Nicolas Côté-Saucier

Abstract: This article examines Indigenous queerness by moving beyond the literal definition of "two-spirit" to explore the diversity and commonalities of Indigenous queer identities. Through detailed analysis of three distinct examples—the Diné/Navajo *Nádleehi*, the Shoshone *Tainna wa'ippe*, and the Inuit *Sipiniq*—this article demonstrates the vast differences in Indigenous gender systems while identifying four unifying characteristics: spirituality, fluid notions of gender/sexuality, connections to tradition, and a state of "in-betweenness." This article concludes by examining contemporary indigiqueer realities, highlighting ongoing challenges such as historical disconnection, community homophobia, racism in queer spaces, and lack of intersectional approaches, while acknowledging positive social changes and increasing representation in mainstream media.

Keywords: colonialism; Indigenous queerness; indigiqueer; intersectionality; sexuality and gender diversity; two-spirit

Résumé : Cet article examine l'altersexualité autochtone (Indigenous queerness) en allant au-delà de la définition littérale de « bispiritualité/Two-Spirit » pour explorer la diversité et les points communs des identités altersexuelles autochtones. À travers une analyse détaillée de trois exemples distincts - les Nádleehi Diné/Navajo, les Tainna wa'ippe Shoshone et les Sipiniit Inuits - cet article démontre les vastes différences dans les systèmes de genre autochtones tout en identifiant quatre caractéristiques unificatrices : la spiritualité, la fluidité de genre/sexualité, le rapport à la tradition et l'état d'« entre-deux » (in-betweenness). Cet article conclut en examinant les réalités indigiqueers contemporaines, en soulignant les défis persistants tels que la déconnexion historique, l'homophobie dans les communautés, le racisme dans les espaces queers et le manque d'approches intersectionnelles, tout en reconnaissant les changements sociaux positifs et l'augmentation de la représentation dans les médias populaires.

Mots clés : colonialisme; altersexualité autochtone; indigiqueer; intersectionnalité; diversité de sexualité et pluralité de genre; bispiritualité

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Many academic works explain the origin of the concept of *two-spirit* as well as define it in different—sometimes contradicting—ways (Adams and Phillips 2006; Anguksuar 1997; Brown 1997; Driskill 2010; 2016; Driskill, Finley, Gilley, and Morgensen 2011; Driskill, Justice, Miranda, and Tatonnetti 2011; Gilley 2006; Jacobs, Thomas, and Lang 1997; Justice, Rifkin, and Schneider 2010; Meyer-Cook and Labelle 2004; Morgensen 2011; Roscoe 1998; Walters et al. 2006; Wilson 2011). The term is also critiqued for imposing foreign cultural concepts, erasing the diversity of Indigenous forms of queerness, evicting sexuality and/or presenting a "noble magical savage" im-

age (Driskill 2010; 2016; Driskill, Finley, Gilley, and Morgensen 2011; Driskill, Justice, Miranda, and Tatonnetti 2011; Gilley 2006; Justice, Rifkin, and Schneider 2010; Laing 2021; Lépine-Dubois 2018; Meyer-Cook and Labelle 2004; Roscoe 1998). For these reasons, the term two-spirit is increasingly rejected especially among activist groups and, in recent years, a new word—*indigiqueer* (sometimes spelled *indigequeer*)—has emerged and has become increasingly popular.

In this present article, I take the critiques of the two-spirit concept and look into Indigenous queerness and indigiqueer identities. Bridging older and more recent literature, I will focus on Indigenous queerness today, on the diversity of identities, roles, and models it can take, as well as the similitudes. This is important because, working on Indigenous queerness with indigiqueer individuals, (non-Indigenous) queer organizations, and academic researchers over the past decade, I have noticed a recurring confusion when it comes to the subject of defining Indigenous queerness. This confusion comes from a decontextualized use of the literature, with people sometimes disregarding the age of the accounts (using decades-old accounts as if they portrayed today's realities), sometimes focusing on a problem rather than on the general lived experience (thus magnifying the importance of the problem), and, especially, often treating Indigenous Nations as one homogenous cultural group and consequently treating "two-spirit" as one homogenous queer category/reality.

Therefore, the objective of this article is to explore and contextualize the recent literature on Indigenous queerness to paint a portrait of current indigiqueer realities. This objective is three-fold: 1) presenting how the "two-spirit" label groups very different realities under its umbrella that should not be lumped together; 2) presenting how, beyond their diversity, the many queer Indigenous identities, roles, models, and traditions still have four main characteristics in common (queerness, indigeneity, spirituality, and in-betweenness); and 3) presenting a few common elements that emerge from the more recent literature as shaping the current indigiqueer experience (disconnect to the past, homophobia, racism, the lack of intersectionality, dire vulnerability, and social change). This three-fold objective of presenting Indigenous queerness today translates into three sections.

First, I will present three very different examples to show the immense diversity amongst Indigenous cultures: the Nadleehé of the Diné/Navajo, the Tainna wa'ippe of the Shoshone, and the Sipiniq/Sipiniit of the Inuit. These examples show how the roles and models create very different experiences and identities although they are often—wrongfully—seen as "the same thing" by most researchers and policy makers.

Once the diversity is acknowledged, clarified, and exemplified, I will enter the second section of this article in which, using the same three examples, I focus on the similarities of experience and identification of indigiqueer individuals. I will draw out the main characteristics that are at the core of all or most indigenously queer roles, models, and identities as presented in the literature.

This article culminates in a presentation of the current realities and, especially, struggles experienced by indigiqueer individuals today as recurrently expressed in the literature and observed in the fieldwork of my own research on the experience of queer Indigenous individuals in Québec.

Three Very Different Examples

One recurrent critique of the term *two-spirit* is the way it reduces a very large diversity of roles, models, and lived experiences to one limited concept, thus erasing difference (Driskill 2010; 2016; Gilley 2006; Jacobs, Thomas, and Lang 1997; Meyer-Cook and Labelle 2004; Roscoe 1998). In his book *Changing Ones: Third and Fourth Genders in Native North America*, Roscoe (1998) documented over 155 tribes in North America that have more than two genders.

To present the diversity of the different sexuality and gender roles and models under the two-spirit umbrella, I will explore three examples of sexuality and gender norms in three different Indigenous cultures of North America. These are not meant to be complete and exhaustive presentations of Indigenous gender systems but overviews to help un-

derstand the full complexity of Indigenous queerness. The following examples are among the most documented and still represent a living cultural practice in their respective cultures (although the practices may have changed to reflect current realities).

Example #1 : Nádleeh (Diné/Navajo[1])

The first example is from the Diné Nation (formerly known as Navajo) which is situated at the border of Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Utah, and for which the gender system is well documented. The presentation of this example is based on the works of Roscoe (1998), Lang (1997), Epple (1997) and, foremost, the works of Jennifer Nez Denetdale (2006; 2009; 2020), Carrie House (1997), and Wesley Thomas (1997), who are themselves Diné/Navajo.

Thomas explains that Diné culture had a sex-based gender system with five genders although Roscoe (1998) saw only three, since three of these genders bear the same title. "Sex-based" here means that biological sex is the primary marker for assigning gender roles. There is (1) the feminine female gender called '*asdzáán*, which is translated as "woman" and (2) the masculine male gender called *hastiin*, which can be translated as "man." Then there are three genders called *nádleeh* (also spelled *nadle* and *nadleehi*) which means "person who changes." The (3) masculine-female *nádleeh* is female-bodied and has a masculine social role with a masculine gender expression; (4) the feminine-male *nádleeh* is male-bodied and has feminine social role with a feminine gender expression and (5) the intersex *nádleeh* is born with a physical configuration that is not clearly one sex or another and can have any gender role.

This sex-based system is similar to the western one where *'asdzáán* and feminine-male *nádleeh*, the western equivalent of trans-women, follow feminine gender norms wearing feminine clothing and having associated occupations like gathering and weaving, while *hastiin* and masculine-female *nádleeh* (trans-men) follow masculine gender roles, wearing masculine clothing and working masculine occupations like hunting. One can see the word *nádleeh* as similar to "trans" in western cultures. Epple cites a *nádleeh* informant who sees herself as "a complete woman, just without a vagina" (Epple 1997, 181). But another *nádleeh* informant refers to themself as a "queen" but not a "woman," rather a man attracted to men with a "womanly" occupation (Epplie 1997, 181). Epple confirms that "drag queens" are *nádleeh,* no matter how they live their lives off the stage.

Except for the intersex *nádleeh,* no one is born *nádleeh;* everyone is assigned a sex-concordant gender. When a child grows older, if they develop interest in occupations and behaviour associated with the other gender, they become *nádleeh*. This can also come later in life. Epple (1997) gives the example of an informant who became *nádleeh* after the death of their mother to take on the role of mother for their young siblings.

This gender system also has a spiritual aspect to it, although minor. A *nádleeh* plays a big part of the Diné origin story and, therefore, they are seen as important and spiritual. Children or teenagers who are identified as *nádleeh* will often be steered towards spiritual, leadership, or mediation adult roles. Roscoe (1998) quotes a recorded comment from the 1930s stating, "They are leaders just like President Roosevelt. […] We must respect a *nadle*. They are, somehow, sacred and holy" (Roscoe 1998, 43 quoting Hill 1935, 274).

One interesting point is how the Diné conceived of homosexuality and relationships with five genders. While gender was sex-based, norms regarding sexuality and relationships were gender-based. Homosexuality was therefore seen as "inconceivable"(Roscoe 1998, 162) but defined as a relationship of two persons of the same gender, not the same sex, as shown in the table below.

Table 1: Diné Sexual Relationships and Classifications I: Traditional and Transitional as found in Thomas 1997, 162 (colour-coding added)

Gender categories	Feminine female	Masculine male	**Masculine female (*nádleehi*)**	**Feminine male (*nádleehi*)**
Feminine female	inconceivable	heterosexual	heterosexual	relationship rare
Masculine male	heterosexual	inconceivable	relationship rare	heterosexual
Masculine female (*nádleehi*)	heterosexual	relationship rare	inconceivable	relationship rare
Feminine male (*nádleehi*)	relationship rare	heterosexual	relationship rare	inconceivable

Thomas (1997) explains that this conceptualization no longer existed at the time of his study but more recent works like Denetdale (2006; 2009; 2020) and Estrada (2011) show that the term *nádleehi* is still used and the Diné's conceptualization and classification of gender and sexuality has merely changed yet remained mostly the same. With western colonial influence and the impacts of HIV in the Diné communities, the relationship norms and classifications shifted to a more sex-based and binary classification. With this shift, any relationship between two individuals of the same sex, no matter their gender, is now considered homosexual, while any relationship between two individuals of the same sex, no matter their gender, is considered heterosexual. Thomas (1997) also notes that the intersex *nádleeh* has virtually disappeared from the contemporary gender system as intersex babies are now generally and automatically assigned a binary sex through surgery. Much in the same way as it was then, the term *nádleehi* is now used for gender non-conforming individuals which includes effeminate men, "half woman half man" (Estrada 2011, 169) non-binary gender identities, trans-gendered individuals and drag queens (Denetdale 2020; Estrada 2011).

Another way the Diné gender system has changed is in the inclusion of bisexuality. Interestingly, in the Diné gender system, there is no prescriptive sexual behaviour: nothing says that a masculine male has to be the penetrator (the "top") and that being penetrated is a feminine behaviour. Consequently, although homosexual relationships were "inconceivable" as romantic unions, homosexual intercourses were seen as inappropriate at worst; they were "permitted although rare" (Thomas 1997, 167). This might explain the absence of pre-colonial formal models of bisexuality. However, as Thomas notes, bisexuality is now "practiced among contemporary [Diné/]Navajo males and females" (Thomas 1997, 167) and it is part of today's relationship norms and classifications. Therefore, the lack of pre-colonial documentation is of little importance.

Example #2 : Tainna wa'ippe (Shoshone)

The second example I will explore is the Shoshone three-genders system. The Shoshone are situated in the Plateau region in the North West of the United States, geographically close to the Diné and yet culturally very different. The presentation of this example is based on Lang's works (1997; 2016).

The Shoshone have three genders: a masculine gender called *tainna* which translates to "man," a feminine gender called *wa'ippe* which translates to "woman," and a third gender called *tainna wa'ippe* which translates literally to "man woman." This third gender is seen as both a man and a woman, masculine and feminine.

In Shoshone society, gender has a strong spiritual aspect which takes form as visionary experiences. *Tainna wa'ippe* experience a powerful vision about their identity, their role in the community, and their gender: "The vision causes them to adopt the ways and clothing of the other sex […]" (Lang 1997, 106). No matter their sex, *tainna wa'ippe* have their own gender norms which blend the two others. They are seen as born with the gift of being medicine people and will often have elevated status and social roles linked to healing, leadership, and war.

There is also no sexual prohibition regarding homosexuality. *Tainna wa'ippe* are not seen as "gay" or "lesbian" since they engage sexually and romantically with the two other genders. However, *tainna wa'ippe* cannot have a sexual or romantic relationship with another *tainna wa'ippe* not because it would be homosexual but because it would be incest: All *tainna wa'ippe* are seen as spiritual sisters. Homosexual relationships among *tainna* (men) or among *wa'ippe* (women) are permitted but are seen as "gay" and "lesbian" relationships not as *tainna wa'ippe* because of the absence of spiritual calling: "A gay person, as opposed to a *tainna wa'ippe*, is defined as lacking the spiritual element, acting on personal preference instead of a manifesting spiritual power" (Lang 1997, 106).

While occupation was central in the Diné gender system, for the Shoshone it is the spiritual aspect that is central. Biological sex is inconsequential and the gender expression of *tainna wa'ippe* is not a full or partial switch of gender norms as it is for the *nádleeh*, but rather a mix closer to western non-binary or gender-queer gender models along with a strong spiritual aspect.

Example #3 : Sipiniq (Inuit)

Before we get comfortable with a premature idea of Indigenous queerness, let us look at a third example which differs radically from the two discussed above and has no western cultural translation. The third example comes from Inuit cultures of the Arctic Circle in the north of Québec, Canada's northern territories, Alaska, and Siberia as researched by Bernard Saladin d'Anglure since 1960 (Saladin d'Anglure 2006, 6). For this example, I will concentrate on his more recent book *Inuit Stories of Being and Rebirth: Gender, Shamanism, and the Third Sex* (2018). In this book, Saladin d'Anglure revisits, summarizes, and updates his life's work. I will also use Lang's (2016) summary of other works on the topic.

In Inuit culture, there are, technically, only two genders, masculine male (man) and feminine female (woman). And yet there are individuals called *sipiniq* (plural: *sipiniit*). *Sipiniq* means "an infant whose sex changed at birth" (literally "split infant" from the verb sipi (to split) for the fetus' penis that "split" to become a vulva). When a baby is born, one of the two genders is attributed to the newborn, not based on genitalia and physical configuration but based on spiritual (reincarnation) and practical reasons (necessity). One can also become *sipiniq* through shamanic transformation.

Reincarnation is very important in Inuit culture and a newborn is seen as a reincarnation of a deathly ill or deceased family member. If the newborn is of the opposite sex from this person, there is "sipiniuniq (change of sex): a fetus or baby can choose a sex other than the one of the person it is reincarnating" (Saladin d'Anglure 2018, 174). This change happens in the womb or at birth. For example, a grandmother may have died very recently while expressing the wish to be reincarnated as a human baby. Days/weeks/months later, a grand-daughter may be giving birth. The baby would be seen as the reincarnation of grandmother regardless of the sex and would bear the name of the grandmother (and of all the previous incarnations) in addition to their own; her parents would call her "grandmother." The person being reincarnated can even express the wish to be reborn in the opposite gender. Saladin d'Anglure gives the example of *Iqallijuq:*

> I was a *sipiniq* because *Savviurtalik* [her grand-father of whom she is the reincarnation] had wanted to live again as a woman and not as a man. He no longer wanted to hunt because hunting took too much effort and for him meant a high risk of getting cold. So, I had become a girl after changing sex at birth. I previously had a penis but then got a vulva; this is how it is with sipiniit. (Saladin d'Anglure 2018, 174)

Sipiniit babies are raised as the gender of their previous incarnation until they reach puberty, at which point they can choose to remain as the gender which they were raised or be reassigned as the opposite gender. From that moment on they will follow their new gender's norms but they will still be considered *sipiniit*.

A more practical reason not to assign gender based on the sex of the infant is when there are not enough people of a given gender in the village to allow for the reproduction of the labour assigned to that gender (for example: not enough men to have a full hunting party). As Lang (2016) explains:

> If there were not enough boys in a community or family, some fathers would teach their daughters hunting skills and raise them to fulfill a hunter's role. Among some Inuit groups, for example, such girls learned to hunt seals from a kayak, acquired a quasi-masculine status, and wore men's garb. […] While the "man-woman" featured in [Saladin] d'Anglure's 1992 article bore no less than six reincarnation-related masculine names, he/she was raised to fulfill a man's role due to a lack of boys; his/her father decided that he "needed a helper to support him in hunting." (Lang 2016, 306)

Like the reincarnation-based *sipiniit*, once the child reaches puberty, they could choose to remain of their labour-assigned gender or be reassigned the gender corresponding to their sex. From that moment on they would follow the chosen gender's norms. However, Saladin d'Anglure explains in recent works (2018) that the assignation of gender for labour needs is no longer practiced.

Non-*sipiniq*—meaning individuals whose gender "matches" their gender assigned at birth—cannot normally change gender once they reach puberty; it only happens in the womb or at birth. But there is an exception to this rule. A person, usually a child, could have their gender changed after birth through a shamanistic transformation: "A shaman could also authorize a gender change to heal a seriously ill child. The child would receive a new name and identity from someone of the opposite sex or even from one of the shaman's helping spirits to prevent evil spirits from recognizing the child" (Saladin d'Anglure 2018, 222). The child will then be considered *sipiniq.* They will be dressed according to norms of the new gender, their hair will be cut or left to grow, their name will be changed to a new one, and they will be encouraged to engage in activities of their new gender, including adopting boyish/girlish behaviour and associating with other children of their new gender.

Sipiniit often have roles of mediation and spiritual or political leadership and have specific roles in certain ceremonies. This is not necessarily because of a "spiritual power," as with the *tainna wa'ippe,* but because their unique life experience puts them in an ideal situation to understand both man and woman, act as mediators, or make decisions understanding all aspects of a society in which everything is divided in two genders. *Sipiniit* are not automatically shamans, and shamans can be of any gender (*sipiniit* or not). But there is certainly a spiritual aspect to being *sipiniq*.

As for sexuality in Inuit culture, it is strongly heteronormative—meaning heterosexuality is enforced and homosexuality is forbidden: "Homosexuality, for example, was severely disapproved of even though the transgender shamans who sometimes practiced homosexuality were thought to be the most powerful" (Saladin d'Anglure 2018, 221). Homosexuality is allowed only if one of the partners is *sipiniq* (of the same sex). S*ipiniit* who have changed gender at puberty are even seen as better partners than non- *sipiniit* because they understand the burden of the gender norms of their partner. Two *sipiniit* together as a couple is considered the best pairing and communities will often try to pair *sipiniit* together.

So, the "Inuit two-spirit" is not a gender role in the classic sense since it conforms to binary man or woman gender roles in their society. It is not really a "third gender" since *sipiniit* do not have a specific gender role and are never both at the same time. Yet, it is clearly a form of gender queerness that does not fit western heteronormative and heteropatriarchal models. It does not fit even the non-heteronormative western models, which allow for a certain fluidity.

These are merely three examples showing the vast diversity of Indigenous queerness. These are *not* three main categories of gender systems among Indigenous societies in North America but three cases within a plethora. Many past and

present gender systems and gender roles and models are understudied, some even lost, but more are being documented in the present, not just as pre-colonial systems. Readers are invited to explore how these examples of Indigenous queerness have changed and how they are lived today. I used these three examples but could also have drawn examples from the Zuni *lhamana* (Roscoe 1992), the Lakota *winkte* and Dakota *winkte* (which integrated very differently in their communities) (Cooper 2018; Little Thunder 1997), and the Cherokee Asegi *udanto* (Driskill 2016) among others.

Main Characteristics of Indigenous Queerness

The three examples presented above show how diverse Indigenous forms of queerness can be but, beyond their differences, key elements unite them and allow us to delineate what Indigenous queerness is and is not. In this section, I will focus on these similarities using the three examples presented above to illustrate how these common characteristics are expressed in various ways. Of course, indigeneity and queerness are two fundamental elements of these three examples but other recurring elements arose from the literature as a "core" or "essence" of Indigenous queerness. I grouped these elements into four main characteristics: (1) spirituality, (2) gender over sexuality, (3) relation to tradition, and (4) in-betweenness. I decided to focus on characteristics that differentiate Indigenous queerness from non-Indigenous queerness.

Spirituality

Spirituality is central to the concept of "two-spirit" (Anguksuar 1997, 2010; Driskill 2010, 2016; Lang 1997; 2016). As explained above, this focus on spirituality was an important strategic tactic to help the acceptance of queer individuals in otherwise homophobic and conservative communities. However, this tactic did not invent or fabricate the importance of spirituality, rather it magnified a significance that was already there.

Almost all Indigenous alternative gender (meaning other than the man/woman binary) and sexuality (meaning other than heterosexuality) identities have a spiritual component. This spiritual aspect is not always central or important but is still present. As we have seen with the three very different examples presented previously, spirituality is central in the Shoshone three-gender system and the Inuit *sipiniq* while being a minor aspect of the Diné five-genders system. Throughout the literature, spirituality is often presented as the source of the distinction between gay, lesbian, and transgender identities and the two-spirit identity: "Two-Spirit and gay clashes. Gay is flesh-centered; Two-Spirit is spirit-oriented" (Lépine-Dubois 2018 57). As in the example of the Shoshone gender system, queer individuals who are not *tainna wa'ippe,* like cis-gendered gay men (*tainna*) and cis-gendered lesbian women (*wa'ippe*), lack the spiritual calling of the *tainna wa'ippe*. This begs the question of whether these queer Indigenous individuals, the gay *tainna* and the lesbian *wa'ippe,* are considered two-spirit or whether only the *tainna wa'ippe* identify as two-spirit—a question that is unfortunately not answered in the literature. Nevertheless, spirituality affects all Shoshone genders and the fact that the gay *tainna* and the lesbian *wa'ippe* identities are defined in relation to spirituality (as lacking or rejecting it) shows that spirituality is still important. One common symbol of spirituality is the feather which, in many Indigenous cultures, at least in the northeast of North America, is associated with spirituality. This is why one can often see feathers in "two-spirit" imagery. It is a subtle yet ever-present symbol.

The importance of spirituality is emphasized in the literature to the point of incurring counter-discourse. As with the gay *tainna* and the lesbian *wa'ippe* Shoshones, queer Indigenous individuals who prefer to use labels like "gay," "lesbian," "trans," and "non-binary" sometimes reject cultural-specific terms and labels or the two-spirit label because of the pressure of spirituality. As Meyer-Cook and Labelle (2004) explain, most Indigenous people have converted, often by force, to a form of Christianity and live with a legacy of multi-generational trauma relating to religion and spirituality. Their traditional spiritual language is not something that is accessible everywhere and for everyone but many still express aspects of spirituality in other terms.

The main way queer Indigenous identities, roles, and models are associated with spirituality without using the spirituality language is through the caregiving/caretaking language: "Caregiving is perceived as an important and integral

role of two-spirit people, and it is clear that many two-spirit people already engage in caregiving or expect to provide care for others at some point during their lifetime" (Evans-Campbell et al. 2007, 88). Meyer-Cook and Labelle use similar language stating, "Many people who are Two-Spirited are active in their communities today, and are using the gifts they have been given. […] They use their gifts in the service of community […]" (Meyer-Cook and Labelle 2004, 36). For Driskill (2010; 2016) and many others, it is clear that caretaking/caregiving is part of the spiritual medicine role of queer Indigenous individuals: "Two-Spirit asserts ceremonial and spiritual communities and traditions and relationships with medicine as central in constituting various identities, marking itself as distinct from dominant constructions of GLBTQ identities" (Driskill 2010, 73).

Gender and/or Sexuality

The distinction between gender conceptualization and sexuality conceptualization in the many forms, roles, models, and identities under the "two-spirit" umbrella is quite complex and convoluted. One cause is that, for over a century, anthropologists did not differentiate between gender pluralism and sexuality diversity (Jacob, Thomas, and Lang 1997; Roscoe 1998; Saladin d'Anglure 2006, 2018). For example, the Inuit *sipiniit* were thought to be homosexuals: "Cross-dressed individuals were long believed to be homosexual, but only a tiny minority actually were. In fact, they should be viewed through the lens of gender rather than sexual orientation" (Saladin d'Anglure 2016, 221). Although this has changed in the light of Queer Studies, the umbrella "two-spirit" still mixes every form of queerness almost indifferently: "The term Two-Spirit is presently used to describe Aboriginal people with different roles or identities, including gays, lesbians, other genders (not-men, not-women), those of multiple genders (hermaphrodites and bisexuals), transvestites, transexuals, transgendered people, drag queens and butches" (Meyer-cook and Labelle 2004, 30).

Gender and sexuality, previously undifferentiated, became separate in the literature after the 1990s. In an attempt to differentiate, the literature split into two sides: the spirit and the flesh. That is, there are those who place "emphasis on gender as constitutive or two-spirit identity (in opposition to any notion of a sexual minority identity)" (Hames-Garcia 2013, 393) and those on the other side who embrace "sexuality and desire as central to the project of queer indigenous studies" (Hames-Garcia 2013, 393). Since the 1990s, the literature on "two-spirit" as a gender concept has become more prevalent in academia thus downplaying sexuality. This conscious focus on gender aimed to distance the "two-spirit" label from sexuality amidst the HIV crisis and aligned with queer portrayals in the media in the 1990s and 2000s as non-sexual, "inoffensive" funny gay best friends (Hames-Garcia 2013; Rothmann 2013).

A new wave of literature emerged just before the 2010s (Brown 2014; Driskill, Finley, Gilley and Morgensen, 2011; Driskill, Justice, Miranda and Tatonnetti, 2011; Justice, Rifkin, and Schneider 2010; Morgensen 2011; Wilson 2011). This wave addressed sexuality *and* gender. This shift recognized that downplaying sexuality misrepresented reality and painted a false image of the two-spirit lived experience, even causing erasure: "Many Indigenous GLBTQ2 people testify to the erotic being central to their definition and experiences of Two-Spirit identity, community, and spirituality" (Driskill, Finley, Gilley and Morgensen 2011, 16). This division of gender and sexuality was helpful to break from hetero-patriarchal practices that plagued the "berdache studies," but did not represent Indigenous worldviews in which spirituality, gender, and sexuality are integral aspects of being in the world (Cooper 2013).

This shift is political and ideological. By bringing sexuality back into focus, Two-Spirit Studies connects with Queer Studies and its critiques of (hetero)patriarchy, modernity, and colonialism to create the Queer Indigenous Studies. It connects to queer activism and queer struggles. In *Sovereign Erotics*, Driskill, Justice, Miranda and Tatonetti use the concept of the "erotic" as a way to connect sexuality, spirituality, and decolonialism: "The erotic, then, is not only about sexuality—though it is certainly about that—but also […] a return to our bodies as whole human beings [which] can disrupt colonial gender regime that have attempted to disavow and colonize indigenous genders and sexualities" (Driskill, Justice, Miranda and Tatonetti 2011, 3). Through this concept, they recognize that the control of Indigenous sexualities and genders "is a central tactic of colonial oppression" (Driskill, Justice, Miranda and Tatonetti 2011, 3-4) and resistance to colonialism, past and present, must include sexuality and gender.

Because of these shifts in the literature, any study on Indigenous queerness must pay attention to the context of each publication. What seem like contradictions on the importance of sexuality are most likely a result of emphasis on gender, and a resultant downplaying of sexuality, caused by political climates and ideologies.

Relation to Tradition

A recurrent element that often arises in the literature is how queer Indigenous individuals relate to tradition differently than non-Indigenous queer individuals. As Driskill explains:

> While radical white-dominated queer movements often attempt to reject religion because of institutionalized homophobia and heterosexism or—on the other hand—create spiritual movements and communities that often appropriate Native practices, Native Two-Spirit/GLBTQ people insist that we already have a place within traditional religious and spiritual life. It is this part of our identities that many Two-Spirit movements emphasize. (Driskill 2010, 86)

It is common among queer people of colour to have to choose between their queer identity and their ethnic identity (Driskill 2010; Lang 2016). Indigiqueer individuals tend to see themselves as Indigenous first, queer second: "One of our major emphases is that we are Indian first, we're Navajo, we're Pima, we're Apaches. And we do not divide our group and say that we're gay, and making us different. We're all Indians, and that's the way we portray our feelings, and that's the priority in terms of our organization" (Erna Pahe (Diné/Navajo) about GAI in Lang 2016, 312-313) Driskill (2010) explains this by the fact that Indigenous cultures have a traditional place for queer individuals and, therefore, queer individuals do not really have to choose queerness over their Indigenous tradition. On the other hand, if they choose white-dominated queer communities or identities, their indigeneity is erased.

The erasure of Indigenous queerness in queer communities is real and critiqued by many (Adams and Philips 2006; Driskill 2010; Driskill, Finley, Gilley, Morgensen, 2011; Gilley 2006; and others). According to Adams and Philips's (2006) study, "Despite feelings of acceptance in the lesbian or gay community, all participants thought that their ethnicity was invisible within these communities" (283) The racism is real and leads many queer Indigenous individuals to find they "have much more in common with those of 'straight' Native Americans than with those of white lesbians and gays, or even other LGBTQ people of color" (Lang 2016). But Lang (2016) also states that the peer pressure to "be Indigenous first" is just as real.

In the end, it is a recurring element that queer Indigenous people are much more often connected to tradition than non-Indigenous queer individuals. For them, tradition not only represents their indigeneity but also spirituality, history, community, and traditional practices.

In-betweenness

The last recurring element is both ubiquitous and rare. While other elements like spirituality or tradition are explicitly stated in the literature, the in-betweenness is a very frequent recurring element that is almost never directly stated. I first encountered this concept transposed to Indigenous Studies in a geography thesis by Lépine-Dubois (2018) on the movement of two-spirit individuals in cities. Drawing from Baas (2010; 2013), Lépine-Dubois (2018) places "in-betweenness" as a desired position characteristic of queer Indigenous individuals. In-betweenness is a state that is not belonging to one or another category and is a bit of both at the same time: not woman but not man either, both and neither at the same time, in-between the Indigenous identity and the queer identity, in-between cities and communities, between the spirit world and the material world, between the past and the future. As Meyer-Cook and Labelle state:

> They are of two worlds, the world of the differently gendered, and the world of being Native. […] To achieve a sound identity, Two-Spirited people need to simultaneously follow two tracts of identity formation: first as Native people or people of a minority group; and second, as people who are differently gendered." (Meyer-Cook and Labelle 2004, 38)

Gilley further states: "Two-Spirit men must, as Ben put it, 'keep one foot in the gay world' where their sexuality is accepted, and 'one foot in the Indian world' where their cultural heritage lies" (Gilley 2006, 89).

This state of in-betweenness is also a state of constant change, shifting from one identity to another, navigating communities, and it is the reason Roscoe (1998) titled his seminal book on Indigenous queerness *Changing Ones*. More concretely, Lang talks of

> two-spirit women, rather than subscribing to rigid European categories of "gay," "lesbian," or "straight," will rather self-label as bisexual due to their recognition of the fact that sexual preferences may change in the course of an individual's lifetime. In other cases, they will use the term "lesbian" in a sense that includes the possibility of having sexual relationships with both women and men; in still others, they will use "lesbian" synonymous with "man-woman," referring to contemporary manly women on the reservations including their relationships that are by no means exclusively homosexual." (Lang 2016, 315-316)

This in-betweenness is even found in concrete examples like in the high proportion of queer Indigenous people in urban settings, how they move from reserves to cities and back (Lépine-Dubois 2018; Medicine 1997; Ristock, Zoccole, and Passante 2010), how they engage in intertribal concerns (Driskill 2010), and the number of "mixed heritage" individuals among Indigenous individuals who identify as queer indigenous individuals (Lépine-Dubois 2018; Lang 1997). This in-betweenness is the reason intersectionality is absolutely necessary when talking Indigenous queerness.

Current Realities and Struggles

So far, I have addressed diversity and difference among Indigenous forms of queerness but also how, despite their differences, some elements emerge in the literature as recurrent. The four main characteristics of Indigenous queerness are not always agreed upon by all authors but are recurrent enough to provide a set of unifying characteristics. However, these characteristics tend to focus on past realities and on identity rather than experience. To create a more accurate portrayal of the current situation of indigiqueer realities, we need to switch from a focus on identity to a focus on the lived experience of indigiqueer individuals. Recent literature emphasizes the struggles and hardships impacting indigiqueer lives but there are occasionally silver linings of positive experiences that are also documented.

It is important to remember the diversity of socio-cultural contexts that shape indigiqueer experiences. The realities reported in the recent literature should never be looked at without a cultural and social context. The reality of one Indigenous group can be very different from the reality of another, as we have seen above. Therefore, although I have tried to remain as general as possible, the elements presented below are based on indigiqueer realities in Québec. These elements are not only applicable to Québec and have been chosen because they resonate with many other accounts and studies on indigiqueerness.

Disconnect with the Past

The body of literature on two-spirit and Indigenous queerness is quite meagre because of the queer models, roles, and traditions in specific Indigenous cultures – and even in given multi-nations territories—only a few have been studied and recorded, and thus the knowledge is incomplete. Much of the literature is decades old. Older research can still provide contextual historical information but it is often riddled with biases. Outside academic sources, while some Indigenous nations may have many historical accounts and oral stories on queer Indigenous traditions, roles, and models but, for most, there is little historical information with which to work and the rare accounts that can be found are often two or three centuries old, and are not very reliable because they are biased or describe very little (Bousquet, Hamel-Charest, and Mapachee 2020, 117). These accounts, academic or otherwise, are critical and necessary to create a continuum. The absence of a documented historical past creates a disconnect between the past and present and hinders the recognition and sense of belonging of queer individuals (Bousquet, Hamel-Charest, and Mapachee 2020; Laing 2021).

The problem is enhanced by the Residential Schools system which erased whatever (and whoever) did not fit "Christian values"—including heteronormativity, heteropatriarchy, and binary notions of gender—and taught homophobia and transphobia. This is paired with an AIDS crisis which saw the death of a large proportion of a generation of queer individuals and even more violent acts of homophobia. More than a loss of knowledge and tradition, these events led to the literal killing of queer Indigenous individuals which results, today, in an absence of queer elders and mentors (Laing 2021; Lépine-Dubois 2018; Pullen Sansfaçon, Lee and Faddoul, 2022). Without historical accounts and queer elders and mentors, many queer Indigenous individuals have no means to connect their queer identity and their Indigenous identity. One of Liang's participants stated:

> [I am] on a constant quest to find our lost stories and teachings and ceremonies and languages specifically in my Haudenosaunee community. I feel kind of envious that there are other nations and other communities who retained that, and who have those words to describe two-spirit people in their language, and who have the teachings of what it means and what your roles were, and what your responsibilities were." (Liang 2021, 121)

Homophobia/Transphobia in Indigenous Communities

Many authors speak of the presence of homophobia and transphobia in Indigenous communities (Adams and Philips 2006; Anguksuar 2010; Bousquet, Hamel-Charest, and Mapachee 2020; Meyer-Cook 1998; Meyer-Cook and Labelle 2004; Lépine-Dubois 2018). Homophobia and transphobia are still a reality for most queer Indigenous individuals today but, in general, acceptance has increased. Although no recent works talk about this growing acceptance, it can be seen in the way people on reserves are more open to discussing the subject, as witnessed by Bousquet, Hamel-Charest, and Mapachee (2020). But these authors also note that the openness to discussing queerness is limited, slow, and often uncomfortable. Where academic literature fails, non-academic literature (Chacaby and Plummer 2016; Whitehead 2017; Whitehead and Abdou 2023; Youssef 2020) provides many accounts of this greater acceptance. The best example comes from current events: on July 3rd 2021, Kahsennenhawe Sky-Deer became the first woman and the first openly queer person to be elected as Grand Chief of the Kanien'kehá:ka/Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke. This is a major change as the Kanien'keha:ka is one of the two most powerful and influential Indigenous nations in Québec.

Racism in Queer Communities

While they are sometimes victims of homophobia in their Indigenous communities, indigiqueer individuals are also sometimes victims of racism in queer communities (Lépine-Dubois 2018; Meyer-Cook and Labelle 2004; Pullen Sansfaçon, Lee, and Faddoul 2022). This situation is far from unique to Indigenous people: racism in queer communities is a problem that has been identified throughout the literature.[2] As Lang (2016) explains, this racism leads many queer Indigenous individuals to choose Indigenous or other queer persons of colour as partners.

I have observed a recent wave of interest towards Indigenous inclusion and representation that arose following the Truth and Reconciliation movement which led to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (September 30th), and the creation of many committees, in addition to extensive media coverage of a conjecture of Indigenous events in the early 2020s (mainly the discovery of unmarked graves in residential schools, the death of Joyce Echaquan, and the Wet'suwet'en resistance). This wave and its impacts have yet to be documented but it has raised awareness and created opportunities for Indigenous peoples.

In the wake of the Truth and Reconciliation movement, many queer organizations are making an effort toward representation of Indigenous people in different ways. Although these efforts matter, queer Indigenous individuals still face racism in their everyday lives when they interact with the local and global queer communities (Adams and Phillips 2006; 2009; Lépine-Dubois 2018; Pullen Sansfaçon, Lee and Faddoul 2022). Non-Indigenous queer organizations are often poorly equipped to address Indigenous issues and queer Indigenous individuals are, therefore, often left feeling like they do not belong.

Settler Colonialism and the Lack of Intersectional Approaches

The racism mentioned above leads many queer Indigenous individuals to feel out of place in queer communities, and homophobia leads them to feel they do not belong in Indigenous communities. This stems from a systemic lack of recognition of intersectionality and intersectional approaches. Intersectionality is a concept from Crenshaw (1989; 1991; 2015) which explains that discriminations are not parallel but rather overlap and intersect: "Intersectionality is a metaphor for understanding the ways that multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage sometimes compound themselves and create obstacles that often are not understood among conventional ways of thinking" (Crenshaw 1989, 149). Consequently, a queer Indigenous cis-woman is not just a victim of racism, homophobia, and sexism separately but all of these together, at the same time, and intertwined in a way that shapes these discriminations differently than for a white trans woman, or a disabled queer indigenous woman, or a queer indigenous cis-man.

Indigiqueer literature is full of examples of a lack of recognition of intersectionality and of intersectional approaches, such as the fact that queer organizations rarely address Indigenous issues, Indigenous organizations rarely address queer issues (although now it is increasingly common for them to do so), and that even organizations working on anti-racism activism almost never address Indigenous issues (Driskill 2010; Driskill, Finley, Gilley, and Morgensen 2011; Hames-Garcia 2013; Lépine-Dubois 2018). Many struggles and issues mentioned earlier in this paper are caused by the lack of intersectional approaches, such as the feeling of erasure and the pressure to choose between queerness and indigeneity.

Moreover, in Crenshaw's intersectionality, power is used and maintained in treating inequalities separately without considering the compounding overlap (Crenshaw 1989; 1991; and 2015). A lack of intersectional approaches and even the impossibility of working on settler colonial projects through an intersectional lens is prevalent in decolonial literature (Driskill 2010; 2016; Driskill, Finley, Gilley and Morgensen, 2011; Greensmith 2018b; Hames-Garcia 2013; Hawley 2001; Larouche 2010; Lépine-Dubois 2018; Lévesque 2016). The lack of intersectional approaches is not accidental as it is in line with settler colonialist ideologies and practices that shape queer communities (Greensmith 2018a; Hames-Garcia 2013; Morgensen 2011). This lack of intersectional awareness hinders indigiqueer inclusion in queer communities and contributes to the erasure of Indigenous presence in queer spaces.

Isolation, Homelessness and Suicide

The historical and cultural disconnect, the lack of mentors and elders, the homophobia and transphobia, the racism, the lack of intersectional approaches, and the feeling of erasure all generate a dire situation of exclusion and isolation (Lépine-Dubois 2018). Indigiqueer individuals often do not feel like they belong in any community; they do not have a place to call their own, a place to meet, to find people to support or help them, to unify and organize. Queer Indigenous individuals often feel isolated, alone, and powerless in the face of their experienced homophobia, discrimination, and violence (RCAAQ 2016).

Amplified by a cultural barrier and, for some, a linguistic barrier, all the issues and struggles discussed above can lead to situations of vulnerability which can sometimes result in homelessness, addiction, and death/suicide (Patrick 2014; Pullen Sansfaçon, Lee, and Faddoul 2022). Meyer-Cook and Labelle (2004) write about how these compounded vulnerabilities lead to high HIV infection and high suicide rates: "Suicide becomes the only option for many, especially among youth. Suicide among Native youth is several times greater than for other adolescents" (40). Coupled with the already higher-than-average suicide rate among vulnerable queer youth, the intersectional situation for queer Indigenous youth becomes dire. More recent publications by Patrick (2014) and Pullen Sansfaçon, Lee, and Faddoul (2022) show that the problem is still present and that there is a higher-than-normal proportion of queer individuals among the homeless Indigenous population (Patrick 2014). But, as Patrick (2014) explains, the lack of intersectionality approaches in most research on either queer homelessness or Indigenous homelessness generate incomplete data on indigiqueer homelessness. Unidimensional research often fails to account for multiple and compounding identities and vulnerabilities, beyond occasional surface-level quantitative data.

Times are Changing

This section paints a grim portrait of the situation and, since this is a review of the literature, one must remember that a lot of the literature focuses problems and struggles thus skewing the representation. The most recent academic works (Bousquet, Hamel-Charest, and Mapachee 2020; Denetdale 2020; Driskill 2016; Laing 2021; Lépine-Dubois 2018) as well as non-academic accounts (Chacaby and Plummer 2016; Whitehead 2017; Whitehead and Abdou 2023; Youssef 2020) paint a more positive picture of indigiqueer realities. Although more positive, they still present many of the elements discussed above. There are not enough recent publications to allow for a general conclusion other than the observation that things are changing for the better: there is a greater recognition of indigiqueer identities in many queer communities as well as many Indigenous communities. This is also supported by the growing presence of indigiqueer figures in mainstream media such as Kawennáhere Devery Jacobs (queer Kanien'keha:ka actor), indigiqueer couple Anthony Johnson (gay Navajo-Diné) and James Makokis (two-spirit Nehiyô/Plains Cree) (winners of Canada's Amazing Race season 7), Kent Monkman (queer Cree artist/artivist), Jeremy Dutcher (queer Wolastoq/Malicite musician/signer), two-spirit Drag artists Ilona Verley (Nlaka'pamux/Thompson), Venus (Red River Métis), and Jaylene Tyme (Métis) who brought unapologetic indigiqueer representation to the *Drag Race* franchise. Laing (2021), who worked with indigiqueer youth, talks about the use of online groups and hashtags such as #twospirit. Social change was also noticed in my own research with indigiqueer individuals living in urban centers in Québec in the way that younger participants had a much more positive narrative and outlook and experienced less violence than older indigiqueer participants.

Conclusion

In this article, we have seen how Indigenous roles, models, and identities of queerness can be very different: from the Diné *nádleeh* whose gender is based on sex and on occupation, interests, and talents, to the Shoshone *tainna wa'ippe* who is both man and woman but different, called by a powerful spiritual vision, to the Inuit *sipiniq* whose gender is given through reincarnation. Beyond their differences, four characteristics emerge from the literature on the indigiqueer lived experiences: a place for spirituality, a fluid notion of gender and/or sexuality, a stronger relation to tradition than non-Indigenous queer individuals, and a very important "in-betweenness." To this, I add an overview of the current realities and struggles of queer Indigenous individuals, with the magnitude varying greatly: "Today, some are greatly respected in their communities, but many others suffer violence and worse" (Anguksuar 2010, 46).

A great deal of activism and research is currently taking place. More works are being published on this topic each year. More Facebook groups, more unofficial meetings are on the verge of becoming official and queer organizations are starting to decolonize themselves, decolonize their practices, and be open to ethnic diversity. This answer to the question "what is two-spirit?" was researched and written as a response to our own struggle to find a clear answer to the question. I hope that a review of the scattered and often contradictory literature on the topic will help present and future researchers as well as community organizations and activist groups understand the situation and have the tools to engage with and understand queer Indigenous individuals in their capacity as experts.

Endnotes

1. In 2017, the Navajo Nation changed its name to Diné Nation. Many of the sources refer to them as Navajo since their publication pre-dates this change.

2. Solely looking at racism towards Indigenous people, see Adams and Phillips 2006 and 2009; Brown 1997 and 2014; Cooper 2018; Driskill 2010 and 2016; Driskill, Finley, Gilley, and Morgensen 2011; Driskill, Justice, Miranda, and Tatonetti 2011; Hames-Garcia 2013; Jacobs, Thomas, and Lang 1997; Justice, Rifkin, and Schneider 2010; Lang 2016; Lépine-Dubois 2018; Lehavot, Walters, and Simoni 2010; Medicine 1997; Meyer-Cook and Labelle 2004; Miranda 2010; Morgensen 2011; Pullen Sansfaçon, Lee, and Faddoul 2022; Ristock, Zoccole, and Passante 2010; Smith 2011; Walters et al. 2006; and many more.

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Research

Masculinities at the Crossroads: Theoretical Insights into Gendered Violence and Social Class in Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja*

by Sanjana Chakraborty and Dhananjay Tripathi

Abstract: The present article critically examines the intricate tapestry of gendered space within Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja* (2014). It aims to unravel the social positionality of men within minority communities in conflict scenarios. Primarily based on the theories of Susan Bordo, Michael Kimmel, and Raewyn Connell, among others, the paper underscores the complexities surrounding gendered violence and the formation of male identity. It highlights the emergence of subaltern masculinity, layered with the embodied realities of masculinity. This fosters a sense of "otherness" among men belonging to minority groups. It furthers the psychological and physical trauma borne by male bodies in the discourse of gender-based violence. This paper delves into the intricate intersections of racial and ethnic identities within social class dynamics, unraveling the multifaceted expressions of masculinity within diverse communities. Through a lens focused on gendered violence, I explore the unique challenges and experiences faced by men navigating the complex terrain of multiple intersecting identity factors. The research probes into the systematic invisibility of victims who identify as men on the gender spectrum, juxtaposed with their unjust association with the image of the perpetrator. In essence, this study contributes to the theoretical discourse surrounding the connections between masculinities and social class, unraveling the multifaceted layers of gendered violence against men within the unique socio-cultural context depicted in *Lajja*.

Keywords: gendered violence; identity; intersectionality; masculinities; otherness; social class

Résumé : Le présent article offre une analyse critique de la complexité des espaces réservés aux hommes ou aux femmes dans *Lajja* (2014) de Taslima Nasrin. Il vise à éclaircir la position sociale des hommes au sein des communautés minoritaires dans les scénarios de conflit. S'appuyant principalement sur les théories de Susan Bordo, Michael Kimmel et Raewyn Connell, entre autres, l'article souligne les complexités entourant la violence fondée sur le genre et la formation de l'identité masculine. Il met en lumière l'émergence d'une masculinité subalterne, à laquelle s'ajoutent les réalités incarnées de la masculinité. Cela favorise un sentiment d'« altérité » chez les hommes appartenant à des groupes minoritaires, qui renforce le traumatisme psychologique et physique que subissent les corps masculins dans le discours sur la violence fondée sur le genre. Cet article se penche sur les intersections complexes des identités raciales et ethniques au sein de la dynamique des classes sociales, révélant les multiples facettes de l'expression de la masculinité au sein de diverses communautés. En adoptant un point de vue axé sur la violence fondée sur le genre, j'explore les défis particuliers et les expériences vécues par les hommes confrontés à l'entrecroisement complexe de plusieurs facteurs identitaires. La recherche examine l'invisibilité systématique des victimes qui s'identifient comme des hommes sur le continuum des genres, juxtaposée à leur association injuste avec l'image de l'agresseur. Essentiellement, cette étude enrichit le discours théorique sur les liens entre masculinité et classe sociale, en révélant les multiples facettes de la violence fondée sur le genre à l'encontre des hommes dans le contexte socioculturel unique dépeint dans *Lajja*.

Mots clés : violence fondée sur le genre; identité; intersectionnalité; masculinités; altérité; classe sociale

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Introduction

In theorizing masculinities and social class, gendered violence perception often confines male victims to a female image. Understanding that men are also subject to societal power dynamics, akin to those experienced by women, necessitates an examination of the factors shaping male perceptions of masculinity across different social contexts. This research unveils the concealed realm of gendered violence against men within minority communities, as depicted in the novel *Lajja* (2014), and thereby aims to debunk stereotypes, raise awareness, and foster a more inclusive comprehension of gender-based violence. By shedding light on the complexities of male identity within the nexus of gender and socioeconomic class, this paper delves into the intersectionality of masculinity vis-à-vis social class, elucidating the ramifications of marginalization on male victims of violence and their psychological well-being.

Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja* (2014) was published, originally in 1993, as a reply to the atrocities brought down upon the Hindu and other minority communities in Bangladesh, as a ripple effect of the 1992-3 Babri Masjid demolition. In her novel's preface, Nasrin states:

> I wrote *Lajja* when I saw Muslim fundamentalists in Bangladesh attack Hindus.… The Hindu fundamentalists of India destroyed the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. The Muslim fundamentalists of Bangladesh avenged the destruction … attacking the blameless Hindus of Bangladesh … destroying their temples … and raping Hindu women. (Preface to *Lajja* 2014, ix)

Lajja means "shame" in Bengali; the manuscript associates this with the shame and humiliation upheld through silence. The narratives of sexual harassment act as an illustration of this shame which is portrayed through Nasrin's Bengali men, Suronjon and Sudhamoy. The novel encircles the after-effects of the 1993 Babri Masjid demolition and narrates the life of the Datta family in these Hindu-Muslim riots, which Nasrin portrayed through the male protagonists, Suronjon and Sudhamoy Dutta. In Bangladesh during those riots most Hindu families were abducted, molested, killed, or forced into conversions. As per reports, the Babri Masjid demolition in India led to riots and violent attacks on Bengali Hindus and other non-Muslim minorities that took place from December 1992 to March 1993.

The report *Minorities at Risk* chronologically records national riots and related social incidents during the period of Babri Masjid conflict (UNHRC 2004). For example, in December 1992, Muslims mobbed and attacked various Hindu temples across Bangladesh. These incidents were followed by a disruption in India-Bangladesh cricket at Dhaka National Stadium, due to the destruction of Babri Masjid by Hindu fundamentalists. At least ten people died, many Hindu women were raped, and hundreds of Hindu homes and temples were destroyed (UNHRC 2004). In October 1993, Hindus in Bangladesh curtailed their Durga Puja (Hindu religious festival) due to atrocities committed against them. This news was reported by All-India-Radio (AIR) on October 16, 1993. Just six months after *Lajja's* publication in July 1993, the country banished the book and several radical Muslims marched the streets of Dhaka for the arrest and execution of Taslima Nasrin, a female Muslim writer who has been critical of male chauvinism and Islamic fundamentalism. In November of that year, a "fatwa" was released in her name by the *Council of the Soldiers of Islam* (a religious fundamentalist group) claiming she insulted the Islam religion in the world forum. The significance of selecting this novel as a point of analysis is established within the narratives of Nasrin's *Lajja* (2014). This paper underscores the necessity of reconfiguring literary representations in feminist texts like *Lajja* and segregating the male experiences of cultural minorities after communal upheaval. This study focuses on the scars carried by the male bodies who fall prey to this type of cultural marginalization and subalternity.

Psychological Trauma of Gendered Violence on Male Bodies

Through a nuanced analysis of gendered violence, this study illuminates the often-unacknowledged challenges faced by male minority community members who have endured both physical and psychological trauma. The paper highlights the pervasive discrimination fuelled by patriarchal biases, emphasizing how violence is inherently gendered and reinforces masculine norms. By exploring the intersection of social dynamics, gendered violence, and cultural shifts within minority communities, this study offers a varied perspective on the multifaceted impact of violence on diverse gender identities, challenging prevailing narratives that primarily focus on female and child victims.

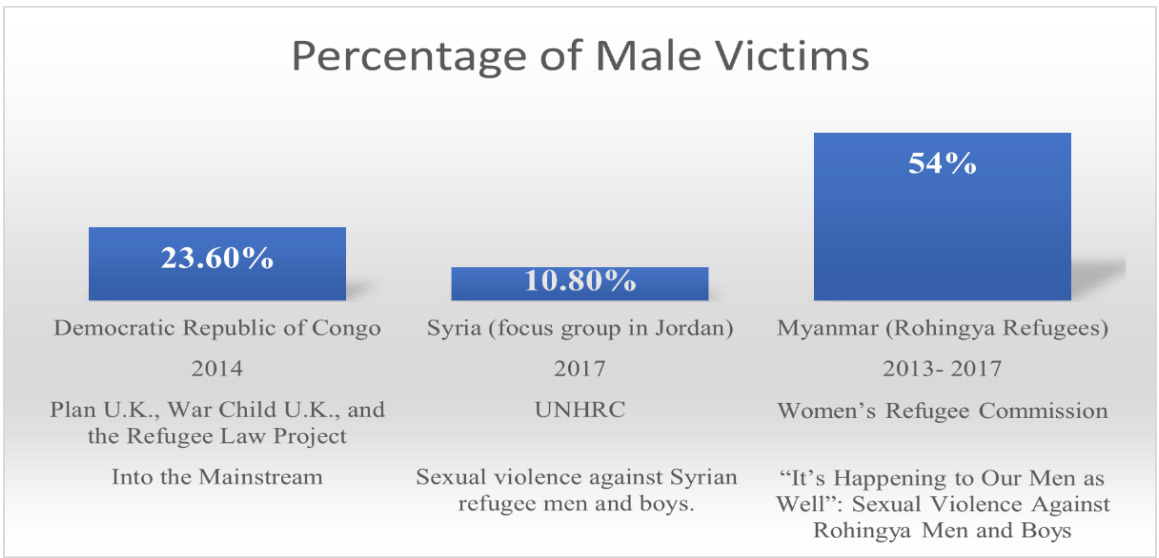

Fig 1: Graphical Representation of Male Victims of Sexual Violence in Conflict Areas.

The data shown in Figure 1 are extracted through various sociological initiatives undertaken by renowned institutes such as Sarah Chynoweth's report, *We Keep it in our Heart,* commissioned by UNHRC (2017), the Into the Mainstream-Refugee Law Project (2014), and the Women's Refugee Commission (2013-17). This representation emphasises a prevalent issue of gendered abuse targeting men, especially in conflict-ridden regions. Gendered violence, an eminent concern in public health and human rights discourse, epitomizes manifestations moulded by societal paradigms that dictate gender roles. The prevalence of the invisibility of men who are victims within specific social

spaces highlights the entrenched power differentials between genders, conflicting human rights and substantial negligence to public health. Acknowledging an often-overlooked reality, it is evident that males can be victims of gendered violence, particularly at the hands of other men, especially when they (the victims) deviate from the expectations of hegemonic or ruling masculinity. A meticulous analysis of the text, *Lajja* unveils a profound transformation in the lives of the Datta family men, Sudhamoy (the father) and Suranjon (the protagonist). Their journey unfolds as they grapple with the challenge of not conforming to the terms of hegemonic masculinity within the societal context of a Muslim country. The research presented here sheds light on the diverse complexities surrounding male victimization within the dynamics of gendered violence.

This study interpolates these dynamics of gendered violence and its subsequent effect on Bangladesh's trajectory since independence reduced religious diversity from approximately 23.1% to 9.6% during 1971 (Shahisullah 2016). The same reduction in religious diversity is illustrated in Figure 2, whose statistical data was retrieved from Minorities Rights Group (Shahisullah, 2016).

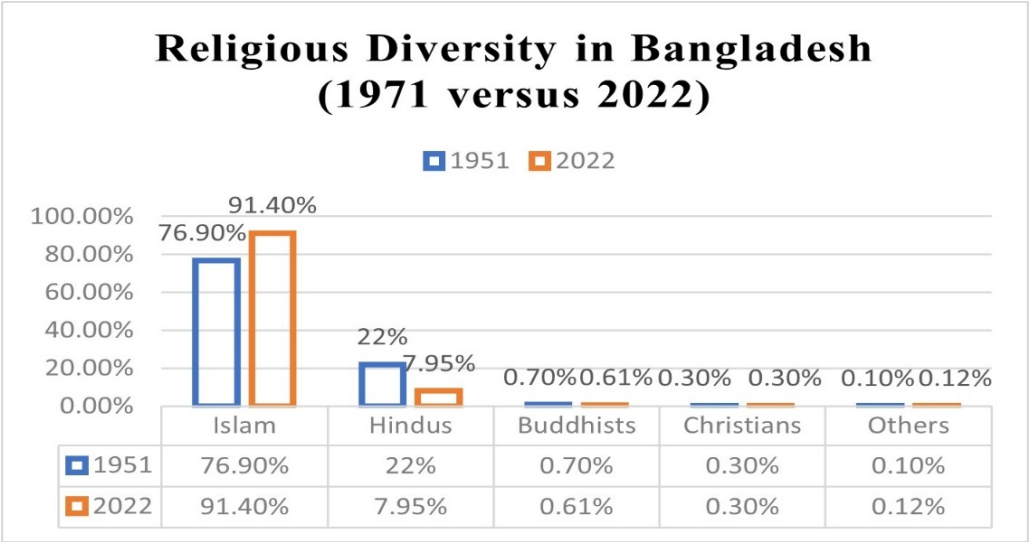

Fig 2: Graphical Representation of Religious Diversity in Bangladesh (1951 versus 2022)

This representation vividly shows a nation-state's move toward one religious community and a significant reduction in other communities, especially Hindus. According to the *Times of India* (2024), minorities, like Hindus, Christians, and Buddhists, have been forced to resign from various workforces due to threats and harassment. Recently, *The Print* reported that an adaptation of *Lajja* was staged at Delhi's Bipin Chandra Pal Auditorium in Delhi in November 2024 (Halder 2024). The adaptation showed how Nasrin's 1993 novel—still banned in Bangladesh—remains relevant today. As there was no Citizenship Amendment Act in India to provide refuge to Hindus fleeing the country when Taslima Nasrin's novel came out, a new play based on the novel serves as an unspoken yet emphatic nod to the CAA. Thus, this paper analyses these real-time scenarios of religious and cultural discrimination and mingles them with South Asian parameters of masculinity to explore the subalternity of minority men in Bangladesh.

Theoretical and Analytical Approach

This study incorporates a qualitative approach that merges literary analysis and close reading with an intersectional analysis of social implications through *Lajja*. The paper portrays the gendered violence implicated in male bodies of minority (racial/sexual/religious) communities. The research blends close textual reading with gender theory and reports on gender-based violence against men within conflict situations, which emphasizes the plight of marginalized masculinities, through Suronjon (protagonist and son) and Sudhamoy (his father) creating a space for subaltern male identities. Sudhamoy's perspective explains the psycho-social impact of systematic violence on Hindu men in Bangladesh during the 1993 communal riots of the Babri Masjid incident.

In *The Masking of Masculinities*, Harry Brod observes: "Men's studies scholars repeatedly face a problem in explaining their task.… Women's lives have been so privatized—some feminists call it the "male-stream"—tradition. Men's studies have no such immediately appealing claim to make since men have been the subjects of scholarship (Brod 1987, 2).

Thus, this study primarily utilizes Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak's (2005) subaltern lens to understand male victimization in conflict situations through thematic analysis of minority communities. It observes Nasrin's depiction of masculinity in her narrative by focusing on specific themes in the text, such as reactions to shame and representations of resilience and vulnerability amidst socio-political shifts.

Unexpected Social Clashes: Reconfiguring Male Bio-metaphors

Masculinity is profoundly defined by the cultural traditions of gender norms. This formulation is interwoven with socio-economic metaphors embodied through male bodies, which is then portrayed as an artificial state that boys and men must navigate, suggesting they are not inherently born with a fixed masculinity; rather, they are shaped by the prevailing hegemonic gendered social codes within their cultural milieu.

This section delves into gender politics influenced by unexpected socio-political clashes that create spaces of subaltern masculinity. It observes how Nasrin vocalizes the atrocities bestowed on minority (religious) communities due to the 1993 Babri Masjid socio-political conflict. She uses the narrative of a Bengali Hindu family in a Muslim-dominant Bangladesh in 1993. Using male protagonists, Suronjon and Sudhamoy, Nasrin focuses on the vulnerability of Hindu men who fail to fulfill the hegemonic role of protector during the Bangladesh conflict and thus lose their male privileges.

This study is primarily based on Connell's study of hegemonic masculinity in *Gender and Power* (1987) which legitimates the social code of manhood. She further developed this idea in her work *Masculinities* (1995, 2005). While Connell revisited her original theory with James Messerschmidt in *Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept* (2005) they mention the *Hierarchy of Masculinity* in this work, a hierarchy which outlines four categories of masculinity. First, *hegemonic masculinity* comprises traits such as heterosexuality, fair skin colour, stoicism, and perpetuation through patriarchy. Second, *complicit masculinity* neither aligns nor challenges hegemonic norms. Third, *marginalized masculinity* adheres to cultural expectations but fails to access the hegemonic privileges. Last, *subordinate masculinity* opposes hegemonic traits and is often associated with effeminacy. This conceptual framework elucidates the complex interplay between various manifestations of masculinity and the fluid dynamics of social class based on the economic standing and religious belief system.

During the time of the Babri Masjid riots, Muslim fundamentalists attacked minority communities, especially the Hindus, who were mainly Bengali. In *Lajja*, it is observed that the responsibility of the Babri Masjid demolition in another country by Hindu fundamentalists was foisted on the shoulder of "Sudhamoys" (Nasrin 2014, 17). The plural usage of "Sudhamoys" represents a singular character vocalizing and representing the plight of many Hindus in Bangladesh during that time. They "had not escaped the clutches of the fundamentalist Muslims in 1990, and so it was unlikely that they would be able to escape their clutches in 1992" (Nasrin 2014, 17). They were expected to leave their home and nation. This fostered a fear of forced displacement and vulnerability which eventually became a reality for many Hindus. Thus, it placed them within the parameters of marginalized communities.

Triple Vulnerability of Minority Masculinity in 1993 Bangladesh

The explicit placement into the category of marginalized creates the space of subaltern masculinity. Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) coined the term s*ubaltern,* in his Prison Notebooks (1971 in English)to elaborate on socio-economically marginalized groups within colonial politics. The term was used to identify the cultural hegemony in a postcolonial context that corroborates social exclusion and displacement of specific social groups to deny their voices. This created the binary space of "them" and "us" and further emphasized the subaltern paradigm.

Later, this term was developed into the postcolonial studies subgroup, Subaltern Studies, by Ranajit Guha, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Partha Chatterjee. This paper, however, uses this concept with Spivak's lens of subalternity which states: "It is not just a classy word for 'oppressed' for the other, for somebody who's not getting a piece of the pie… everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern – a space of difference" (Spivak 1992, 45; also cited in De Kock 1992, 45). Spivak further clarifies that the creation of a subaltern identity is based on the "mechanism of discrimination" (De Kock 1992, 45). Thus, this paper argues that, during conflict situations, minority communities navigate the realms of layered vulnerability. Nasrin's men—Sudhamoy and Suronjon—embody what can be termed as a *triple vulnerability* within their homelands. This vulnerability weaves the tapestry of *Othering* and paves the way for making their masculinity as *subalterns.*

Drawing on Spivak's concept of subalterns, the narrative in *Lajja* captures the layers of vulnerability faced by minority masculine identities. Their identities are forced into the space of "difference." First, in the world of *Lajja*, being a Bengali Hindu man within a Muslim-majority space makes these men religiously vulnerable and consistently othered. The role of religion affects the social placement of men as "religion produces socio-cultural systems through processes of domination, subordination, inclusion and exclusion, all spiced with an aura of factuality" (Geertz 1973, 90).

Second, their Hindu Bengali identity correlates to the cultural identity created their minority status. Mrinalini Sinha states, "The Muslims in Bengal, who as a group had a slight numerical advantage over Hindus, were similarly usually exempted from the popular elaboration of Bengali effeminacy" (Sinha 1995, 16). This colonial subordination imbued with sexual harassment pushes them to unredeemable positions of continuous subjugation.

Third, their masculinity is thus shaped by this hegemonic masculinity, which Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) define as established by dominant socio-cultural groups while emasculating the minority. This *triple vulnerability* pushes Suronjon and Sudhamoy to subaltern masculinity and snatches away their agency and visibility through communal violence, socio-cultural biases, and gendered hierarchies. Sudhamoy and Suranjon embody marginalized masculinity and showcase two sides of the male image hampered by the hegemonic masculinity in a Muslim country. They are trapped within their homelands because of their subaltern identities, which leads to desperation, alienation, and emasculation.

The subaltern embodies no identity and lacks representation. The subaltern is oppressed by the "reproductive heteronormativity" (Spivak 2005, 478) which restricts their "social mobility" (Spivak 2005, 476). This restriction elucidates subalternity which is also termed "stuckedness" (Hage 2009, 4). Hage defines this as an entrapment where "a person suffers from both the absence of choices or alternatives to the situation they are in and an inability to grab such alternatives even if they present themselves" (Hage 2009, 4). This shifting gendered hierarchy furthers the subalternity of Sudhamoy and Suronjon, where social class is formulated based on "economic collectivity" (Spivak 2005, 476). This is exemplified by Sudhamoy's disqualification for an academic promotion in his teaching career. He states, "Do you think something will happen with the file, dear man? he would ask.... Will my work get done, Forib Sahib? he would ask.… Sudhamoy's juniors got their promotions. His file had been buried under the files of Dr. Korimuddin and Dr. Yakub Mollah, but they soon began working as associate professors. (Nasrin 2014, 29).

His Hindu identity consistently delays a well-deserved promotion, reflecting the intricate layers of *triple vulnerability* —religious, cultural, and socio-political subjugation—which results in loss of social agency. His compromised economic standing serves as a poignant illustration of the profound impact of evolving socio-political power dynamics on the fundamental facets of male identity. This reflects the intricate interplay between economic agency and social status within the broader context of masculinity. Sudhamoy did not fit the conventional archetype of "real manhood," which equates with economic stability. Moreover, his religious and cultural identity added to the systematic dismantling of his masculinity towards emasculation: "Finally, Sudhamoy Datta retired as an assistant professor. His colleague Madhob Chondro Pal whispered in his ear … as they bade him farewell, "In a country of Muslims, we should not expect too many opportunities for ourselves. Even what we're getting now is a favor" (Nasrin 2014, 30).

Social class intricately interweaves with racial and ethnic identities, contributing to economic disparities that profoundly impact the construction of masculine identities. Thus, it is observed that minority men encounter barriers to

economic mobility, unequal pay, and limited access to resources. Economic challenges thus shape perceptions of success and failure, influencing the definitions of masculinity within the context of financial stability and independence.

Shifting Male Bio-metaphors and Bengali Masculinity

The Bengali men are equated with the aspect of "feebleness" as observed through Sinha's work. In *Colonial Masculinity*, she quotes Macaulay: "the physical organization of the Bengalee is feeble even to effeminacy.... His pursuits are sedentary, his limbs delicate, his movements languid" (Strachey 1888 (1911), 450; also cited in Sinha 1995 , 15). This languid state of being, which was a product of a colonial mindset, impacted the Bengali men's identity during communal violence (1992-3) and in many cases till the contemporary times.In her seminal work Mrinalini Sinha observed, Colonial Masculinity (1995), that the colonial motive of divide and rule was established by creating a rift between Bengali Hindus and Muslims. Specifically, after the Partition (1905 and 1947) of East Bengal (now Bangladesh), the colonial lens exempted Muslims in Bengal from the brand of *effeminacy*. In Nasrin's narrative, the politicized religious belief system by fundamentalist Muslims bestows gendered and racial violence: "Suronjon saw his mother pull the windows shut … they could hear the slogans. "Pick up Hindus/ One or two/ And snack on them." … Suronjon remembered that they had heard the same slogan in 1990.... And who were they? ... They were people like Jobbaar, Romjan ... almost like younger brothers…." (Nasrin 2014, 23).

These processions with religious hate speeches and bullying inflict trauma on Bangladesh's minority communities, mainly Hindus. The reference in Suronjon's narrative of a similar scene in 1990 specifies how communal violence marginalizes the Bengali Hindus and minority groups. This understates how the psychological weapon of public shame was an efficient strategy to emasculate men, making them voiceless against the screams of culturally dominant groups. Shame and fear erode the foundation of "liberalism" and "independence" with fear of identity loss among the minority communities, creating a subaltern space for individuals like Suronjon and Sudhamoy. Moreover, Michael Ropar and John Tosh state, "Masculinity is in constant relation to the 'other', colonizer and colonized, later defined as emasculate and in need of control whereas the former imbues the image of imperial masculinity" (Ropar and Tosh 2021, 1-24).

These recurrent shifts in the bio-metaphors assigned to the male bodies within the national borders create the marginalized "Other." However, this binary impacts the assigned gender roles of men from minority groups, especially Bengali Hindus of Bangladesh. Nasrin implores this contrast with the women of the Datta family, Maya (daughter) and Kironmoyee (mother). The men and women of the Datta family represent the two sides of vulnerable social placement within the communal riots of Bangladesh in 1993. The former, the father-son duo, represents the non-acceptance of subaltern identity within the failed parameters of manhood, whereas, the mother-daughter duo represents the sense of acceptance of defeat and vulnerability. Maya (daughter) serves as the prominent relic that sets a series of events that changes the father-son duo's social placement of being men. The following passage shows Maya's willingness to change her cultural identity and migrate to India: "What will you do with your name, Maya?" he [Sudhamoy] asked, recalling when he had identified himself as Sirajuddin.... "I'll do that, and call myself Firoja Begum," she replied in an unwavering tone..... Maya was prepared to take any step to carry on living" (Nasrin 2014, 18).

In this incident Sudhamoy questions Maya's sense of nationalism. However, in retrospect, he is reminded of his act of choosing the Muslim identity, Sirajuddin, during a street confrontation. This emphasizes the hypocritical ways men and women are judged based on the definitions of nationalist identity. These definitions of identity is particularly linked with the social standing of real manhood. The intertwining nature of embodied masculinity with social metaphors like economic status, nationalist standing, etc. marginalizes both Sudhamoy and Suronjon.

Conundrums about masculinity thus arise from these clashes between "cultural epistemologies" (Haywood et al. 2018, 4) of understanding masculinity in its performative nature. This facet is overlooked in the mainstream discourse of gender-based violence against men within the space of communal violence. Thus, this article contends that masculinity is more than an inherent quality linked only to the biological symbols. However, the meaning to biological metaphors is influenced by cultural fabrication and sustained by social metaphors and peer recognition.

Masculinity Shifts and Social Class Dynamics in Minority Community

Masculinity has undergone several cultural re-productions and institutional metaphors attached to its physiological form. Susan Bordo in her seminal work *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and in Private* states: "Images of masculinity that will do double (or triple or quadruple) duty with a variety of consumers, straight and gay, male and female, are not difficult to create in a culture like ours, in which the muscular male body has a long and glorious aesthetic history" (Bordo 1999, 181).

This shift in masculinity unfolded as a religious-inspired criminality within Bangladesh's 1993 riots as portrayed in *Lajja*. This shift further threatens the minority community, as embodied within the colonial lens, and subjugates the male body. Sudhamoy, in *Lajja*, embodies this ghost of masculine metaphors, especially the spirit of nationalism. His commitment to the nation sets him apart from the wider minority community.

In the novel, with escalating tension in Bangladesh, some Hindus sought refuge in India but later returned, an act which Sudhamoy condemned. His frustration and condemnation reflect his understanding of masculinity: "When the war broke out in the country, Sudhamoy would often say while talking to them, "You fled to India like emasculated men. Once the country was liberated you came back like heroes. And now, whenever there is a spot of trouble, you say you'll go away to India. A cowardly bunch, that's what you are" (Nasrin 2014, 27).

His reaction underscores the deep-seated valuation of being a man and its alignment with institutionalized masculine ideals, tied with a sense of nationalism and glorification of violence. However, his lack of resources to challenge the situation leaves him internally struggling, resulting in a perceived failure to achieve masculine respectability. This tension underscores the fragmentation of identity that often arises at the intersection of race, ethnicity, and social class. These intersections are like puzzle pieces representing varied layers of identity. The challenge is, however, to find a cohesive link between these intersections, such as race, ethnicity, social class, and religious background, to create a normative image of masculinity. It is a labyrinth of internal and external struggle to align with the hegemonic narrative of manhood and masculinity within the socio-political strife in Bangladesh.

Socio-Political Dynamics Subjugates Subaltern Masculinity

In one of her recent interviews with Goutam Karmakar, Susan Bordo states, "Images of the body are 'never just pictures' … they carry fantasized solutions to our anxieties and insecurities...the culturally successful image … carries values and qualities that 'hit a nerve' that is already exposed…about how to become what the dominant culture admires—and/or how to escape the pain caused by that culture" (Karmakar 2020, 6-7).

These images of the body form a tapestry to construct an identity intertwined with social metaphors of manhood. Moreover, this identity negotiation is further complicated by social clashes, like the riots of 1993 in Bangladesh. This creates a state of subalternity for men like Sudhamoy and Suranjon who are subjugated based on their socio-economic standing and social class embedded with racial and ethnic backgrounds. This negotiation is further complicated when men are faced with intersectional discrimination or oppression for following their ethnic heritage through sexual harassment.

Sudhamoy's personality shifts drastically after he faces street sexual harassment and forced imprisonment in a Pakistani military camp where he is tortured as he fails to align with the structural markers of dominant masculinity. While returning from his friend's house, he falls into the clutches of the Pakistani army and they ask him, "What is your name?" (Nasrin 2014, 14). He is startled and afraid to give away his Hindu identity and names himself "Sirajuddin Hussain" (Nasrin 2014, 14), which was the straw that breaks his connection with his nation. Then, the troop orders him: "Take off your lungi … and they pulled it off him" (Nasrin 2014, 14). After this incident, Sudhamoy chooses to always wear pajamas (pants-like loose cotton trousers). This signifies the dynamic relation between how the male body and clothing are intertwined with social bio-metaphors which shifts with the change in socio-

political dynamics. Therefore, these socio-political dynamics traps men from minority communities within the restrictive constructs of manhood. This reference highlights how the internal struggle of Sudhamoy to acknowledge his subaltern position by changing his Hindu name forces him to feel psychologically mutilated. It uproots him from his cultural grounding and changes his association with masculinity and the male body.

Mrinalini Sinha, in her *Colonial Masculinity* (1995) highlights the image of effeminacy imposed on Bengali men due to their physicality against the lens of imperial masculinity. This, as discussed earlier, adds to the shifting political dynamics of Bangladesh and the masculine identity struggles of the minority community in Nasrin's *Lajja*. It represents that, even though the biology of gender identity is determined at birth, becoming one's gender is culturally influenced. As bell hooks quotes Connell from In *Gender Politics of Men* (1997) that when men "who oppose patriarchy remains at odds with the world…. They are likely to be met with derision from many other men…" (as cited in hooks 2004, 73). This derision isolates, imprisons, and confines men within the spaces of subalternity. As Sudhamoy observes, this change was with his nationalist views, which were attached to the perception of manhood: "He was quick to join gatherings against Pakistani rulers, getting there before anyone else. He had never felt restrained by home and family. Where had that courage gone!" (Nasrin 2014, 16).

This passage outlines how men from minority communities within a conflict situation are burdened with the sense of protecting their families without realizing their state of vulnerability, often due to age and loss of economic standing. This loss of agency further point out the drifting state of the father-son relations, as they both suffer from gendered emotional mutilation.

Suronjon (son) viewed Sudhamoy (father), as a "guide and teacher of the family. Suronjon thought his father was a Superman-like person" (Nasrin 2014, 93). However, in 1993 Bangladesh did not have liveable condition for liberals like Sudhamoy. Suronjon, who mirrored the youthful passion of his father, stood in grief with his father's lack of nationalist passion and his mother's wish to seek refuge in India. He felt alienated within his own family and among friends, the majority of whom were Muslims, and he moved to nothingness. In the failure to fulfill the duties of being a man, he felt ashamed and insulted. Thus, masculinity pervades several cultural epistemologies and becomes essential for the politics of (un)intelligibility and subjugating subaltern men.

Identity Struggles: Masculinity, Social Class, and Gender Violence Realities

Susan Bordo, in the chapter "Hard and Soft" in *The Male Body* (1999), quotes French feminist Luce Irigaray, "This sex which is not one" (Bordo 1999, 36) to understand the relationship between women's biology and their social placement. However, Bordo follows this argument by analyzing the social placement of the male body and their identity negotiations. Bordo (1999)argues that the cultural significance of potency and genitals weighs down a man's understanding of their manhood, which formulates their identity.

This "cultural equation of penis" (Bordo 1999, 37) is questioned in *Lajja* when the men of minority communities face gendered violence within a conflict situation. Sudhamoy observes this by stating it was "about torturing the weak whenever possible" (Nasrin 2014, 26). This was highlighted by the assault of Sudhamoy's female student, where she asked to remove her sari in the middle of the street, however, the fact that shocked Sudhamoy was, that, this student was Muslim, her weakness was her female identityThere is a consistent correlation between biology and culture which aids in the interpretation of the male body. The symbolic constructs feed into human history, which influences the flesh and body. This is further elevated by the interlinking ideologies of race and ethnicity, which form the struggles of subaltern identity. As the novel progresses Nasrin specifies how the minority men were subjected to sexual violence within Pakistani army camps in 1993: "How many days was it before Sudhamoy returned from the camp? Seven days... Sudhamoy felt that his chest and tongue were bone dry all the time. He would moan for water and the soldiers would laugh horribly" (Nasrin 2014, 94).

The tortures bestowed on Sudhamoy and other prisoners from the minority communities highlight a shift in power dynamics which alters the metaphors of masculinity and pushes the minority towards subaltern masculinity. "Sexual

terrorism" (as cited in Kimmel 2011, 137), as termed by legal theorist Carol Sheffield, is a constant reminder for the minority of their vulnerability. Within the space of politicized religious warfare, *forced imprisonment* is one of the greatest weapons. A similar instance of that can be seen in the era of the Holocaust, where Jews were imprisoned in torturous concentration camps under harsh conditions. In the novel, during their imprisonment, many Hindus were forcefully asked to recite the Kalma and convert to Islam: "One day, after Sudhamoy had steadfastly refused to become a Muslim, they lifted his lungi and said that since he hadn't agreed to become a Muslim, they were going to circumcise him—they sliced off his penis. Then they held up his organ and laughed" (Nasrin 2014, 95).

This permanent physical scar left him with mutilated genitals and impotence while acting as a reminder of his subaltern position. Beyond the physical trauma, this fractured his spirit of nationalism and associated sense of masculinity as he also suffered a loss of agency and identity. The general dissociation of masculinity and victimization happens in both the private and public spheres. Sandesh Sivakumaran (2007) points out, "A man should have been able to prevent himself from being attacked" (255) and be able to cope like a man. Amidst the armed conflict, as portrayed in the novel, and forced imprisonment, these masculine stereotypes are more intensely attached to the self-perception of manhood, which is meant to shatter the centerpiece of the household. Therefore, it alters the structural metaphors of masculinity associated with the "protector" image of men. This image of minority men's loss of identity relates to Alex Haley's *Roots* (1976), "where the black boy (protagonist) keeps on claiming that he is Kunta Kinte yet he is being whipped and forced to be the man named Toby" (as cited in Nasrin 2014, 95).

Impact of Gendered Violence on Subaltern Men and Social Class Dynamics

Gendered violence to a man or boy scars his physiology and mental and social welfare. This violence ranges from "bruises, lacerations, stabbings and fractures, genital pain during urination, anal and testicular pain, and sexual dysfunction including impotence" (Solangon and Patel 2012, 421). However, castration is often viewed as mutilation and rape as torture is seen as watered down interpretation of the male-on-male atrocities, which hinders with the identification of male victims of armed conflicts. Gottschall describes this type of violence as a "coherent, coordinated, logical and brutally effective means of prosecuting warfare" (Gottschall 2004, 131).

The physical mutilation of men by dominant opposition serves as the greatest biological weapon. It is used to destabilize and emasculate the men from minority communities. The generational gap in response to the conflict in the novel is embodied through Sudhamoy, clinging to the fractured sense of nationalism. Suronjon represents the lost generation: "Suronjon's air of indifference dampened Sudhamoy's enthusiasm" (Nasrin 2014, 90). Suronjon's proclamation of his liberalism bridges his familial responsibilities and cultural conflicts: "He was aware that he was not taking on the responsibilities required of him. He should have taken everyone in the family to hide somewhere but he had not done that. Perhaps he did not feel like doing it" (Nasrin 2014, 19). In some societies where masculinity is associated with being powerful and being head of the family, some men who feel they have failed to live up to this role, such as unemployed men who are unable to provide for their families, may feel that sexual violence, with its connotations of force and power, allows them to regain some control over their masculinity.

Suronjon's inability to protect his family, especially after his sister Maya is kidnapped and abused, makes him feel alienated and enraged, which leads him to question his manhood. bell hooks observes in her work *The Will to Change* that "rage is the easy way back to a realm of feeling. It can serve as the perfect cover, masking feelings of fear and failure" (hooks 2004, 73). In an attempt to mask his feelings of failure and regain control, Suronjon assaults Shamina, a Muslim prostitute. He visualizes her as a symbol of the Muslim community whom he blames for his pain: "Suronjon did not look at Shamima as a whore-he saw her as a Muslim woman. He was extremely keen on raping a Muslim woman…. She was a streetwalker and yet she was yelping in pain- this made Suronjon very happy" (Nasrin 2014, 294).

This episode marks a turning point in Suronjon's life, triggering a shift in his psychological space and prompting a redefinition of his identity: "Suronjon was calm. He felt unburdened. He had been able to do something with the de-

sire that had gnawed at him all day" (Nasrin 2014, 295). His sense of unburdening after committing such a heinous crime underlines the struggle and failure to embody the patriarchal role of family protector, which profoundly impacts his connection to his sense of self.

Nasrin's *Lajja*, echoes the plight of Hindu and other minority families while highlighting how sexual abuse on men and women of minority communities is weaponized to emasculate men by dominant masculinity. This abuse creates the category of *othering*, which causes psycho-social implications for men, implications that are often eliminated from the gendered violence discourse.

Chris Dolan, in *Into the Mainstream* (2014), reports on the psycho-social and familial trauma of male victims of sexual abuse through documented cases of conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo. For instance, one of the interviewees/victims of sexual violations reports how his wife left him, asserting that a man who cannot protect himself cannot protect her. This shows how trauma, masculinity, and gendered violence are imbued with social expectations. Carpenter also observes, "But there has been very little specific effort to recognize the trauma of such atrocity for the male relatives of the victims" (Carpenter 2006, 96), calling attention to the neglected emotional toll on male survivors in communal conflict.

The underrepresentation of diverse portrayals of male identities based on varied intersections such as race, ethnicity, and social class in media, literature, and cultural narratives exacerbates the marginalization of male victims. This invisibility perpetuates cultural stereotypes that narrow the spectrum of acceptable masculinities. This void in the narrative sustains systematic oppression and gender hierarchies, which denies visibility and legitimacy to minority masculinities.

The impact of this skewed representation extends beyond mere storytelling; it shapes societal perceptions and moulds the collective consciousness. The emerging narratives often adhere to stereotypical moulds, reinforcing preconceived notions about how individuals at the intersection should embody masculinity. Nasrin's *Lajja* reflects Sudhamoy's struggles and trauma, symbolizing the older generation of men from the minority community. It focuses on the psycho-social trauma that incubates subaltern identity within the familiar socio-economic strata. It captures the systematic socio-economic inequalities creating the space of subaltern masculinity: "Sudhamoy thought to himself that he had not become an associate professor simply because his name was Sudhamoy Datta. If only he had been Muhammad Ali or Salimullah Chowdhury! Even in trade and business, very rarely did a Hindu institution get a license if there was no Muslim partner involved" (Nasrin 2014, 30).

The paper highlights intersectional perspectives of how male bodies of minority communities are violated. This relates to the reconstruction of their identity within their social placement. Even though Masculinity Studies are evolving and addressing intersections they pay negligible attention to the phenomenon of the racialization of masculinities and the pervasiveness of hegemonic whiteness (Wong and Wang 2022). The same can be said about gender-based-violence male survivors in conflict areas as observed through works ofDolan 2014; UNHRC 2017-18, ,which exposes the deep embedding of the definitions of victimhood and masculinity which creates the space of subalter identities for the male survivors of GBV.

Conclusion

The patriarchal ideals of *protector, breadwinner, and provider of the family* exacerbate dominant masculinity to marginalize alternative expressions of masculinity and silence their voices. Failing to stand up to those standards alters the male identity triggering subaltern male identity within social power structures. This paper highlights how socio-political shifts echo through the varied social standards of violations, particularly for male victims whose struggles are often overlooked. Kimmel observes this development of feminism and gender equality: "Four decades of feminism has been accompanied by four decades of increasingly shrill denunciations of feminists…. Gender Equality, we've been told, is really for women … but underneath this is the idea that gender equality is bad for men" (Kimmel 2010, 3).

These social dynamics reveal the tension between evolving gender norms and restrictive narratives of dominant masculinity. This article explores the male characters in *Lajja* who are from the Hindu minority community, Suronjon, and Sudhamoy, depicting their constrained emotional range,dominated by despair, failure, and anxiety whichmanifests as anger as they fail to reclaim individual agency. The paper critiques the homogenized portrayal of masculinity, advocating for diverse narratives that challenge stereotypes and explore varied masculine expressions across race, ethnicity, and social class.

Often in conflict scenarios, sexual violence involving rape and physical mutilation is used as a biological weapon against male members of the marginalized community, which psychologically impacts the victims, highlighting the complexities of gendered subjectivity. This violence is also heightened during socio-political shifts that disrupt power dynamics, deepen male alienation, and reinforces the patriarchal ideal man. These further results in a loss of agency as shown in *Lajja:* "Sudhamoy sat up suddenly as he heard the sounds of the procession. Suronjon clenched his jaws… Should he not be angry too?" (Nasrin 2014, 32).

Religious discrimination in Bangladesh, rooted in colonialism and the Partition, continues to marginalize minorities post-independence. Events like the 1992 Babri Masjid demolition in India incited widespread rioting in Bangladesh, targeting Hindu shops, and businesses, and inflicting gendered violence. Nasrin's *Lajja* vividly portrays these atrocities, emphasizing the intersections of gendered violence and social class. It examines masculinities through the lens of intersecting racial, ethnic, and class identities, shedding light on how these dynamics shape the perpetuation or resistance to gendered violence. Thus, the novel adds to the ongoing discourse of male victimhood in conflict areas, while addressing the intersectional perspectives attached to the South Asian male identities which often create subaltern masculinity.

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"Coming In" to Queer Psychology: The Value of Blending Queer Theory and Psychology in Critical Autoethnography

by Alicia Wright, Phillip Joy, Conor Barker

Abstract: This commentary reflects upon an Honours thesis undertaken in 2024-2025 to analyze the subjective experience of coming out in adulthood through critical autoethnography. The method used, which blends autobiography with ethnographic observation, was rooted in psychological frameworks and drew upon queer theory—a scholarly perspective that challenges and attempts to disrupt heteronormative assumptions of gender and sexuality—to analyze the first author's experience of changes in sexual orientation in her thirties. The authors discuss the challenges, and ultimate benefit, of interweaving psychology, which tends to be grounded in positivist and structured views, with queer theory, which promotes fluidity and resists established norms. Sharing their unique perspectives, each author contributed to this essay from their respective discipline, highlighting the possibilities that appear when holding two seemingly opposing theoretical tensions; not just in understanding experiences of diversity among sexual orientation identities, but also in questioning the traditional boundaries of research and the complexity of human experience. As researchers who are also part of the queer community, the authors found great value in queering psychology scholarship, supporting a need for diverse representation within academia.

Keywords: autoethnography; LGBTQ+; queer pedagogy; queer theory; psychology

Résumé : Ce commentaire porte sur une thèse honorifique rédigée en 2024-2025 qui analysait l'expérience subjective du dévoilement de l'orientation sexuelle à l'âge adulte, au moyen d'une autoethnographie critique. La méthode utilisée, qui allie l'autobiographie et l'observation ethnographique, s'appuyait sur des cadres psychologiques et sur la théorie queer – une approche scientifique qui remet en question et cherche à déconstruire les suppositions hétéronormatives liées au genre et à la sexualité—pour analyser l'expérience de la première auteure quant aux changements de son orientation sexuelle survenus dans la trentaine. Les auteurs abordent les défis, ainsi que les avantages ultimes, d'associer la psychologie, qui a tendance à être fondée sur des points de vue positivistes et structurés, à la théorie queer, qui encourage la fluidité et remet en question les normes établies. En partageant leurs points de vue uniques, chaque auteur a contribué à cet essai selon sa discipline respective, mettant en lumière les possibilités qui émergent lorsque l'on tient compte de deux tensions théoriques apparemment opposées; non seulement pour mieux comprendre la diversité des expériences liées à l'orientation sexuelle, mais aussi pour remettre en question les limites traditionnelles de la recherche et la complexité de l'expérience humaine. En tant que chercheurs faisant eux-mêmes partie de la communauté queer, les auteurs reconnaissent la valeur qu'apporte l'intégration d'un point de vue queer dans les recherches en psychologie, soulignant ainsi la nécessité d'une représentation diversifiée au sein du milieu universitaire.

Mots clés : LGBTQ+; théorie queer; psychologie; autoethnographie; pédagogie queer

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This commentary reflects upon my (Alicia Wright) Honours thesis, undertaken in 2024-2025 to analyze the subjective experience of coming out in adulthood (Wright 2025). Guided by the mentorship of my co-supervisors (Phillip Joy and Conor Barker), whose research expertise respectively resides in the fields of queer health and psychology, I conducted a critical autoethnography, a method that blends autobiography and ethnographic observation while employing theoretical views to analyze lived experience (Poulos 2021), to explore this change in sexual orientation. Specifically, this essay considers the benefits and challenges of interweaving psychological frameworks with queer theory, a scholarly view that challenges and attempts to disrupt heteronormative assumptions of gender and sexuality. These perspectives do not always align easily: queer theory often prioritizes fluidity and anti-normativity, while psychological frameworks tend to emphasize diagnosis and structured models. Yet, these seemingly incompatible lenses were used together to more deeply examine the tensions, possibilities, and productive disruptions that emerge when personal narratives are situated at the intersection of identity, theory, and practice.

With the aim of understanding how sexual identity transformation happens in adulthood, I wrote reflexive narratives to evocatively depict three turning points in my experience of a sexual identity shift away from heterosexuality in my thirties, involving a deconstruction, recognition, and reconnection of identity. Rooted in psychology, these first-person stories were compared to psychological models of identity formation and were understood in intrapersonal and interpersonal terms, with the recognition of sexual identity being both socially constructed and guided by a sense of authenticity (Rust 1993). Queer theory was then drawn upon to remove the heteronormative lens from personal stories and review them through an acknowledgment of religious, patriarchal, and heterosexist influence that acted to obscure non-heterosexual thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. We argue that queer theory was integral for understanding the complexity of my experience of forging a sexual orientation identity against the resistance of dominant, insidious, and pervasive social systems.

Throughout the arc of this story, themes were revealed that captured aspects of embodiment, unlearning, being witnessed, grieving, belonging, and *coming in*—an introspective concept that honours the nuanced nature of sexual dis-

covery and self-acceptance (Rosenberg 2018). To better understand these phenomena on a personal level, queer theory concepts were used to understand not just *how* these experiences happened but *why* they were such an important part of change. Namely, Adrienne Rich's compulsory heterosexuality (1980), which views heteronormativity as an institution that subordinates women to men by promoting heterosexuality as the only standard by which to live, was drawn upon to illuminate barriers to my sexual diversity recognition and my sense of obligation to a heterosexual role. Similarly, Judith Butler's theory of the heterosexual matrix (2007), which describes how sexuality, gender, and sex are collectively socially performed and reciprocated, was used to support the understanding of my earlier life stages, where I tried so hard to embody a wife, woman, and mother in just the "right" way. This study concluded with an understanding that sexuality is fluid, and orientation can change across the lifespan through non-linear, non-sequential, and non-hierarchical stages—a claim that extends the understanding of popular developmental models of identity formation that see sexual identity as something that is stable and typically formed in early life.

The primary challenge of this research was using the boundaries and predictability of psychological theory alongside queer theory. Specifically, I aligned my sexual identity shift with social constructionist perspectives, noting the relational meaning-making aspects of my sexual orientation while also acknowledging an essential sense of authentic truth that felt as if it was being uncovered. The latter concept of an essential self runs counter to queer theory, which promotes an ever-evolving dynamic experience of identity that is sensitive to sociopolitical, cultural, and historic forces. However, when considering the idea of authenticity as something that is not absolute or stable, but rather a sense of congruence or incongruence with one's evolving values (Erickson 1995), it is fair to accept that queer people experience their sexuality as something that is stable and retrospectively make sense of their experiences as leading to an authentic sense of self (Rust 1993). To support a retrospective analysis of this process, from a feeling of incongruence with my heterosexual life to an experience of greater alignment with my lesbian identity and same-sex relationships, queer theory was helpful in addressing the social constructionist factors that both impaired a healthy expression of sexual diversity and enabled the adoption of a more aligned sexual orientation identity.

Mentorship and Methodology: A Queer Reflection (Interlude by Phillip Joy)

As a queer health researcher and mentor, I approach scholarship from the understanding that knowledge is never neutral, and that some of the most meaningful insights arise in spaces of discomfort and contradiction. When Alicia proposed exploring the experience of coming out in adulthood, I was struck by both the vulnerability of the inquiry and the intellectual ambition of engaging with psychological and critical theoretical frameworks simultaneously.

Queer health research often requires navigating across epistemological boundaries, including clinical models that seek to diagnose, stabilize, or normalize, and queer theoretical approaches that emphasize fluidity, disruption, and resistance to categorization. Rather than resolving these differences, I encouraged Alicia to hold space for the tensions between them. In this project, the friction between psychological structure and queer fluidity is not a problem to be solved but a site of possibility.

My role as mentor was not to guide Alicia toward certainty but to support her engagement with uncertainty. I aimed to affirm that her lived experience holds value as a site of knowledge production, not in need of justification but worthy of exploration on its own terms. The choice of critical autoethnography as methodology allowed for a politically engaged and reflexive approach that foregrounds the embodied and affective dimensions of coming out. This aligns with my broader commitment to queering health scholarship and reimagining how we produce, value, and share knowledge within systems that are often hostile to difference. This project illustrates the generative capacity of working across disciplinary, theoretical, and identity-based borders. It also reflects how queer mentorship can serve as both method and ethic, grounded in collaboration, care, and the shared pursuit of more just and expansive ways of knowing.

Mentorship and Methodology: A Psychological Reflection (Interlude by Conor Barker)

As a queer faculty member in psychology and education whose research focuses on inclusion and the voices of those underserved by school psychology, supervising this thesis was a personal and professional challenge that evoked something deeper in me. When I joined the psychology department through a diversity cluster hire, I brought a qualitative orientation into a space traditionally dominated by positivist, quantitative approaches. Like many in psychology, I once imagined myself becoming a quantitative researcher. But the questions that emerged from my practice, as a clinician and as a queer person, demanded something different. They were questions grounded in lived experience, cultural complexity, professional competency, and identity. In short, they were qualitative in nature, necessitating a deep appreciation for theory as it applies to my research questions.

What became clear to me, early in my role as a supervisor, was how under-prepared psychology students often are for this kind of work. Psychology education tends to emphasize statistical significance and generalizability, privileging knowledge that conforms to the scientific method. But qualitative research invites us to step outside that framework and ask different questions. It calls on us to consider how we know what we know, and to recognize that rigorous research can emerge from reflection, emotion, and identity. This was especially true in supervising Alicia's thesis, where her process of *coming in* to her sexual identity pushed conventional undergraduate research to *come out*—to assert its place within psychology as both valid and necessary.

Before participation in this thesis, I would often say that I am a researcher who happens to be queer, not a queer researcher. That distinction once felt important, perhaps protective. But over time, and especially through this project, I have come to understand that my queerness informs my way of seeing the world and my way of doing research. Supporting Alicia's work and collaborating with Dr. Joy, helped me claim that identity more fully.

This work illuminated something important for me: that queer research is not just about queer topics or queer people, but about queering the research process itself. It is about disrupting linearity, embracing contradiction, and valuing stories that resist easy categorization. Queer theory gave Alicia a lens through which to reinterpret her life and not as a deviation from the norm, but as a narrative shaped by and resisting dominant structures and oppression. At the same time, the psychological frameworks she used grounded her story in developmental and relational processes, creating a powerful interplay between the destabilizing force of queer theory and the interpretive lens of psychology. There is a deep tension here, and it is productive. Psychology often seeks to explain, to categorize, to make stable what queer theory insists is fluid. Alicia's narrative helped us hold both truths: that there is a felt sense of authenticity that is meaningful, even as identity is understood to be constructed, shifting, and contingent. This isn't a contradiction in need of resolution, but a generative tension, one that encourages psychology students to reckon with the limits of our discipline and expand what is accepted and valued as knowledge.

As queer researchers and educators, we must create more space for this kind of work: research that is messy, embodied, intersectional, real. It is only through embracing these stories, stories that do not fit cleanly into variables or diagnostic criteria, that we begin to understand the full range of human experience. Through this process, I came to understand that queerness is not just part of who I am, but also how I think, question, and engage with research. And I now wear the label of queer researcher with pride.

Conclusion (by Alicia Wright)

This thesis, and the opportunity to delve into deeply meaningful and complex critical analysis at the undergraduate level, would not have begun without the guidance of queer supervisors. Aside from their academic expertise, their identities as gay men allowed them to direct my work through their subjective understanding of my experiences, thereby implicitly guiding me through the appropriate lens and introducing me to theoretical perspectives that allowed me to see my own story in a new way. Moreover, my perspective as a late-in-life lesbian helped to expand our

collective concept of queer experience, sparking an acknowledged need for this type of vulnerable discourse in scholarly investigation. This process confirms the benefit of enacting a mission of equity, diversity, and inclusion in academia and the powerful possibilities of queer representation in research.

Regarding the outcome of this study, queer theory was ultimately critical in weaving a multidimensional experience of dynamic sexuality with the awareness of a reciprocal performance of expected social roles. This approach suggests that the use of queer theory can serve to enhance and extend psychological perspectives, which are traditionally rooted in heteronormative standards that see non-heterosexuality as something to be explained outside of a norm (Jones 2019; Minton 1997). Using queer theory to question psychology supports existing research that calls for a move away from the minoritization of groups and towards a resistance of hegemonic ideas of gender and sexuality that perpetuate the problems of patriarchy and heterosexism (Minton 1997). There is growing scholarly discussion around the ways in which queer theory helps with "queering" research, not simply through its ability to deconstruct hierarchical structure and binary-based thinking of gender and sexuality, but also by encouraging researchers to remain open to an ever-changing landscape of psychosocial experience (Lesutis 2023).

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Research

Intersectional Promises: How Well Did the Canadian National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence Integrate an Intersectional Approach?

by Olesya Kochkina

Abstract: It took more than ten years of feminist advocacy for the Canadian government to adopt the National Action Plan (NAP) to End Gender-Based Violence (GBV) on November 9, 2022. This study is among the first to trace the development of and critique the NAP. Specifically, I interrogate how well is the NAP grounded in an intersectional approach. Using the adjusted Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis (IBPA) and qualitative content analysis as research methods, I argue that the recently adopted NAP is premised on a deflated definition of intersectionality and lacks attention to the role of existing policies in reproducing social inequalities. The NAP fails to centre the voices of those most affected and to demonstrate an in-depth understanding of systemic causes and effects of GBV resulting in different intersectional needs of various at-risk groups. As a consequence, the NAP provides symbolically intersectional solutions that are unlikely to be effective in addressing GBV. In addition, the NAP relies on non-intersectional data for progress assessment, and it is without built-in mechanisms for meaningful engagement of the most affected groups. With such a design, the current NAP will not be able to achieve the stated vision of a Canada free from GBV.

Keywords: content analysis; gender-based violence; IBPA; intersectionality; policy analysis

Résumé : Ce n'est qu'après plus de dix ans de défense des droits des femmes que le gouvernement canadien adopte, le 9 novembre 2022, le Plan d'action national (PAN) pour mettre fin à la violence fondée sur le sexe (VFS). Cette étude est l'une des premières à retracer l'évolution du PAN et à en faire une critique. Plus précisément, j'examine dans quelle mesure le PAN repose sur une approche intersectionnelle. En utilisant la version adaptée de l'analyse des politiques fondée sur l'intersectionnalité (IBPA) ainsi qu'une analyse qualitative de contenu, je soutiens que le PAN récemment adopté repose sur une définition édulcorée de l'intersectionnalité et néglige le rôle des politiques existantes dans la reproduction des inégalités sociales. Le PAN ne fait pas entendre la voix des personnes les plus touchées et ne démontre pas une compréhension approfondie des causes et des effets systémiques de la VFS, qui se traduisent par des besoins intersectionnels différents selon les groupes à risque. Par conséquent, le PAN propose des solutions symboliquement intersectionnelles qui ne seront probablement pas efficaces pour lutter contre la VFS. De plus, le PAN s'appuie sur des données non intersectionnelles pour évaluer les progrès réalisés, et il ne comporte pas de mécanismes intégrés permettant une participation significative des groupes les plus touchés. De ce fait, le PAN actuel ne sera pas en mesure de concrétiser la vision d'un Canada exempt de VFS.

Mots clés : violence fondée sur le sexe; intersectionnalité; analyse des politiques; IBPA; analyse de contenu

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Introduction

Researchers acknowledge the potential of intersectionality as a policymaking framework to deliver more equitable social outcomes (Bowleg 2008; Hankivsky and Cormier 2011). The Canadian government promised that the National Action Plan (NAP) to End Gender-Based Violence (GBV) would be "grounded in an intersectional approach" (WAGE 2022b, "The high-level framework for joint action"). This aligns with what Canadian feminist organizations have advocated for: "[W]e need the national action plan to be bold, to be robust, to be well resourced and to be intersectional" (Grant, Hayes and Renzetti 2022).

The goal of this paper is to examine how the NAP integrates intersectionality. First, I provide background on the development of the current action plan. Then, I review the literature discussing what it means for a public policy to be intersectionality-informed. Next, I present the findings of qualitative content analysis of the NAP informed by Hankivsky's Intersectionality Based Policy Analysis (IBPA). I aim to contribute to intersectional critique that applies intersectionality "to examine a text, a discourse or policy in order to determine whether they are intersectional" (Garcia and Zajicek 2022) with an ultimate goal to move discourses and policies towards greater social justice. Scholars advocate for the use of an intersectional approach in policymaking because it has the potential to bring a "paradigm shift that foregrounds the complex contexts and root causes of health and social problems" (Hankivsky 2012, 8). An intersectionality-based policy framework brings forward the vantage point of groups that may otherwise remain invisible (Cole and Duncan 2023; Crenshaw 1989), thus producing more equitable and inclusive policy outcomes. This is particularly important in addressing GBV since, as scholars pointed out, the analytical frameworks that focus on single issues, such as race, class, or gender, fail to address the problems produced by a complex web of oppressive powers (Crenshaw 1991; Day and Gill 2020). The assumption that experiences with GBV are the same for all women leads to "one size fits all" solutions that are generally ineffective for everyone. Developing an approach to safety tailored to the intersectional needs of various groups "offers genuine empowerment to end *all* forms of oppression and violence against *all* survivors" (Day and Gill 2020, 847). It may be argued that the practical application of intersectionality is challenging (McCall 2005) and its use within policies tends to be "blurry" (Manning and Levac 2022). However, a wide range of tools guiding the implementation of intersectionality within policies are currently available (Hankivsky and Jordan-Zachery 2019), thus policymakers have resources to address these challenges.

My analysis of the NAP reveals a weak and inconsistent application of intersectionality which is likely to produce results opposite to that which intersectionality intends. Sara Ahmed called this phenomenon "*non-performativity*: when something is named without coming into effect" (Ahmed 2018, 333, emphasis in the original). The NAP's recommendations demonstrate the non-performative use of intersectionality; its surface adoption of the language of intersectionality masks the lack of commitment to disrupting the existing power status quo disadvantaging certain groups in the context of GBV. Furthermore, by failing to centre the standpoints of marginalized groups, the policy contributes to reproducing their vulnerable position. The design of the NAP works to sustain rather than challenge the existing hierarchies in the context of GBV.

Background: Decades of Feminist Advocacy Resulted in Adopting the NAP

On November 9, 2022, the Government of Canada released a ten-year National Action Plan (NAP) to End GBV. The introduction of the NAP was a culmination of more than ten years of strategic advocacy by Canadian feminist organizations. NAP signifies a critical step in addressing "one of the most pervasive, deadly and deeply rooted human rights violations" (WAGE, 2022b Introduction). Yet the advocates for the NAP were far from celebratory (see Joint Statement on the Release of the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence 2022).

The Canadian campaign to advocate for the NAP addressing GBV started around 2012 as a response to the series of United Nations resolutions and a global UN campaign calling on states to adopt multi-sectoral action plans to address Violence Against Women (VAW) by 2015. Women's Shelters Canada (WSC) spearheaded a national advocacy campaign, involving more than 250 organizations (Dale, Maki and Nitia 2021, 362). The goal was to push the Cana-

dian government to enact a plan that is "bold, ambitious, and intersectional" (Dale, Maki and Nitia 2021, 135).

The Justin Trudeau Liberal government, elected in 2015, was generally supportive of developing a comprehensive policy on VAW and GBV; however, instead of introducing a long-term NAP, it adopted a five-year Strategy titled "It's Time: Canada's Strategy to Prevent and Address Gender-Based Violence" in 2017. Although the Strategy contained important initiatives and increased funding towards GBV, it was criticized for a scattered approach and limited coherence of actions (Gotell 2023).

The 2021 federal budget provided $600 million over five years to advance the NAP; the next year another $540 million over five years was added to work with provinces and territories on the NAP. Another milestone was the endorsement of the Joint Declaration for a Canada Free of Gender-Based Violence by the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women in January 2021. This Declaration states that the NAP is a high-level framework for joint action; it identifies the vision, goals, pillars, guiding principles, and foundation for the NAP. However, the Declaration left the question of coordination mechanisms open.

One of the initiatives funded under the 2021 budgetary allocation was the development of the report titled "Roadmap for the National Action Plan on Violence Against Women and Gender-Based Violence" (hereafter "Roadmap"). The report was sanctioned by Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE) and developed by anti-violence experts from advocacy groups, front-line service organizations, academia, and professional organizations (Dale, Maki and Nitia 2021). These experts developed a prototype of a NAP with recommendations structured around five pillars: (1) enabling environment and social infrastructure; (2) prevention; (3) promotion of responsive legal and justice system; (4) support for survivors and their families; and (5) Indigenous Women's leadership (assigned to a different group, WAGE Indigenous Women's Circle). The Roadmap put forward over one hundred recommendations offering transformative solutions to systemic problems. In addition, the Roadmap had calls to action covering police and state violence, complexities of transformative justice, wrap-around services, and stability of VAW/GBV sector. Arguably, the Roadmap was a comprehensive and well-researched document developed through a transparent participatory process that could be translated into a national framework for action, provided there was political will.

The launch of the NAP in November 2022 could be viewed as a victory for feminist advocacy. However, the experts who developed the Roadmap expressed serious concerns. "The document released two weeks ago is not a National Action Plan," they said in a Joint Statement on the Release of the NAP (Joint Statement 2023). Acknowledging that the NAP is aligned with many of Roadmap's traits, the authors critique the NAP for not being binding on Canadian governments and for providing recommendations that are too broad, not far-reaching, and without identified priorities.

All provinces and territories signed bilateral agreements with the federal government between June and November 2023. These agreements cover four fiscal years from April 1, 2023, to March 31, 2027. One of the advocates' key demands – as well as one of the main promises of the policy document – is that the NAP integrates an intersectional perspective. How effectively does the NAP use intersectionality? To answer this question, I will first outline the characteristics of an intersectionality-informed policy.

Literature Review: Intersectional Policy Framework

Defining Intersectionality in a Policy Context

Intersectionality's "methodological pluralism" (Hankivsky and Jordan-Zachery 2019, 10) means there are multiple ways that intersectionality is defined and applied in policymaking. The very definition of intersectionality used within a particular policy sends a message about that policy's focus. Scholars point out that some definitions of intersectionality extend towards social justice, while others have limited transformative potency (Collins 2015; Christoffersen 2022; Walby, Armstrong and Strid 2012). The literature strongly cautions against the "additive" approach to intersec-

tionality; socially constructed categories of gender, race, sexuality, and (dis)ability must be recognized as co-constitutive and indivisible (Bowleg 2008). In addition, scholars underline that a productive way to engage with intersectionality is by paying attention to the ways that different regimes of inequality shape each other (Walby, Armstrong, and Strid 2012). It is important to focus the definition of intersectionality on the systems of domination that place individuals in a multi-dimensional hierarchical position rather than on identities alone.

For example, compare the following definitions:

> The concept of "intersectionality" refers to the interactivity of social identity structures such as race, class, and gender in fostering life experiences, especially experiences of privilege and oppression. (Gopaldas 2013)

> Intersectionality investigates how intersecting power relations influence social relations across diverse societies as well as individual experiences in everyday life. As an analytic tool, intersectionality views the categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, ability, ethnicity, and age—among others—as interrelated and mutually shaping one another. Intersectionality is a way of understanding and explaining complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. (Collins and Bilge 2020, 2)

Unlike the first definition, the second one highlights the relationships between different social levels emphasizing the primary role of power in creating inequalities. Formulated this way, the definition invites us to think about the role of policies in shaping lived experiences, social relationships, and overarching power relations. As much as intersectionality's "definitional fluidity" (Collins 2015) allows policymakers to adjust the conceptual framework for a particular initiative, it is important to ground it in a definition that guides towards transformative solutions.

What Makes a Policy Intersectionality-Based?

The application of intersectionality to public policy can be traced to 2006, with the publication of Tiffany Manuel's paper, which first talked about the advantages of using an intersectional lens in public policies (Garcia and Zajicek 2022, 273). Since then, authors have explored the core elements of an intersectionality-informed policy. Attention to power is arguably at the heart of an intersectional approach (Cho, Crenshaw and McCall 2013; Collins and Bilge 2020; Hankivsky 2012). Power structures intersect at multiple levels (Hankivsky 2012) placing people in unique social locations, thus the same policy will be experienced differently by different groups (Collins and Bilge 2000, 6). A core intersectionality tenet is bringing the lived experiences of people from marginalised communities to the centre of policy analysis and formulation (Bowleg 2012, 1268). Methodological misuse of intersectionality can lead to the recentring of hegemonic subject positions, such as whiteness (Tate 2023). Recentering whiteness and other dominating groups along with the othering of non-white and other disadvantaged communities often happens through the application of a so-called "colourblind intersectionality" (Carbado and Harris 2019, 2223), which is defined as a false assumption of neutrality of certain subject positions. This leads to treating white, able-bodied, cis-gender and other privileged groups as the default baseline. Scholars underline the importance of examining the realities of historically marginalized populations from their unique vantage point and not through comparison with an imagined "norm" (Bowleg 2012; Carbado and Harris 2019).

Meaningful engagement with the intended beneficiaries helps to address the risk of falling into the trap of "colourblind" intersectionality. For example, Samantha LaMartine, Nakamura, and García (2023) examined the experiences of victimization from the vantage point of Afro-American transgender women, highlighting that their aggravated vulnerability to GBV comes from the intersection of racism, classism, cissexism, and sexual stigmatization (105). The interaction of these powers positions Black transgender women at a higher risk for intimate partner violence, sexual assaults, police violence, re-victimization, and criminalization; at the same time, the authors underline the resilience of the community and their creativity in developing coping mechanisms (LaMartine, Nakamura, and García

2023, 106-107). The authors examine the situation from Black transgender women's vantage point to inform their recommendations for GBV-related counselling and programming.

A common critique of intersectionality is that it works to fragment advocacy movements rather than support unity and cohesion. This argument is often taken up by policymakers who reason that it is not feasible to introduce a different policy for each "interest group"; intersectionality-based policy is "too complicated" (Manning and Levac 2022). However, Dorothy Roberts and Sujatha Jesudason demonstrated that intersectionality can forge political alliances between such different groups as reproductive justice activists, racial justice activists, women's rights, and disability rights activists. They suggest that even though these groups operate from distinct social locations, the analysis of their commonalities "reveals ways in which structures of oppression are related" thus offering better ways to address them (Roberts and Jesudason 2013, 316). Unfortunately, rather than acknowledging variabilities and spaces of convergence, policies tend to operate from an underlying assumption of being gender-, race-, class-, sexuality- and ableism-neutral which results in an ineffective "one size fits all" approach. Scholars argue that policies and programs addressing GBV from appropriate vantage points are scarce (Henriksen et al. 2023).

Methodology

To answer the question "How does the Canadian NAP on GBV use an intersectional approach to frame the policy?" I draw on Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis (IBPA) (Hankivsky 2012) and qualitative content analysis (QCA) (Altheide and Schneider, 2013; Krippendorff 2019). Introduced in 2012, IBPA aims "to better illuminate how policy constructs individuals' and groups' relative power and privileges vis-a-vis their socio-economic-political status, health and well-being" (Hankivsky 2012, 134). The core of IBPA consists of eight guiding principles and twelve descriptive and transformative questions. The descriptive questions help to interrogate the policy issue while transformative questions help to develop approaches to tackle it. IBPA's guiding principles imply that the work will be done collectively by people who have lived experiences with the policy issue, be rooted in reflexive processes, include multi-level analysis, and acknowledge contextualized power dynamics with the ultimate goal of achieving social justice.

For my analysis, I adopted the approach to combining IBPA and QCA used by other scholars (e.g., Di Matteo 2022). I adjusted the IBPA framework to match my research question and the availability of resources. Four slightly modified questions were used to guide my analysis of the NAP (adapted from Hankivsky 2012, 39-42):

1) How does the NAP define intersectionality? How does the NAP use intersectionality to frame the causes of GBV and its effects on various groups? How does this framing shape the understanding of the groups' needs in the context of GBV?

2) How has this representation of GBV come about within the NAP? Who was involved and what type of evidence was used?

3) How will proposed actions address intersectional inequities?

4) What intersectional factors will be measured within the evaluation of the NAP and how?

Findings: the NAP's Non-Performative Intersectionality

The NAP's guiding principles assert that the policy is "grounded in an intersectional approach" (WAGE 2022b, "The high-level framework for joint action)". The words "intersectionality" and "intersectional" are sprinkled throughout the document: they appear in each section, twenty-one times in total. However, my analysis suggests that the kind of "intersectionality" used within the NAP is a hollowed-out version, depleted of its transformational potential (Bilge 2012). The NAP is premised on a flattened definition of intersectionality that does not orient the policy toward social justice. The NAP de facto homogenizes the most affected groups despite listing them separately. The monitoring and

reporting system deployed by the NAP does not have ways to integrate intersectionality-informed methods of data collection and analysis. The NAP demonstrates "non-performativity" (Ahmed 2006; 2018) in how it addresses systemic barriers and in how it commits to engaging people with lived experiences. Ahmed (2016) suggests that non-performative speech acts "'work' precisely by not bringing about the effects that they name" (Ahmed 2016, 105). Scholars argue that this failure is not a result of a mistake or a circumstance. "The failure is the function" (Jackson 2018, 47) in the sense that non-performatives are used to replace the action. The NAP's non-performative intersectional language results in evading further intersectional analysis and response.

Diluted Definition of Intersectionality

The first set of questions that guided my content analysis was: "How does the NAP define intersectionality? How does the NAP use intersectionality to frame the causes of GBV and its effects on various groups? How does this framing shape the understanding of the groups' needs in the context of GBV?"

The Glossary provided in the Annex of the NAP contains the following definition of intersectionality:

> Approach to analyzing social relations and structures in a given society developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw. Intersectional approaches recognize that every person's identity is made up of multiple identity categories such as (but not limited to) ability, attraction, body size, citizenship, class, creed, ethnicity, gender expression, gender identity, race, religion. The ways a person may experience systemic privilege and oppression are affected by the intersection of these identity categories, depending on how they are valued by social institutions. (WAGE 2022b, "Annex C - Glossary")

This definition frames intersectionality as an individual intellectual contribution rather than an outcome of the collective political struggles of historically marginalized communities. It wrests intersectionality away from Black feminist thought and detaches Crenshaw from the cohort of anti-racist and anti-colonial intellectuals/activists. The framing of intersectionality, organized around individual identity categories, is narrow and misleading as it obscures the roles of systemic forces. The language used to describe the relationships among multiple categories—"made up of"—does not strongly caution against the additive approach and treating identity categories as mutually exclusive (Bowleg 2008). For example, Bowleg underscores that personal identities are not made up of independent characteristics, such as race, gender, and sexual orientation but constitute each other and, if taken apart, they can't fully explain unequal outcomes faced by individuals (Bowleg 2008, 2012).

There is another explanation of the intersectional approach within the NAP that gives slightly more attention to systemic factors and context:

> …an intersectional lens, which recognizes that people often experience multiple oppressions due to the combined effects of systemic discrimination (e.g., ableism, classism, colonialism, a collective history of trauma, poverty, racism, sexism, and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression). Intersectionality takes into account historical, social, and political contexts and centres the unique experiences of the individual and/or group in relation to their identity factors. (WAGE 2022b)

However, this explanation neglects the role of existing institutions, policies, and administrative decisions in (re)producing social inequalities. The document lists the "-isms" without discussing how they work together to position specific groups as more vulnerable to GBV. As a result, the dominant underlying assumptions about GBV remain unchallenged (e.g., that GBV is an individual-level problem) and may be reproduced. Sirma Bilge pointed out that framing social life as interactions of individuals, not a collective, can "create the conditions allowing the founding conceptions of intersectionality - as an analytical lens and political tool for fostering a radical social justice agenda - to become diluted, disciplined, and disarticulated" (Bilge 2012, 407). Despite talking about systemic discrimination, the NAP is premised on a disarticulated intersectionality.

GBV affects various groups differently. An intersectional understanding of variations and similarities among the most impacted communities is crucial for formulating effective policy responses. The NAP uses the concept of intersec-

tionality to name the most affected groups, it acknowledges that GBV is rooted in gender inequality amplified by other systemic factors (WAGE 2022b, "Introduction"), but it does not substantiate this statement with an analysis of intersecting power structures that create unique experiences with GBV for each of the listed groups. This results in de-facto homogenization of the groups and their needs. For example, the document states: "Certain populations that are at risk of GBV or underserved when they experience these forms of violence include Indigenous women and girls; Black and racialized women; immigrant and refugee women; Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and additional sexually and gender diverse (2SLGBTQI+) people; people with disabilities, and women living in Northern, rural, and remote communities" (WAGE 2022b, "Introduction").

In this and similar passages, all groups are lumped together without a discussion of how different "-isms" co-produce specific inequalities for various groups work in their specific situation. For example, immigrant and refugee women are included in the list, but nowhere in the document can we find discussion of how the intersection of precarious legal status produced by migration policies with gendered racializations makes some women more vulnerable to GBV. Moreover, "migrant and refugee women" are further homogenized as the NAP does not acknowledge diversities within and between these two groups. The policy does not take into account the ways that sub-groups even within a seemingly coherent "refugee" category are differently affected by the "welfare models and societal discourses related to migrant deservingness" (Di Matteo 2022, 70).

One of the NAP's recommendations is to "improve programs, services, and supports that impact people experiencing GBV so they may better address the intersectional needs of diverse communities and populations" (WAGE 2022b, "Pillar One"). This recommendation is non-performative as it is not linked to a robust background analysis; it also does not specify which programs, services, and supports impact which groups and in which ways. Nor does it address what needs to be changed. The recommendation is too abstract to guide an intersectional response. Without concrete and targeted actions to address intersectional realities, the NAP's solutions are likely to benefit those who are already relatively privileged and further marginalize those who are disadvantaged.

Engaging People with Lived Experiences of Intersectional Oppressions

My second set of questions was: "How has this representation of GBV come about within the NAP? Who was involved and what type of evidence was used?" Hankivsky (2012, 37) points out the critical need to engage with people who are typically excluded from policy formulation. Unfortunately, the NAP contains only a vague description of how diverse knowledges were taken into account while developing the policy.

The official Backgrounder for the NAP states that it "has been informed by over 1000 recommendations through years of engagement with Indigenous partners and a wide range of stakeholders, including victims/survivors, front-line service providers, community leaders, experts, academics and civil society" (WAGE 2022a). The text of the NAP echoes this statement (WAGE 2022b, "The need for a national action plan"). At the same time, the NAP suggests that one of the barriers to applying intersectionality is the lack of data that uses an intersectional lens. If "over 1000 recommendations" provided by "a wide range of stakeholders" did not offer substantive evidence grounded in intersectionality then what was counted as evidence?

The Roadmap is one example of a comprehensive analytic document, representing a collective voice of people with lived experiences and firmly grounded in intersectionality. Even though the NAP follows the structure offered by the Roadmap, the Roadmap is not directly cited in the policy and the two documents are not linked. Given the weak intersectional paradigm of the background and introduction of the NAP, there is no evidence that the authors of the NAP have substantively engaged with "over 1000 recommendations" mentioned in the policy.

On the surface level, the NAP recognizes the importance of future engagement with key communities. It suggests that "federal, provincial, and territorial governments, Indigenous organizations, GBV direct service providers, researchers, the private sector, and victims, survivors and their families work together" to achieve the NAP's vision. The plan notes that the GBV Secretariat at WAGE will be responsible for this coordination (WAGE 2022b, "The Found-

ation"). Complimentary strategies are promised to be developed to support federal and provincial/territorial coordination. Unfortunately, the proposed mechanism lacks clarity.

The authors of the Roadmap have been calling on the government to establish an overarching NAP supervisory body and suggest that "independent oversight gives the NAP its best chance at strategic, long-term success" (Homepage, National Action Plan). However, two years after the NAP was launched, it is still not clear if and how the overall oversight board will be created, and there are no specific recommendations about it in the policy. The "Opportunities for Action" section related to engagement mostly talks about research and knowledge mobilization. It may be expected that stronger engagement mechanisms will be developed on the provincial level, but the national policy does not contain strategies that would ensure transparency for the NAP as a whole.

Symbolic Intersectionality in Addressing Systemic Issues

The third IBPA question guiding my analysis was: "How will proposed actions address intersectional inequities?" A critical characteristic of an intersectionality-based policy is the attention to intertwined powers that produce inequities operating on structural, cultural, disciplinary, and interpersonal levels (Collins and Bilge 2020); this attention must inform and guide policy responses. The NAP acknowledges the problems resulting in inadequate responses to GBV, such as systemic racism and discrimination, but does not deal with them in any substantive way. For example, the NAP suggests that "people are often reluctant to report GBV due in part to stigma, shame, fear, and systemic issues, which may lead to a lack of confidence that the justice response will be effective" (WAGE 2022b, "The evidence"). The NAP does not specify what those systemic issues are. The document could, for example, discuss victim-blaming by the criminal justice system, retraumatization of the survivors, and low conviction rates, among other issues. In another part of the document, the NAP describes the "underlying intersectional factors" as "systemic racism, discriminatory practices and institutional deficiencies that prevent survivors from experiencing just outcomes" (WAGE 2022b, "Pillar three, footnote"). Again, the NAP does not specify what institutional deficiencies it is referring to; it also does not discuss the link between the listed factors and barriers to accessing adequate GBV services. As a result, the solutions to addressing intersectional inequalities remain vague and are unlikely to address the systemic causes of GBV and the inaccessibility of GBV services.

To answer the question of how intersectionality could be deployed more authentically, we can look at the following example from the Roadmap:

> Survivors of VAW/GBV, including sexual assault, do not often avail themselves of protections provided by the law and when they do, they often report re-victimization and/or re-traumatization. Since the services that are available are usually underfunded and piecemeal (i.e., legal aid lawyers frequently have strict limits on their hours and cannot complete all aspects of a file) survivors also require continuity of support. In the criminal law context, unless victims are also the accused, they do not have their own lawyer. (Dale, Maki and Nitia 2021, 80)

In contrast to the NAP, the Roadmap provides a sufficiently detailed contextual analysis, for example, of the "'twin myth' that the complainant is more likely to have consented or [is] less worthy of belief" (despite the adoption of the "rape shield" provisions in the Criminal Code in 1992) and the lack of lawyers specializing in representing survivors within the governmental system. This makes it clearer what is understood in terms of systemic barriers and allows the Roadmap to offer tangible solutions, including, for example, access to Survivor Advocates and expanded community-based wrap-around services (Dale, Maki and Nitia 2021, 79-80). The Roadmap also advocates that the "Correctional Service Canada's (CSC) risk assessment tools that disproportionately impact racialized, Black, and Indigenous women" should be revised using an intersectionality-based perspective (Dale, Maki and Nitia 2021, 86). This action would contribute to addressing the problem of over-incarceration of specific groups and thus help resolve the issue of GBV under-reporting. These are a few examples from hundreds of targeted strategies laid out by the Roadmap. Unfortunately, the NAP failed to achieve the same level of specificity in addressing the root causes of problems through intersectionality-informed solutions.

It may be argued that the elaboration of concrete actions is expected to happen on the provincial level. However, certain policies are under federal jurisdiction (e.g., criminal law, divorce, employment and social development policy, labour laws, and immigration policy) and there are areas where provincial and federal policies work in tandem. This allows for the formulation of more specific recommendations while leaving room for local adjustments. On the surface, the NAP commits to intersectionality but does not make substantive attempts to provide actionable intersectionality-informed recommendations. Ahmed (2016) talks about such commitments as a way of not doing things by appearing to do them.

The NAP's Accountability: Same Methods—Different Results?

The last IBPA question used for this analysis was: "What intersectional factors will be measured within the evaluation of the NAP and how?" The NAP describes applying an intersectional approach as challenging due to the limitations of data: "It is difficult to apply an intersectional lens to existing data, as available data only highlights specific forms of GBV on individual populations such as Indigenous Peoples or people with disabilities, for example, but not the experience of Indigenous people with disabilities" (WAGE 2022b, "The Evidence"). While vaguely acknowledging the need for change, the NAP builds its monitoring and reporting system around conventional performance indicators and existing data collection mechanisms. As stated within the document, the data will be collected by Statistics Canada through the Homicide Survey, Survey of Safety on Public and Private Spaces (SSPPS) and General Social Survey on Victimization (GSS). There is no recommendation for reconsidering the nature of the results-tracking system so that it is firmly grounded in an intersectional approach, when good guidance for doing so exists. For example, emergent research offers intersectionality-informed mixed-method approaches to data collection and analysis (Grace 2014). Methodological advances such as survey data harmonisation, big data, and mobilization of interdisciplinary perspectives can help apply the intersectional framework to generate insights about policymaking, impact, and effectiveness (Dubrow and Ilinca 2019). In addition, considering alternative ways of understanding what may serve as evidence can expand intersectional understanding (Hankivsky 2012).

The NAP, however, makes no attempts to embed intersectionality in the design of the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework. The NAP suggests that "whenever possible, data will be further disaggregated by gender identity or expression, Indigeneity, sexual orientation, age, race, status, disability, geography (provinces or territories; urban or rural/remote/Northern) and by any other available identity factor(s)" (WAGE 2022b, "Reporting and monitoring"). Data disaggregation alone may not be enough to ensure an intersectional approach to M&E. For example, there is evidence that the responses towards GBV within the Canadian healthcare system reproduce ableism and other power relations that restrict "access to care and justice for women with disabilities and those who are historically marginalized" and sustain "the conditions that create vulnerabilities to GBV for these groups" (Grand'Maison 2024, 152-153). The existing progress tracking methods might, for example, show whether or not service utilization and satisfaction have changed, but they cannot assess whether or not the power relations have changed.

Without deploying a truly intersectional M&E framework it will be impossible to assess if the NAP is making a difference in transforming such structural issues as the healthcare system's ableism. One set of recommendations within the NAP pertains to "design, development and implementation of holistic performance measurement frameworks that are by, for, and accountable to Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, no matter where they live" (WAGE 2022b, "Reporting and monitoring"). This important aspiration should be extended to other marginalized communities.

Discussion and Conclusion

While intersectionality became "the gold standard of feminist work" (Nash 2019, 43), it can be used in ways that neutralize its transformative potential (Bilge 2012). My analysis suggests that even though the Canadian NAP rhetorically values this analytical framework, it engages in "the symbolic performance of intersectionality" (Mirza 2022, 196). The policy is premised on a deflated definition of intersectionality preoccupied with identities more than with the intersections of systemic inequalities. Within the document, there is no sound analysis of how intersecting social

structures create different types of vulnerabilities for the groups experiencing the highest rates of GBV and how existing policies and practices recreate and sustain barriers to addressing the needs of these groups. The in-depth intersectional analysis provided by the Roadmap—a guiding document produced by the leading Canadian front-line organizations addressing GBV—is ignored. The NAP follows the structure of the Roadmap but it does not have the same level of nuanced background analysis and recommendations. Without contextualization within the lived realities, the NAP's recommendations remain too vague to produce tangible results. There is no evidence of meaningful engagement with the most affected groups. The text of the NAP implies that detailed strategies and actions are to be elaborated on the provincial level. However, the national policy provides a weak example of embedding intersectionality for the provincial-level plans. Since the NAP's M&E does not integrate an intersectional lens, there are no accountability mechanisms to ensure that an intersectional approach to policy is used on the provincial level.

The NAP's use of intersectionality is non-performative: the document labels solutions as intersectional to mask an absence of real action. By communicating the value of intersectionality, the NAP presents itself as an intersectionality-based policy despite the lack of mechanisms to operationalize intersectionality and be accountable for it. Rezai-Rashti et al. (2021, 9) discuss institutional commitments to diversity and inclusion suggesting that "having a good policy ultimately shields and protects the institution from having to effectively perform the policy"; similarly, declaring a commitment to intersectionality within the NAP allows it to bypass deploying transformative solutions.

Scholars have demonstrated that there is resistance at the governmental level to applying intersectionality within policymaking, especially within enforceable initiatives (Manning and Levac 2022). Intersectionality as a knowledge project operates within the same socio-cultural and political context that it strives to transform (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013), thus it is susceptible to de-politicization, co-opting, and misuse. In my analysis of the use of intersectionality within the Canadian NAP on GBV, I demonstrate how such a de-orientation of the concept happens within this policy document. Ahmed (2016, 2) argues that non-performativity reveals institutional mechanics of "how things are reproduced by the very appearance of being transformed." The NAP contains the risk of further disadvantaging people with multiple intersecting identities in the context of GBV and reinforcing the systemic powers that work collectively to marginalise them. Through non-performative use of intersectionality, the plan re-institutionalizes attention to already relatively privileged groups, while the needs of most vulnerable groups continue to be neglected. The non-performative deployment of an intersectional approach within the NAP leaves little hope that the vision of Canada free from VAW and GBV will come true in the near future.

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Book Review

Ejaculate Responsibly: A Whole New Way to Think about Abortion

by Jodi VanderHeide

Book reviewed: Blair, Gabrielle. 2022. *Ejaculate Responsibly: A Whole New Way to Think about Abortion.* Workman Publishing Company

Reviewer: Jodi VanderHeide is the Manager of the Sex Education Resource Centre at the Dalhousie Student Union, where she has the privilege of working with students on important issues relating to sex, sexuality, and gender. She has a BA in Social Work (UNBC) and an MA in Women and Gender Studies (St. Mary's University). She will continue her studies in the fall of 2025 at Dalhousie University, in Sociology (PhD), where she will further her research on the intersection of sexuality, religion, and community belonging.

In 2022, the Supreme Court of the United States overturned the hard-won battles of *Roe v. Wade*, leading to the restriction of abortion and access to reproductive contraception in many of the states. As a researcher interested in the intersections of sexuality, politics, and religion, I felt drawn to read *Ejaculate Responsibly: A Whole New Way to Think about Abortion* by Gabrielle Blair who, in the introduction to her book states, "I'm a religious mother of six" followed by "the most important essay I have ever written, an essay about abortion" (1) (referencing her earlier work "Men Cause 100% of Unwanted Pregnancies, 2018). This statement immediately piqued my interest, as there is a liminal space in which feminist or progressive viewpoints and religious identities co-exist publicly. Throughout the book, Blair navigates her positionality, and I appreciated the nuanced tone in which she confronted conservative rhetoric rather than bypassing these beliefs altogether. Despite her biting satirical narrative, in which it sounds as if she is poking fun at the simple anatomical process of unwanted pregnancies, Blair spends time addressing the foundational arguments of those who want to restrict abortion and the "fundamental mistake" (2) they are making in their efforts (hint, it has to do with men!).The premise of the book, as stated in the title, is that unwanted pregnancies are the result of [male] ejaculation. To expand upon this argument, Blair organizes the book's chapters into 28 succinct and numbered arguments, directing the audience to the unacknowledged yet tenable facts of reproductive health (e.g., "men are 50 times more fertile than women", 6), thereby dispelling the myths that position women as intuitively responsible for fertility and issuing a call for crucial refocus: it's the men (1).

To contextualize the tensions related to reproductive health and abortion in the United States, Blair contends that the "for-or-against" abortion debate is ineffective. I paused here. While I understand her intention in bypassing the debate and moving straight into her synopsis of the issue as a means to engage a wider audience without presenting a particular socio-political stance, this bypass could be perceived as a dismissal of past (and present) reproductive rights efforts, which were/are immensely political and publicly debated. Nevertheless, Blair's overall argument is logical: simply put, abortion is not a women's issue but, rather, inherently a men's issue as males, on average, are significantly more fertile. Flipping the narrative to place responsibility on male fertility would drastically shift the "abortion debate" by decentralizing women as the primary character in unwanted pregnancies. Let us pause again here. Blair has laid out an almost obvious argument but in doing so has completely under-minded the patriarchal power entrenched in western society and a government that actively works to displace male responsibility and forefront women as being reproductively responsible. The hyperbolic image of the fertile woman flows right into the narrative of the nurturing mother, who is expected to breastfeed, be a stay-at-home mom, and be responsible for "family life."

Granted, Blair's commentary about the tragicomic nature of the female contraception industry, in comparison to the marginal attention focused on male fertility, paints an unspoken picture of patriarchal pursuits. She taps into her comedic voice to denote the unjust burden on women to access contraception, from attending doctor's appointments and filling prescriptions (with or without insurance) to adjusting to the potential side effects. The book is clear about the various barriers to procuring and taking birth control in the United States, barriers that do not account for the multiple intersecting layers that might affect a woman's access to reproductive health. In the same vein as the author's note on language at the beginning of the book, in which she acknowledges the exclusive cis-gendered, heterosexual focus of the manuscript, it is also critical to recognize the many variables entwined in reproductive health that impact women in various ways. For example, experiences of reproductive health care for women of colour can be profoundly impacted by systemic racism embedded in the health and scientific community.

Ejaculate Responsibly is full of interesting facts, with informative, concise, and easy-to-read arguments that confront the deficits of positioning reproductive responsibility as a women's issue. Blair provides a note at the end of the book stating, "This book was thoroughly and deeply fact-checked, and the end notes for this little volume are almost as long as the book itself" (129) and proceeds to provide a link to a 105-page citation guide—I checked! Each of the arguments is listed followed by multiple sources, ranging from peer-reviewed journals to medial based web sources. Despite the many reputable cited sources, it is unclear how many reliable deductions Blair made from the various data sources, noting she is not a trained medical professional.

As a feminist reader, my opinion fluctuated between whether Blair was strategically comedic about calling out a rampant toxic masculinity that evades reproductive responsibility or if there was an unnamed passivity that was reluctant to confront the ongoing harm of reproductive injustices. However, in the end, I felt Blair succeeded in presenting a comprehensive overview of the realities of sex and reproduction with candour. She does not shy away from addressing more personal reproductive issues, such as the notion of reduced sexual satisfaction with condom use or diminished masculinity in the aftermath of a vasectomy. Furthermore, in Argument No. 17, Blair states that "the uneven power dynamic between men and women is real and can turn violent quickly" (81). While the majority of the book is focused on stating facts with surface level remarks on sexism, here Blair takes the opportunity to address the patriarchal violence ingrained in American society and, in her satirical style, presents a "pop quiz" (referenced 82–84) for men with questions aimed at confronting the power dynamics inherent in many [hetero]sexual relations, thereby grounding Blair's overall argument in the realities of sexual violence for many women.

In conclusion, if you are looking for a book that delves into a socio-political analysis of reproductive rights, Blair's book may not be for you. As noted earlier, Blair's introductory statements, as well as her concluding chapter, address those advocating for abortion restrictions, stating, "If you want to reduce the number of abortions in your country…" (118). From this perspective, her approach seems strategic; she highlights statistics and bare facts and avoids delving too deeply into the religious, political, and patriarchal powers that enable the continued injustices shaping female sexual reproductive health. In summary, *Ejaculate Responsibly* is a condensed handbook that highlights critical reproductive injustices with an amusing dose of sarcasm. I would heartily recommend it to those looking for a succinct and informative read, especially the [hetero] men needing further education about their reproductive responsibilities.

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Introduction

AMI Working Papers

The following group of articles, "AMI Working Papers," is a new, annual section that presents innovative essays, interviews, and creative writing from speakers hosted by the Alexa McDonough Institute for Women, Gender and Social Justice at MSVU throughout the current or previous year.

This year's selection features two keynote addresses from the Women and Gender Studies Graduate Student Conference for International Women's Day: MSVU's Nancy's Chair in Women's Studies, Dr. Mary Rita Holland and the AMI Fellow (2024-2025) Adebola Osegboun, an MSVU graduate student in Women and Gender Studies.

Next is an interview with pioneering feminist activist, Julie Glaser who spoke to Sam le Nobel, the AMI's Program and Planning Assistant as well as the President & Co-Founder, Women's Studies Society at MSVU). Julie participated in a panel discussion called A Herstory of Consent Activism Across University Campuses that showcased the book *This Wasn't on the Syllabus*, edited by Emma Kuzmyk and Addy Strickland.

Last, our inclusion of poetry celebrates the winners of the AMI's International Day of the Girl Child: Girls' Vision for the Future poetry contest: Mariana Caloca & Sam Sinclair (1st place), Jyotsana Balasubramaniyam (2nd place), Catherine Khaperska (3rd place). These original and thought-provoking pieces were also read at the AMI's Girls Conference: Better Together.

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Working Papers

Family Caregiving as Health Work: A Critical Perspective on the Value of Supporting a Loved One Aging at Home

by Mary Rita Holland

Abstract: This paper uses the example of family caregivers in Atlantic Canada to shed light on the invisible emotional labour—or health work—required to maintain the home as a site of care and manage disrupted meanings of home space and family relationships. It provides an overview of feminist political economics perspective to illustrate the history of women's exploitation, the extent of their invisible health work, and the impact of private home care and aging-in-place policies on their experiences of home. A critical perspective on gendered, familial care providers and their relationship to the care environment contributes to knowledge of the impact of imposing long-term care policy on domestic relationships and places.

Keywords: Canada; family caregiving; feminist political economy; home care

Résumé : Cet article s'appuie sur l'exemple des aidants familiaux dans les provinces de l'Atlantique canadien pour illustrer le travail émotionnel invisible – ou travail en santé – qu'implique le maintien du domicile comme lieu de soins et la gestion des bouleversements liés à l'espace domestique et aux relations familiales. Il offre un aperçu du point de vue féministe à l'égard de l'économie politique pour montrer l'exploitation historique des femmes, l'ampleur de leur travail invisible en santé, ainsi que les répercussions des soins à domicile privés et des politiques de vieillissement à domicile par rapport à leur expérience du foyer. Pour comprendre les conséquences de l'imposition d'une politique de soins de longue durée sur les relations et les milieux familiaux, il faut poser un regard critique sur les aidants familiaux selon leur genre et sur leur rapport à l'environnement de soin.

Mots clés : aidant familial; économie politique féministe; soins à domicile; Canada

Author: Mary Rita Holland is the current Nancy's Chair in Women's Studies at Mount Saint Vincent University. She holds a PhD from Queen's School of Kinesiology and Health Studies with a focus on health policy, a Master of Public Administration degree in social policy (Queen's), a Master of Arts degree in History (Queen's), and a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and History (University of New Brunswick). Dr. Holland's teaching interests include health equity, formal and informal caregiving, women and politics, social movements, and qualitative research methods. Her current research uses the example of family caregivers of rural older adults in Atlantic Canada to shed light on the invisible emotional labour required to maintain the home as a site of care and manage disrupted meanings of home space and family relationships. Her work has been published in the international journals Health & Place and the Journal of Rural Studies. She is also a Research Associate at the Trent Centre for Aging and Society.

Introduction

When health problems are chronic due to age or disability, family caregivers must take on the long-term work of supporting a loved one at home. Family members who find themselves caring for a loved one either at close proximity or from a distance over the long-term are an integral part of the health care system yet, because their efforts are based on

the private realm of the home, their contributions remain largely invisible and undervalued.

In 2019, I began an inquiry into the question: What do family caregivers do to maintain the home as a site of care and how are they supported? The project took place in rural New Brunswick and consisted of interviews with family caregivers and frontline health and social services staff. Participants spoke of the interior and exterior work involved in maintaining the home as a site of care. While housekeeping, administrative tasks, and property maintenance are not factored into home care policy, participants portrayed this work as "critical to care," similar to findings of feminist political economists who study care in institutional settings (Armstrong, Armstrong, Scott-Dixon 2008).

The research used the example of family caregivers of rural older adults in New Brunswick to shed light on the invisible health work required to maintain the home as a site of care and manage disrupted meanings of home space and family relationships. Findings suggest that structural forces like government policies and income inequality create and perpetuate new forms of health work for family caregivers.

While presenting findings from the research, I encountered the perspective of people who supported family members living with chronic illness or disability living at a distance. It was clear that while the health work they engaged in looked different from that of family caregivers living in the home or nearby, those caring at a distance also played a significant role in the form of home care "without walls." A critical perspective on gendered, familial care providers and their relationship to the care environment is necessary to understand the impact of imposing long-term care policy on domestic relationships and places.

Positioning Myself in the Research

My interest in the contributions of family caregivers began when I noticed contradictions inherent in the cancellation of the Primary Informal Caregiver Benefit (PICB) program in New Brunswick. In 2018, Premier Gallant's government introduced a monthly, non-taxable benefit of $106.25 to eligible informal caregivers, the PICB. The stated purpose of the benefit was twofold, first to "recognize the vital role informal caregivers play in supporting and assisting seniors and adults with a disability to remain safely in their own homes" and second "to help offset some of the costs associated with caregiving" (Government of New Brunswick 2017). The discourse suggested that the government recognized the contributions of family caregivers and the "home" as part of the health care system. Less than a year after the PICB was introduced, the newly-elected Progressive Conservative government of Premier Blaine Higgs cancelled the program, arguing that it had not proven effective as only half of those eligible had applied for the benefit (CBC News, April 5, 2019).

I have a personal connection to the research because my mother cared for my father full-time during this period. My mother experienced the cancellation of PICB as a personal insult and disregard for her work, caring for my father at home and "keeping him out of a nursing home." The decision to direct funds to increase the pay of home care workers did not address my mother's needs as my father did not qualify for subsidized home care hours. I endeavoured to learn more about the impact of the policy and the lives of people caring for loved ones at home in response to lingering questions over how government policy for informal care did not reflect my mother's needs and experience.

Care is Health Work, not Housework

"Caring" is broadly defined as "the mental, emotional, and physical effort involved in responding to and supporting others" (Evans and Neysmith 1998, 11). A number of scholars have explored the negative economic and health impacts on family caregivers (Duxbury, Higgins, Schroeder 2009; Duxbury and Higgins 2017; Turcotte 2013). The research question "what do family caregivers do to maintain the home as a site of care" developed in response to the work of Armstrong, Armstrong, and Scott-Dixon (2008) who have shed light on ancillary health care work in long-term care. They found that by privatizing aspects of care like laundry and meal service, governments re-categorized this work as ancillary, or "outside of care." Doing so meant they could cut costs by offering contracts for housekeep

ing and food service to the lowest bidder. The deleterious effects on care—standardization of personal care and poor quality food, to name a few—are compounded by the poor working conditions of non-unionized, low-waged contract employees. High turnover in the ancillary care work sector has become the norm as precariously employed laundry and food service workers may opt for hotel or restaurant work with better pay. Armstrong, Armstrong and Scott-Dixion (2008) argue that the work involved in feeding and clothing residents in long-term care facilities is fundamental to care, should be compensated accordingly and, most importantly, should be categorized as skilled care work to ensure its social value is upheld.

Armstrong, Armstrong, and Scott-Dixon's theoretical contribution to research on long- term care can easily be extended to home care, particularly in areas where there is a private provision like New Brunswick. Subsidized home care supports are available for some forms of ancillary care work but homemakers, or home support workers, are employed by private, for profit-agencies and are poorly trained and low paid. Government policy states that homemaker support is meant to supplement the work of family members and restrict homemaker activities through guidelines and strict, means-tested eligibility criteria. Therefore, I argue that family caregivers have become an essential workforce, providing laundry and meals similar to the ancillary workforce in the long-term care setting.

No matter where it is provided or by whom, care is work. According to Armstrong and Day, "unlike many other forms of labour, the timing and duration of care needs are often unpredictable and vary significantly over time of day and of life" (Armstrong and Day 2017, 10). Care involves two people and is therefore relational work; "doing the work well requires conditions that make relationships possible" (Armstrong and Day 2017, 11). In other words, policymakers must go beyond the atomized version of caregivers and task-oriented, for-profit model of service delivery to prioritize fundamental aspects of care.

Feminist Political Economy

Debates over women's activities in relation to space are the hallmark of feminist scholarship. Feminist political economists move beyond discussions of "public" and "private" spheres to categorize women's unpaid labour in relation to the institutions and social structures that shape their experiences. A comprehensive feminist political economics perspective can help to illustrate the history of women's exploitation, the extent of their invisible care work, and the impact of private home care and aging-in-place policies on their experiences of home. While not all research participants in the study discussed here were women, the scholarly field of caregiving and the social organization of the home are gendered, thus feminist political economy is a good theoretical fit for the research.

While gendered expectations of women as caregivers constitute long-standing social norms, the relationship between unpaid care and the state has evolved over the past century in Canada. The post-war period of capitalism in Canada was based on a model of social reproduction; this period marked the institutionalization of unpaid care within the welfare state. Feminist political economists have fought against this gender bias in policy for years yet it has proven enduring. Their proposals have varied. Some argue unpaid labour should be commodified as a means of creating market value and material benefit. Others argue against market-oriented solutions in favour of social programs to decommodify care.

Prior to determining in which direction policy should proceed, it is vital to conceptualize care in relation to where it is performed. Armstrong, Armstrong, and Scott-Dixon (2008) provide a framework that helps with commodifying family caregiving by demonstrating that care is more than units/tasks and medical services but skilled work requiring compassion and human interaction. This view of care necessitates a broader understanding of context, skills, and relationships with space (e.g., the home) than what currently exists in policy. Family caregivers want to be visible; this requires some way of reversing institutionalized invisibility of their work.

The Value of Care Work

Feminist political economists understand care as work and argue that there is a need to make it visible for the purpose of drawing attention to its value. Marilyn Waring (1988, 1999) challenges the assumptions of neo-classical economics in her critique of the general accounting of paid versus unpaid work in the global economy. Waring argues in favour of commodifying, or assigning a monetary value to, women's activities in the home in order to make their work visible. Work happens regardless of whether it is paid and must therefore be understood from beyond narrow economic constructs, otherwise, as Waring points out "my grandmother did not work, and those mothers I see with their infants are not working" (Waring 1988, 21). Donath (2000) and Folbre (2001) argue the best solution is to categorize care work according to what its substitutes would cost in the marketplace. Waring (1999), Braedley (2010), and Luxton (2010) call for assigning monetary value to care work in The National System of Accounts which measures global economic activity. Such commodification strategies dedicated to solving the practical problem of how best to measure the value of unpaid care are helpful in framing family caregiving as a form of unpaid labour.

The practice of valuing work according to where it is performed is institutionalized through labour categorization codes like the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) and National Occupation Classification (NOC). Armstrong, Armstrong, and Scott-Dixon point out that the codes measure and categorize work based on the activity type (NAICS) and employer (NOC) rather than the location meaning that, for example, laundry services, housekeeping, or food preparation are grouped according to activity (i.e. housekeeping or food service) and whether an individual worker is employed in a hotel or a hospital (Armstrong, Armstrong, and Scott-Dixon 2008, 16). As a result, nearly half of health care workers in hospital and long-term care settings are not classified as such. Breaking up care into units of activity gives the impression that it consists of a series of low-skill tasks. The associated low rates of pay have brought less care and poorer health outcomes, particularly for older adults and persons living with a disability care (Armstrong, Armstrong, and Scott-Dixon 2008, 9). These same researchers further argue that activities categorized as "ancillary" in hospitals and long-term care—those that are classified as "out of care" and often contracted out to the private sector—require skill and are every bit as "critical to care" as the work of physicians and nurses.

The unpaid domestic work involved in maintaining and supporting the household's inhabitants is referred to as "social reproduction." Bezanson describes the concept as a set of processes involved in "providing for social, emotional and physical needs and efforts to secure an income" (Bezanson 2006, 26). Women in Canada have been involved in social reproduction since Confederation, yet the development of the welfare state has reinforced rather than mitigated the effects of women's unequal burden of care.

Scholars continue to draw attention to our lack of understanding of the price women pay in terms of time and energy devoted to social reproduction. Whether for no pay in the home or low pay in the market, women have buttressed the family, market, and society against the exploitation of labour. Luxton expands the definition of social reproduction to include "the complementary work (also often done by women for pay) provided by state services such as education and health care or in the market" (Luxton 2010, 36). By combining the paid and unpaid activities of women's caring, Luxton enhances our understanding of women's roles in social provisioning, and points out that state support for caring through investments in public services is one way to lessen the burden. Yet, as we can see with the Canadian example, the policy direction is toward greater individualization and privatization of social reproduction as governments reduce investment in care in the name of fiscal responsibility (Bezanson 2006, 11).

Unpaid caregiving is increasing in Canada while the concept of gender is disappearing from government policy (Morris et al. 2017). Policymakers have re-framed care as a "family" concern, and, as Braedley points out, promote their "presumption that households and communities should and will actively provide services formerly offered by the state or third sector organizations" (Braedley 2010, 216). Low-income women who are informal caregivers have fewer options for supports and services. As Braedley (2010) argues, women are less likely to have employee benefits that would support their care activities and are less likely to have the financial resources available to contract out their domestic work (e.g., cleaning services). Moreover, low-income women are more likely to receive some form of government assistance and be subjected to surveillance by the state because of their circumstances (Braedley 2010, 225).

Debates on the Commodification of Care

Key to understanding the ways in which women have been systemically disenfranchised through assumptions about their willingness to provide care is the fact that it is not the burden of labour in the physical sense but the social relations involved that perpetuate women's subordination to capitalism (Luxton 2010, 34). Donath (2000) argues that it is possible to characterize the economy as a masculine entity and calls for a separate, or "other economy" to draw attention to women's experiences. While Donath's argument is clearly based on a concern for gender parity, it is also a call to improve the study of economics which has hitherto focused on an incomplete model of the economy. She argues that "in order to be able to investigate empirically the relationship between the other economy and the market economy, it is vital that feminist economists devise ways of measuring the other economy" (Donath 2000, 121).

Nancy Folbre is similarly dedicated to solving the practical problem of how best to measure the value of unpaid care. She argues that the most straightforward approach is to look at the cost of substitutes, like purchasing home care outside the home. While she admits that "purchased services are only partial substitutes for personal services from a family member or friend ... the cost of purchased substitutes provides at least a lower-bound estimate of the value of socially important activities" (Folbre 2001, 66). Folbre acknowledges that the first step toward computing such information is to develop instruments other than opportunity cost to account for the time and energy women devote to caring for others. While Donath (2000) focuses on the broader issue of including women's economic experiences, Folbre (2001) seeks to incorporate mechanisms from the market economy to explain women's caregiving in terms of its market value. Folbre argues for greater integration of women in the market economy through "valuing" unpaid work while Donath argues that integration is not only impossible but undesirable.

A combined approach—one that simultaneously compensates care work in market terms and includes state support for an "other economy"—would balance out the hitherto unequal roles for the market and state, vis-à-vis care work. The starting point for such a shift is to assign care work a value in the National System of Accounts (Braedley and Luxton 2010, 14). My research will contribute to the broader goal of accounting for unpaid care by gaining insights from family caregivers on the kinds of activities involved in maintaining the home as a health care setting and the costs associated with such work when outside help is necessary. By making the full extent of family caregiver work visible, it is possible to bring the social structures that systematically oppress women into focus for the purpose of reform.

Neoliberalism and Familialization of Long-term Care

In the present Canadian policymaking context, neoliberalism prevails in public discourse and social-political organization. Politicians argue that public spending must be curtailed and offer the competitive market as the means to lower taxation levels while maintaining services. Moreover, the virtues of capitalism are promoted; competition is depicted as "natural" and ideally suited to maximize social good (Braedley and Luxton 2010, 8). Thus, the state receives its mandate not from citizens but from the market. Rather than the state staying out of the economy, "neoliberalism activates the state on behalf of the economy, not to undertake economic functions or to intervene in economic effects, but rather to facilitate economic competition and growth, and to economize the social (Brown 2015, 62).

The rationalization for inequality in the neoliberal era is expressed through "the assumption that what we get is what we deserve as a result of our efforts" (Armstrong and Armstrong 2010, 187). The neoliberal trend toward relying on families to provide social welfare, families who obtain financial means through the market, has consistently dominated Canada's policies vis-à-vis women's care work. The effect is the suppression of social citizenship rights for women in the name of individual responsibility. As Brodie and Bakker argue, "the language of choice elevates the goal of individual liberty—the right to choose—over all other goals, including gender equality" (Brodie and Bakker 2008, 34). State provision of social welfare has become less popular over time, based on what Armstrong and Armstrong (2010, 187) refer to as "privatization of responsibility." In the citizen-as-consumer society, individual choice is considered not only a right but an imperative.

Welfare state scholars have fought tirelessly against downsizing government and against placing the onus on vulnerable populations to improve their circumstances. In more recent years, scholars have pointed out health impacts of social policies based on an individualized model of citizenship. As Polzer and Power argue, the technique of encouraging citizen-consumers "to maintain their health through their own 'free choices' and informed decisions" not only commodifies health but increases demand for health-related products as individuals must seek their own, market-based solutions for poor health and disease (Polzer and Power 2009, 4). The neoliberal backdrop of privatizing government functions has led health departments and hospitals to subcontract care services from agencies that operate like private businesses (Ferguson 2009, 168). Faced with declining levels of government funding, formerly publicly funded services in hospitals, like laundry and food preparation, have become privatized. Such a change is based on the thinking that care activities can be separated into those requiring trained health professionals and those who are low-skilled and whose work resembles services available in hotel and hospitality sectors.

Neoliberal approaches in the health sector—individualization and privatization—are inconsistent with the goals and nature of caregiving. Breaking up care into assembly-line units of activity has brought less care and poorer health outcomes, particularly for elderly and disabled individuals who rely on access to home care (Armstrong, Armstrong, Scott-Dixon 2008, 8). The current discourse around aging populations and the sustainability of public health care in Canada has supported the current model, one that is based on business practices in the name of efficiency. Yet, health care is "a relationship between health care workers and those with health care needs that cannot easily be reduced to a series of unspecified tasks and allotted to narrow time frames" (Armstrong, Armstrong, Scott-Dixon 2008, 8). By categorizing the work of caregivers as similar to the activities that take place in the home, governments have effectively found a way to keep pace with the neoliberal project of reducing the role of the state.

While scholars have acknowledged the increased burden on family members that accompanies private delivery of home care (Skinner and Rosenberg 2006; England 2010), the fact that their efforts are categorized in the same way as ancillary health work in an institutional setting suggests limited understanding of the way their work is socially organized. Invisibilizing the labour and costs of home care are hallmarks of a liberal welfare state.

Care at Home is Health Work, not Housework

The distinction between "health care" and "ancillary health work" articulated by Armstrong, Armstrong and Scott-Dixon (2008) illustrates the creep of privatization in health and long-term care at an institutional level. Mykhalovskiy and McCoy's (2002) definition of "health work" captures the invisible labour involved in managing health at an individual level. The trend toward reprivatizing care to the home through aging-in-place home care policy frames the need for long-term care as an individual and family responsibility. England (2010, 141) describes the result as "a privatised safety net" that "reveals how neoliberalism is far from self-sufficient, and depends on cultural assumptions about home and the hard work of women in the private sphere." Combining the critiques of feminist political economists on privatization in health care with critical geography of home provides a means of making visible not just the extent of "health work" involved in a rural setting but the gendered, neoliberal context that makes it so.

As illustrated in the rural findings from New Brunswick presented above, qualitative research with family caregivers and frontline staff demonstrates the complex nature of health work involved in care for older adults aging at home in an era of familialization. Family caregivers—particularly those who live-in—are tasked with navigating the material conditions of the home as well as its meaning, trying to preserve family relationships and traditions while operating within the constraints of everyday life. Such constraints are particularly challenging for family caregivers who are women and/or living on low income for whom the home can seem like a confined space, both literally and metaphorically.

Managing the home as a site of care involves a multitude of activities and constant coordination of space and relationships. The complex health work of family caregivers must be identified and counted rather than taken for granted. Recent debates on the future of long-term care in New Brunswick, as illustrated in the policy change from investing in the PICB to private home care agencies, focus on the need for higher levels of staffing. Yet governments are

aware that well-paid, unionized, full-time home care roles demand exponentially higher operating budgets for home care that can only be achieved through tax increases. The true costs of care, in other words, are human labour. Keeping those costs inside the home through familialization of home care has created new forms of health work for family caregivers who have few community and government resources to draw on.

Prospective Research: Long-distance Caregivers in Halifax, Nova Scotia

Location is central to my research in a number of ways. A number of scholars have provided insight into the unique relationship between caregivers and their physical surroundings, or workspace. Wiles argues that the geography of caregivers can provide researchers with "a sense of the physical, material and social constraints that operate on daily life and the strategies people use to negotiate these" (Wiles 2003, 1301). What is most significant about this line of research is that it will contribute to a more comprehensive view of the costs of home care—costs that are borne by family caregivers.

Place-based responses to aging assume the availability of a) a safe home environment and b) human labour to support healthy aging in the home space. Such requirements are often met by the adult children of parents living in a city or country that is far from the care recipient. While considerable scholarly attention has been directed at caregivers and their "burden" of providing assistance to a loved one living with chronic illness or disability, less has been devoted to the forms of health work long-distance caregivers are involved in that ensures the home is maintained as a site of care. Such forms of health work go beyond administrative and emotional support and can include the maintenance of culture, family relationships, and memories—vital aspects of health that are invisible in neoliberal (e.g., Canada) and authoritarian (e.g., China) welfare states.

Long-distance caregiving to aging people has been a common phenomenon in modern society. In Canada, according to Vézina and Turcotte (2010), 22 per cent of caregivers provide help for a parent living more than an hour away. Research has documented the caregiver "burden" (Adelman et al. 2014) emphasizing the physical, emotional, and financial strains faced by those who care for relatives with chronic illnesses or disabilities (Pinquart, Sörensen, Light 2003; Sambasivam et al. 2019). A secondary data analysis by Li and Wister (2023) shows that in Canada, greater caregiving intensity leads to more restriction to social life of family caregivers, causing worse social isolation.

In order to build on research of long-distance caregiving in Canada, I have designed a qualitative study to provide a comparative analysis between Halifax residents who are Canadian citizens caring for a loved one at a distance (over 1 hour away) in Canada and residents who are Chinese immigrants/newcomers caring for a loved one in China. The purpose of the comparison is to further develop an understanding of the types of health work related to supporting a loved one at home, albeit from afar. The difference between caregiving traditions in Canada, which emphasize individual responsibility for caregiving, and that in China, where adult children caregivers hold more responsibility (Lai 2008) poses unique challenges and coping strategies for the caregivers. Compared to caregivers who are taking care of

their loved ones in Canada, Chinese-Canadian long-distance caregivers may face cultural differences and language barriers affecting long-distance caregiving, as well as societal expectations to avoid formal caregiving services, due to a strong adherence to traditional values, such as filial piety, and the pressures of immigration (Lai and Surood 2008).

Using semi-structured interviews with long-distance family caregivers residing in Halifax, Canada, while caring for a loved one in Canada or China, the prospective research project will respond to the question: What does family caring entail for long-distance family caregivers and how are they supported? The research will provide a comparative analysis of two distinct experiences of sociocultural norms, citizenship status, and caregiving responsibilities.

The objectives of the research are to: (1) Identify invisible forms of health work involved in providing care at a distance; (2) Compare/contrast the feelings of familial responsibility in China and Canada; (3) Determine how Halifax-area family caregivers can be better supported in managing their role.

As discussed above, significant rationale for the study is that earlier research on family caregivers did not lend itself to gaining an understanding of the diversity of experiences of family caregivers. Rural areas of New Brunswick in the studies discussed above were demographically homogenous, with the exception of linguistic/cultural differences between Anglophone and Francophone populations.

For the prospective study, long-distance caregiver participants will be recruited through social media posts. However, to ensure recruitment materials reach marginalized communities, outreach emails will also be sent to organizations representing specific populations, including caregiver support groups (Alzheimer's Association) and marginalized communities such as urban Indigenous people (Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre) and Black Nova Scotians (Health Association of African Canadians) and Nova Scotia Community Health. With a diverse immigrant population from within and outside of Canada, Halifax provides a unique setting to study these differences.

By analyzing the experiences of caregivers in different cultural backgrounds, this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of the intersection between culture, family dynamics, and caring practices. It will also build out the scope of research on the health work of family caregivers to include those providing care from afar, both in another country and across Canada. As such, it has the potential to benefit both the scholarly community and long-term care practitioners. The research also has the potential to increase knowledge of the resources used to support long-distance caregivers living in Halifax and in the area in which the study participants provide care (China and Canada).

Conclusion

At the conceptual level, there is work to be done in making visible the "invisible heart" of the care economy. Folbre argues this is possible through a commitment to measuring the value of care work and promoting our success as a society on the basis of how that number reflects "the kinds of success we care about," including the values of caring, sharing, duty, and responsibility (Folbre 2001, 79). State support for policies that reward caregivers and, in particular, the sharing of care commitments between genders, would be a way to begin to shift the balance away from individualization and toward the state ameliorating the effects of patriarchy and capitalism on health care at home. The contributions of long-distance family caregivers in Canada remain invisible because it occurs beyond jurisdictions (municipally, provincially, and federally). Family caregivers require recognition and encouragement to mitigate distress and burnout. Whether they are providing meals, administrative support, care coordination, or home maintenance, family caregivers are "critical to care." The needs of caregivers should be addressed regardless of where they live in relation to the care recipient due to the fact that the work they do is time-consuming, financially and emotionally burdensome, and beneficial to a health/social system elsewhere that faces reduced costs.

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Institutionalizing Women Empowerment in Nigeria: The Contributions of the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs to Sustainable Development

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Abstract: Women empowerment is an indicator of social change and an important goal in achieving sustainable development worldwide (United Nations n.d.). Historically and across nations until today, men have had greater access to power and resources and more socio-politico-economic opportunities. In Nigeria, the plights of women are becoming more appalling as men are properly positioned to benefit and advance professionally and socially. Women in Nigeria need to be empowered because their contributions to national development is far too significant to be ignored. While literature abounds on women empowerment in Nigeria, there is a dearth of research on the contributions of the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (FMWASD) to women empowerment. It is against this background that this article examines the contributions of the FMWASD to sustainable development in Nigeria through its various women empowerment efforts from 2011-2021. This work is expected to contribute to the efforts to raise public and government attention to the need to foster women's agency and for the government to be able to deliver on its mandate.

Keywords: women empowerment; empowerment theory; sustainable development; Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Development; Nigeria

Résumé : L'autonomisation des femmes est un indicateur de changement social et un objectif important pour atteindre le développement durable dans le monde entier (Nations unies, s. d.). De manière historique et jusqu'à aujourd'hui, dans tous les pays, les hommes ont eu un meilleur accès au pouvoir et aux ressources et ont bénéficié de davantage de possibilités socio-politico-économiques. Au Nigeria, le sort des femmes devient de plus en plus épouvantable, car les hommes sont bien placés pour en tirer profit et progresser sur le plan professionnel et social. Les femmes du Nigeria doivent être autonomisées, car leur contribution au développement national est bien trop importante pour être ignorée. La documentation sur l'autonomisation des femmes au Nigeria est abondante, mais il y a peu de recherches sur les contributions du ministère fédéral de la Condition féminine et du Développement social (FMWASD) à cette autonomisation. C'est dans ce contexte que cet article analyse comment le FMWASD a contribué au développement durable au Nigeria, par ses efforts en faveur de l'autonomisation des femmes entre 2011 et 2021. Ce travail devrait contribuer aux efforts visant à attirer l'attention du public et du gouvernement sur l'importance de renforcer l'autonomie des femmes et de permettre au gouvernement de s'acquitter de son mandat.

Mots clés : autonomisation des femmes; théorie de l'autonomisation; développement durable; ministère fédéral de la Condition féminine et du Développement; Nigeria

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Introduction

Popular thinking in Nigeria contends that women belong to the disadvantaged group in society when compared to their male counterparts, mainly because they are often not treated equally to men. Men possess a stronger ability to utilize force, exert control over resources, have less societal obligations to fulfill, and benefit from positive cultural

ideology compared to women (Huis et al. 2017). The woman is disadvantaged in many areas of life and is seen as one who should be focused on unpaid care work in the home, such as childbearing, cooking, cleaning, as well as taking care of the children, elderly, or physically challenged. According to the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development, women, globally, carry out 76% of the total amount of this work which is a key dimension of gender inequality and a major constraint to women empowerment (OECD 2019). While this is a global problem, it is particularly worrisome in developing African countries. Despite evidence that empowering women can benefit the society at large, women's empowerment particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa has been far too slow and will require concerted effort to achieve (African Union 2020).

In Nigeria, the plight of women is worsening because men are properly positioned to gain maximum benefit from social opportunities, government facilities, and infrastructure (Adeleke 2004). While Nigeria does not have an explicit policy of gender discrimination, certain detrimental traditions, customs, and beliefs regarding women impede their advancement and active involvement in national matters (Ovute, Dibia, and Obasi 2015). Women's marginalization has elicited different policy interventions at the national, regional, and global levels over the years. The United Nations General Assembly, African Union, and national governments have adopted a number of treaties, conventions, and policies aimed at promoting human rights and the advancement of women. Some of these include the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR), and the African Charter's Women's Rights Protocol, National Gender Policy, and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), among others (Ntiwunka 2013). In September 2015, world leaders adopted Agenda 2030 and its new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the United Nations to replace the MDGs, which ran their course at the end of 2015. A major milestone is the inclusion of a stand-alone global goal, SDG 5, dedicated to the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of women and girls (Rorsche 2015).

Nigeria has ratified all the UN Conventions on women, with the aim of eliminating all types of discrimination, particularly those based on gender, as well as violence against women (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs 2006). To demonstrate its commitment towards this goal, Nigeria in 1998 designed a national policy on women to protect women against all forms of discrimination (Nwagbara and Ering 2007). In 2006, a national gender policy was made to replace the national policy on women, and, to implement these agreements and policies, the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (FMWASD) has been charged with the overall responsibility for this goal.

Literature on women empowerment in Nigeria (Ntiwunka 2013; Lawal, Ayoade, and Taiwo 2016; Dibie, Sam-Okere, and Dibie 2018; Jooji 2021) is plentiful. However, the specific contributions of the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (FMWASD) to addressing issues relating to women empowerment as well as the budgetary allocation to the ministry are yet to receive adequate scholarly attention. This is a gap that my work seeks to fill. The main objective of my work is to examine the contributions of the FMWASD to sustainable development, particularly through its various empowerment projects between 2011 and 2021. In order to achieve this objective, this article is divided into seven sections. Following this introduction, the second section focuses on the paper's conceptual clarification and theoretical framework. The third section explores the socio-economic and political conditions of women in Nigeria. The fourth section presents the budgetary allocations of the FMWASD. The fifth section examines the various empowerment projects by the ministry from 2011-2021. The sixth section highlights the problems associated with women empowerment in Nigeria. The last section is the conclusion of the paper which states that, despite ongoing efforts of the FMWASD, the ministry's limited resources and poor outreach, as well as lack of political will, hinder Nigeria's progress toward gender equality and the achievement of SDG 5.

Conceptual Clarification and Theoretical Framework

Here, I explain the concepts that are central to the study: empowerment, women empowerment, and sustainable development. I also explore the theory driving this research effort, which is the empowerment theory.

Empowerment

The term empowerment has been defined and expressed in several ways by different scholars. Wallerstein (1992) explained empowerment as a process in which people acquire social, economic, and political power to liberate themselves from injustices in society. Empowerment refers to the process of granting individuals or groups the ability to effectively utilize their personal or collective power, authority, and influence when interacting with others, institutions, or society as a whole (Dibie 2018). Taking a look at these explanations, one can say empowerment has to do with gaining power (in all areas), building capacities and capabilities of clearly disadvantaged people or groups to be able to do what ordinarily they could not have done of their own accord. Put differently, Gajanayake (1993) noted that empowerment involves supporting individuals to comprehend their situation's reality, analyzing the factors influencing it, and, crucially, taking action to enhance it. Similarly, Page and Czuba (1999) describe empowerment as a complex social process that enables individuals to take charge of their lives. These two positions see empowerment as a thing of the people, by the people, and for the people. That is, a person or people empowered must first be aware of their situation (consciousness), be ready to improve such situation, and must be involved in the process or policies to effect such changes. It is their lives after all.

Kapitsa (2008) states that empowerment consists of two interconnected components: resources (which can be both tangible and intangible) and agency. Tangible resources refer to assets that have a physical form and can be measured in terms of their financial or material value. Examples include money, property, and equipment. On the other hand, intangible resources are non-physical assets that cannot be easily quantified. These include knowledge, skills, abilities, and involvement in political and social endeavours. Agency refers to the capacity of individuals to establish their own goals and objectives and successfully accomplish them. Clearly, without resources, there cannot be empowerment, and without an agency such empowerment policies and projects cannot be duly pursued and achieved. In sum, every person that has hitherto been discriminated against based on disability, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and/or economic status needs to be empowered to attain equity.

Women Empowerment

The concept of women's empowerment emerged in the 1980s and 1990s as a radical approach aimed at changing power dynamics in order to promote women's rights and achieve more gender equality (Batliwala 2007). Women empowerment has become one of the central themes in global treaties, covenants, conventions, and declarations. The thinking is that it is

> a catalyst to clear-cut development strategies which is targeted at poverty reduction, improved living standards, good governance and profitably productive investments that are critical to the creation of an enlarged capacity that provide men and women equal opportunity and unrestrained access to decision-making and policy implementation institutions and processes. (Mahmud 2019, 350)

Women's empowerment refers to the process by which women gain the capacity to make important life decisions in a situation where they were previously denied this capacity. It is built upon three interconnected elements: resources, agency, and achievements (Kabeer 1999). According to Lasiele (1999), women empowerment refers to the provision of sufficient possibilities for women to enhance their abilities and make contributions to the development of their country and the globe. Fadeiye and Olanega (2001) see women empowerment as the process of facilitating women to cultivate the ability to realize their full potential. Okemakinde (2014) asserts that women empowerment serves as an effective means to enhance women's competencies, their authority over resources, and their influence in making decisions that impact their lives. It entails the process of enhancing the position of women by promoting literacy, edu-

cation, training, entrepreneurship, and increasing awareness (Alvarez 2013). The primary objective of women empowerment is to achieve a balanced allocation of power between genders, ensuring that both men and women have equal opportunity for economic, social, legal, and political advancement (Sohail 2014).

Sustainable Development

The notion of sustainable development arises from an increasing recognition of the interconnectedness of global environmental challenges, socio-economic disparities related to poverty and inequality, and apprehensions over the well-being of future generations (Hopwood, Mellor, and O'Brien 2005). The concept originated from the publication of *Our Common Future* by the Brundtland Commission in 1987. This publication presents the widely referenced definition of sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the current generations without compromising the needs of future generations" (United Nations 1987, 11). It emphasizes that sustainable development must encompass the pillars of social, environmental, and economic sustainability. Sustainable development is often considered as varied interaction between social, economic, and ecological dimensions of development (Lawal, Ayoade, and Taiwo 2016). The major goal of sustainable development is to achieve reasonable and equitably distributed economic well-being that can be perpetuated continually for many human generations. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development consists of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets. These goals and targets became effective on January 1, 2016, and are applicable to all countries. The text introduces two fundamental ideas: the notion of "needs," specifically the crucial needs of impoverished populations, which should be prioritized above all else; and the concept of limitations imposed by the current state of technology and social structure on the environment's capacity to fulfill both current and future needs (UN World Commission on Environment and Development 1987).

Theoretical Framework

Several theories have been adopted to explain women's empowerment. However, this study adopts empowerment theory as a framework for explaining women empowerment for sustainable development in Nigeria. Empowerment theory grew out of the social and self-help movements of the 1960s and 1970s and later gained prominence around the 1980s and 1990s in the discourse of political science, social psychology, feminism, and development studies as an alternative theory of development. The proponents of this theory include Rappaport (1985), Friedman (1992), Zimmerman (1995), and Rocha (1997) among others. Empowerment theory connects individual well-being with the larger social and political empowerment and suggests that people need opportunities to become active in community decision making in order to improve their lives, organizations, and communities (Zimmerman 2000). Friedman (1992) argues that empowerment must not only lead to a clear improvement in the conditions of life and livelihood of ordinary people but must bring about the rectification of existing imbalances in social, economic, and political power.

Different levels of analysis of empowerment have been identified by proponents of this school of thought. Rocha (1997) for instance came up with five types of empowerment: political empowerment, social-political empowerment, mediated empowerment, embedded individual empowerment, atomistic individual empowerment. Rowland (1997) identified three dimensions of empowerment namely, personal empowerment, relational empowerment, and collective empowerment. Zimmerman (2000) also gave three levels of empowerment viz, individual empowerment, organizational empowerment, and community empowerment. These scholars disagree, however, on which type of empowerment should come first. While Zimmerman emphasizes the individual level, he explicitly states that this focus does not imply it is more important than the other levels. Friedman emphasizes community empowerment rather than individual empowerment. Rocha (1997) suggests movement from individual empowerment to community empowerment. Irrespective of these differences in empowerment levels, the central theme is that empowerment involves processes, and the outcome of such processes results in a level of being empowered. Empowerment is context and population specific and, as such, no single standard can fully capture empowerment for all people in all contexts (Rappaport 1985; Zimmerman 1995). This is where the strength of the theory lies as it recognizes the complex interaction

between multiple agents like poor citizens, grassroot organizations, non-governmental organizations, the state, and international agencies.

The theory has most often been applied to women and has addressed two types of needs namely, practical and strategic needs. The practical needs include food, clothing, shelter, health care, etc., while the strategic needs include structural transformation of the society to remove women from their subordinate social position. As Moser rightly argued, the empowerment policy approach seeks to reach strategic gender needs indirectly through practical gender needs (Moser 1993). The FMWASD budget from 2011-2021 has continued to cater more for the practical empowerment needs of women in Nigeria with the hope of reaching that strategic needs of women in the country.

Socio-economic and Political Conditions of Women and Girls in Nigeria

The socio-economic conditions of women and girls in Nigeria is worsened by various factors including variations in educational opportunities, child labour, disparities in employment opportunities, and unequal decision-making capacities in personal and family matters and in public affairs (World Bank 2022). Based on data extracted from the World Bank's (2022) dataset, World Development Indicators (WDI), Nigeria as of 2021 has 104,250,709 females, which constituted 49.3 per cent of the country's total population. In terms educational opportunities, compared to about 71.3 per cent for males, 52.7 of the female population age 15 and above are literate in Nigeria. Although this represents a considerable increase in the female literacy rate from 2003 (43.3 per cent), the gender-gap remains significant. In 2019, 31 per cent of young women were neither engaged in education, employment, nor training. It is important to note that the prospect of female education in Nigeria has been significantly undermined by culture and traditions, poverty, inadequate public advocacy and investment, and insecurity. Recently, targeted attacks against girls and associated education institutions have become a political agenda, campaign strategy, and economic tactic for terrorist, insurgent, and bandit groups in Nigeria, especially in the northern part of the country.

Child labour is another dark side of women's affairs in Nigeria, as many underage women and girls struggle to survive and/or support their families through street hawking, agricultural labour, domestic work (house helps) etc. The World Bank (2022) showed that working female children between ages seven and 14, declined from 41.1 per cent in 2007 to 18.7 per cent in 2010, and then rose to 36 per cent in 2011. More alarming, female children have been increasingly exploited in the underworld by baby factories, bandits, terrorists, insurgents, traffickers, and ritualists that have engaged many kidnapped young girls and women as sex slaves and objects of sacrifice, as well as rebel spies, domestic servants, fighters, suicide bombers, and human shields against counterinsurgency forces (Oyewole 2016).

Female unemployment in Nigeria rose from about four per cent to nine per cent in the last two decades. Accordingly, female education tends to be less appreciated in labour market, considering that 21 and 16 per cent of those with advanced and intermediate educations respectively are unemployed, while only 9 per cent of those with basic education are unemployed in 2019. Meanwhile, the percentage of firms with female participation in ownership declined from 20 to 16 between 2007 and 2014. The female share of employment as senior and middle management was about 31 per cent in 2019, while firms with female top manager were only 14 per cent in 2014 (World Bank 2022). These figures, among others, reflect the limited economic capacities of most Nigerian women, with significant implications for decision-making capabilities in personal and family affairs as well as in public spaces.

The education and economic conditions of Nigerian women and girls provide considerable indicators of the health and lifestyle of the population. Female life expectancy at birth remains low, even as it rose from 47 to 56 years between 2001 and 2020. Seventeen per cent of annual female mortality between ages 30 and 70 is caused by cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes, or chronic respiratory disease in Nigeria (World Bank 2022).

The percentage of women between ages 15 and 49 that are participating in decisions regarding their own health care, major household purchases, and visiting family rose from 14 to 34 per cent between 2003 and 2018. The percentage of women who believe a husband is justified in beating his wife also declined significantly from 64 to 28 between

2003 and 2018. Equally, female-headed households rose slightly from 17 per cent in 2003 to 18 per cent in 2018. Yet, women's representation in politics and public policy remain low. Between 2000 and 2021, women held only three to seven per cent of the seats in national parliaments (World Bank 2022). Similarly, women candidates ran in only about six per cent of all the governorship races across the 36 states in Nigeria between 1999 and 2019, and none won.

The above analysis reveals that, despite constituting almost half of Nigeria's population, women remain underrepresented in leadership positions, underserved in education, face unequal access to employment opportunities, and are disproportionately affected by poverty and violence. Evidence shows that empowering women is one of the most effective ways to accelerate economic growth, improve social outcomes, and achieve sustainable development. It is against this background that different policy initiatives aimed toward women empowerment cannot be ignored or underestimated in Nigeria's quest for sustainable development.

Budgetary Allocation of the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (FMWASD)

FMWASD was created as a response to the United Nations agreement to establish institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women and associated matters. The ministry started out as a National Women Commission in 1989, which was an initiative of the wife of the then Head of State, Mrs. Maryam Babangida. However, in 1995, the National Women Commission was upgraded to a full-fledged Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, which meant that the country had achieved one of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action. The ministry has the mandate of advising the government on gender- and children-related issues as well as issues pertaining to persons with disabilities and the elderly (UN Women 2016). In addition, the ministry has within it an agency called the National Centre for Women Development (NCWD), which has a mandate for gender training and capacity building, research, and documentation as well as addressing other relevant concerns of Nigerian Women.

The ministry has received considerable budgetary allocation in every fiscal year to pursue its objectives. However, the question that begs for answers is whether the ministry has the prerequisite institutional identity and resource base to pursue its gender mainstreaming objectives. On the average, the FMWASD budget represents 0.07% of the national budget. This marginal allocation reflects the level of government's commitment to gender-focused programs and services in Nigeria's national development agenda. Given the ministry's role in addressing systemic gender inequities, and the fact that women make up to half of the country's population, these figures are strikingly inadequate. This budget reflects the government's tokenistic approach to addressing women's issues. Women empowerment requires adequate funding, yet the FMWASD lacks sufficient resources to lead this effort within the government. Also, the budget of the ministry has experienced notable fluctuations over the years. For instance, between 2015 and 2017, the ministry's budget saw a decline. However, in 2018, the budget allocation more than doubled, offering a significant boost to the ministry's capability for implementing programs. This progress was short-lived, as the allocation was reduced again in 2019. In 2020 and 2021, the ministry's budget saw a substantial increase, marking the highest allocation within the decade, and invariably an increase in its capital expenditure. For instance, the ministry's capital expenditure doubled in 2021. Nonetheless, these trends show the lack of substantial investment in the ministry and the critical need for consistent and predictable funding to ensure long-term impact.

Table 1: Total Budget of the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, 2011-2021

Year	Total National Budget (₦)	Total Ministry Budget (₦)	Total Budget of the NCWD (₦)
2011	4,226,191,559,259	2,810,641,366	325,800,791
2012	4,749,100,821,170	4,184,514,997	
2013	4,987,220,425,601	4,624,437,917	834,376,390
2014	4,695,190,000,000	4,530,575,191	746,909,804
2015	4,493,363,957,158	3,093,073,863	1,121,004,836
2016	6,060,677,358,227	3,555,252,814	916,014,073
2017	7,441,175,486,758	3,629,888,264	2,087,377,937
2018	9,120,334,988,225	7,409,748,628	2,295,800,779
2019	8,916,964,099,373	5,566,696,400	2,255,515,443
2020	10,594,362,364,830	8,193,235,758	3,123,577,696
2021	13,082,420,568,233	12,919,466,492	5,627,382,287

Source: Compiled by the author with data extracted from Federal Republic of Nigeria Appropriation Bill (2011-2021)

Another notable trend in this budget is the consistent drop in the ministry's allocation during election years, specifically in 2011, 2015, and 2019. Although the data in Table 1 does not include allocations for years prior to 2011, the significant declines observed in 2015 and 2019 strongly support this pattern. The implication of this is that the ministry is unable to sustain some of its major projects during election years.

The ministry is one of the least-funded ministries in the federation, partly because it is not considered on par with other departments such as the ministry of defence, ministry of police affairs, ministry of interior, ministry of health, and ministry of education, among others. The priority sectors in the national budget over the years have been defence and security, education, health, infrastructure, and social investment. While these areas are important, women are unlikely to benefit maximally from these sectors because these sectors are not subject to a gender-based analysis. In

terms of resources, it appears that the FMWASD needs to be empowered as an institution in order to deliver on its mandate. The women ministry's budget should be prioritized if the government is really serious about empowering women and attaining gender equality.

Women Empowerment Programs by the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development

The empowerment programs elucidated here are from the FMWASD projects as found in the Federal Republic of Nigeria Appropriation Bill during the period under study. From my study, I discovered that the ministry, over the years, has had quite a number of commitments including advocacy and sensitization programmes, support for women-focused NGOs, girl-child education, economic empowerment, establishment of skill-acquisition centres, agriculture, supports fo women and girls with disabilities, technology and innovation, and women's political empowerment, among others.

Economically, the ministry has implemented economic empowerment projects that either take the form of training/skill acquisition and distribution of materials/equipment to women. From 2013-2015, the ministry implemented a nationwide project to support women cooperatives under the initiative called the Women Fund for Economic Empowerment (WOFEE) and a women small- medium-scale entrepreneurs support programme under the Business Development Fund for Women (BuDFoW). Also, in 2017, empowerment materials/equipment were provided for women and youth in 23 states of the federation. This project was continued in 2018 and 2019 with 26 and 10 states respectively as beneficiaries. Another major empowerment project by the ministry was the cooking gas projects advocacy and community mobilization of women in the 774 local government areas in Nigeria in 2020 and 2021. Through this cooking gas project, 331,000 cylinders with burners (6kg) were procured in 2021 for distribution to women in 15 states of the federation. There were also some empowerment projects targeted at specific local government areas and senatorial districts, which involved the distribution of sewing accessories in places like Anambra central senatorial district (2020), Ndokwa/Ukwuani federal constituency, Delta state (2020), Aguata, Anambra state (2018) etc. The ministry also empowered women in the agricultural sector by training them and providing farming tools and machines. Some of the major agricultural projects were a cassava processing integrated industry for women in Ado/Otta LGA, Ogun state in 2013; a rice-milling factory for women in Yewa North, Ogun state in 2013 and 2014; and a palm oil-processing cottage industry for women in Ipokia local government, Ogun state in 2013 and 2015. One major shortfall of these empowerment projects is that they do not have a wider reach. They also lack continuity and inclusiveness. Moreover, the rationale for picking some of these states or local government for empowerment projects is not clear.

The ministry also provided technical and financial support to women non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and women cooperatives in order to boost their economic standing in the country. For instance, in 2011, 2013 and 2014, the ministry provided grants to women-focused NGOs across the federation. In addition to these, the ministry has established and continues to fund skill-acquisition centres across the federation. The ministry has responded to the issue of Chibok girls (who were kidnapped by Boko Haram in 2014 from their school in Chibok, Borno State) which sparked global outrage and the #BringBackOurGirls (BBOG) movement. It sponsored a specialized education programme for the rescued Chibok girls in 2017, 2018, 2020 and 2021 costing over a billion naira (Federal Republic of Nigeria Appropriation Bill (2017-2021). The ministry has also implemented initiatives to increase girls' enrollment and retention in schools by sponsoring programs on girl-child education. The campaign against gender-based violence appeared 11 times covering years 2013, 2014, 2017, 2020 and 2021. The ministry is also committed to the provision of quality and affordable information, commodities, and sexual and reproductive health services to women and girls with disabilities.

Table 2: Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development Empowerment Projects, 2011-2021

Project Name	Number of Project
Advocacy & Sensitization	30
Women NGOs	13
Vulnerable Groups	32
Education	33
Economic Empowerment (Training & Materials)	80
Legislation/Policies	21
Women Cooperatives	4
Centres(Skill acquisition, children resource, rehabilitation, women development, etc)	75
Women Political participation	5
Agriculture	14
Girl-Child Education	5
Council on Women Affairs	8
Conventions/Conferences	17
Chibok Girls	4
Women Shelter	2

Source: Data extracted from Federal Republic of Nigeria Appropriation Bills (2011-2021)

Politically, the ministry has organized several advocacy projects on gender equality. A major achievement of the ministry is championing the National Gender Policy, which aims to eliminate gender discrimination and promote equality in all sectors of society. Also, the ministry organized nationwide advocacy and sensitization activities to promote the livelihood of women and children in 2018, 2019 and 2020. Notably, the ministry has had five major projects on women's political participation. It has also continued to pursue and review substantive legislation and policies that affect women in Nigeria. In addition, it has continued to pull its weight behind international convention related to women and has sponsored women focused conferences, such as the national conference on women and political participation in Nigeria in 2019.

The above analysis shows that the FMWASD understands its mandate and wants to promote as many empowerment projects as possible. However, the frequency and consistency of these projects over the span of 11 years remain insufficient. Many initiatives were one-time interventions, lacking the continuity for widespread impact and inclusion. This inadequacy cannot be separated from the financial constraints highlighted in the previous section. The next section will focus on the challenges facing the ministry.

Problems Associated with the Institutionalization of Women Empowerment in Nigeria

The FMWASD undoubtedly has made some progress on its mandate of promoting gender equality and the attainment of sustainable development through women empowerment projects at various levels. However, the ministry has been faced with some constraints that has continued to limit its activities, one of which is lack of adequate budgetary provision. Women constitute almost half of the country's population, hence proper revenue should be allocated to the ministry that cater to this group of people. These financial constraints indicate the lack of political will to prioritize resources for gender-specific issues. As presented in Table 1, the FMWASD's budgetary allocation on the average represents 0.07% of the national budget. Moreover, the ministry's budget, if pitched against the population of women on a yearly basis, will show how insignificant the contribution of the ministry is to sustainable development. That is why women are still socially, economically, and politically marginalised in Nigeria. Taking a close look at the expenses of the ministry on women empowerment between 2011-2016, there were only two major nationwide economic empowerment projects: Women Fund for Economic Empowerment (WOFEE) and Business Development Fund for Women (BUDFOW), while other projects/programs were implemented at specific locations.

Another challenge is the issue of inclusion. Noticeable in these empowerment projects is the insufficient inclusion of states such as Yobe and Bayelsa. The implication is that many women want to be empowered but, sadly, they don't have access to many of these programmes. As a matter of fact, a lot of women across the country are not aware of these programmes and therefore not benefit from them. This raises a question of whether the ministry has lived up to its mandate.

Lastly, most of the empowerment projects of the ministry revolved around meeting the practical needs of women, such as the distribution of sewing and grinding machines, hairdressing salon kits and equipment, motorcycles, empowerment materials, popcorn machines, ice block machines, cooking gases, etc. While these are worthy and needed projects, considering the level of poverty among women in the country, the approach is usually short-term and does not integrate women into all facets of national life. The cooking gas project, as a case in point, can improve the livelihood of women. However, what happens when the recipients cannot afford to buy Liquified Petroleum Gas (LPG) to put these cooking gases to good use? They will likely go back to the use of charcoal and wood. This shows the importance of more sustainable, long-term empowerment strategies to address structural economic barriers among women.

Conclusion

The FMWASD has continued to work towards its vision and mission in various capacities, through economic empowerment, political empowerment, advocacy and sensitization, grants to women-focused NGOs, agriculture, education, etc., even though these programmes are underfunded. From 2011-2021, the ministry's budget has been consistently meagre, representing just 0.1% of the national budget. This shows lack of political will—which cannot be divorced from patriarchal norms that undermine the prioritization of resources for gender-specific issues. The empowerment programs of the ministry within the period of study also reveals that, though the ministry has many commitments, most of these programmes do not have a wide coverage and not inclusive.

The 2022 fiscal year is eight years to the expiration of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and an evaluation of the current state shows that Nigeria is not on the path to meeting the SDG 5 targets. This can be confirmed by the Global Gender Gap Index report in 2022, which shows that, out of 146 countries, Nigeria ranked 50 in economic participation and opportunity for women; 134 in educational attainment; and 141 in political empowerment, leaving just Iran, Qatar, Brunei Darusalam, Kuwait and Vanuatu behind. This huge gender gap has serious implications for the attainment of sustainable development, which, halfway to the 2030 target, is unlikely to be achieved. A ministry that is meant to cater to women, who represent almost 50 per cent of the country's population, needs enough resources to have both short- and long-term impact on women empowerment. The vision and mission statements are clearly stated, but the capability of the ministry in terms of resources is low. Ironically, the institution that is meant to serve as an agent to achieving SDG 5 clearly needs empowerment.

As recommendations, the federal government needs to be more decisive in lifting Nigerian women out this miry clay called inequality, and one of the ways to do that is to invest in the women's ministry. Also, the ministry should also seek funds from international bodies that can sponsor projects on a larger scale. Additionally, the ministry should partner with state ministries of women affairs and women-focused NGOs to complement its efforts. Lastly, the ministry should promote grassroot engagement by expanding outreach to rural areas. However, beyond the role of the FMWASD, women empowerment requires collective action from every individual committed to building a just and equitable society. Women should not just beneficiaries of empowerment programs but also become active architects of sustainable development.

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Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice
Issue 46.2 (2025)
Working Papers: Interview

Continuing the Conversation: Intergenerational Student Feminist Activism

by Sam le Nobel and Julie Glaser

Sam le Nobel (she/her) is a student, a feminist, and a social justice activist. She is the co-founder and President of the Women's Studies Student Society at Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU) where she is completeting her Master's of Women and Gender Studies graduate degree. Her research concentrates on feminist social movements and bridging the gap between feminist theory and feminist practices.

Julie Glaser (she/her) is a feminist and human rights advocate working in the film and cultural sectors. She also consults and engages with communities in social change on issues of homelessness, sexual and gender identity, diversity and inclusion, the environment, and accessibility. She is published in numerous anthologies including *This Wasn't on the Syllabus, Fireweed*, *Tessera*, *Bent on Writing*, *Womanisms & Feminisms*, and *Filling Station Magazine.* When not on horseback, she can be found in the garden, furiously trying to finish a novel.

Introduction

In March 2025, Julie was featured as a panelist in a discussion on gender-based violence at Canadian universities, co-hosted by the Alexa McDonough Institute for Women, Gender, and Social Justice and the Women's Studies Student Society at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Drawing from her own lived experiences as a student activist in the late 1980's, Julie offered valuable advice to current students undertaking similar advocacy.

Between the second and third waves of feminism, in 1989, Julie was a student at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. She was among the influential group of women who protested rape culture on campus, refused to be silenced, and demanded institutional accountability and protection from gender-based violence and sexual harassment. From sit-in protests in the principal's office, to disrupting previously unquestioned hazing rituals, Julie, and her fellow activists, successfully advocated for institutional protection against sexualized and gender-based violence. They created what has become the foundation of the sexual violence prevention and response policies that students benefit from today. This dedicated group of feminist-student activists adopted the name *Radical Obnoxious Fucking Feminists (ROFF)* as an act of self-empowerment after a group of male engineering students harassed them with this name after a protest on the mysogyny and sexual violence that was occuring on campus. Julie explains in more detail how the group got their name in her contribution to the anthology *This Wasn't On the Syllabus* (2024, 100).

Julie's commitment to feminist and social justice advocacy is influential and inspiring. Her work rests on the contributions of the feminists who precede her and will continue to be built upon by the feminists who succeed her; social justice is a continous, collaborative endevour that relies on prolonged, multi-generational efforts. The following interview is inspired by Julie and the feminists who have worked diligently, tirelessly, and thanklessly to develop a safe and inclusive society for all and is intended to continue the conversation, collaboration, and support among generations of feminist activists.

Interview

Sam le Nobel: When do you consider to be the beginning of your feminist-activist journey or career? Is there a moment in particular that stands out to you as your starting point, or, perhaps, when you came into feminist consciousness?

Julie Glaser: Feminist consciousness blew my mind open in 1986. I took a course called Women in Literature that led me to Women's Studies 101. No doubt, both of these courses would look much different today than they did back then, but the experience opened me to a reality that, all of a sudden, I realized I was living, although unconsciously, without the words to explain the experience. Consciousness shone a light upon injustice, inequity, bias, discrimination, and systems of oppression designed to keep some of us down while sending others to the front of the line. It's startling when it hits, and it hits hard. Nothing is ever the same afterwards.

SLN: What does activism mean to you?

JG: Activism is the ability to act on injustice in all of its forms. It's the opportunity to improve upon humanity, to create new systems to lift us all up, and to honour life in all its forms on this earth. We must act for kindness, for each other, for the planet, and for a future that we imagine and that we must believe can exist.

SLN: What was your experience as a student feminist activist at Queen's University in 1989? What did you learn during that time?

JG: The experience was filled with friendship, fraught with incredulousness, and led with bravery and ingenuity. It was a time of exchange, openness, righteousness, foolishness, and belligerence. There was a lot of affection, dancing, tears, cheers, many potlucks, laughter, lovers, and late nights. Activism leads to finding your voice, your power, and filling your timeline with deep bonds by doing all the things to make a difference in this life, for oneself, but mostly for others.

SLN: What can contemporary feminists learn from their predecessors? What does it take to be a feminist activist? What skills or resources does one need?

JG: Creativity and humour must have a seat at the table. Our predecessors were goddess icons out of reach - Adrienne Rich, bell hooks, Angela Davis, Simone de Beauvoir, Gloria Steinem, Audre Lorde, Frida Khalo, Maya Angelou—and we ate them up while screen-printing t-shirts and placards for our next rally. Their creativity and tenacity inspired ours; we were fired up with banter, critique, exploration of new ideas that blew our minds but made so much sense. Our feminism was party to a party.

We have to be able to be open and bend our minds to reshape our beliefs. We also need humour, heart, tenacity, and the willingness to know you'll get knocked down, but you can get back up again and the compassion to know when you need to retreat, recharge, reset.

SLN: What do feminists of 1989 and contemporary feminists have in common? What are some of their differences? What did you wish you knew when you were a student feminist activist?

JG: We're still fighting the same fight, only today, the issues are more complex and we have a more developed understanding of intersectionality than we did in 1986. That makes things more intersting and beautiful. Moreover, the crime of mysogyny has grown in its heinousness since 1989—a year forever etched in my soul. Just when you think it can't get any worse, it does.

Contemporary feminists have to spend more time uncovering the dark depths of misogyny, which apparently know no limits. I often wonder what we'd all be doing for ourselves and others if we didn't have to exert so much energy

dealing with morally reprehensible behaviour and exposing misogynist networks. What beautiful things would we create? How would we spend all that extra time not fighting for equity and peace? What I never imagined is that 35 years later we'd still be having to do this.

SLN: Being a student activist often means resisting the authority that you rely on to grant your degree. How do you navigate the power imbalance as a student challenging an institution such as a university? How can students prepare themselves for the inherent opposition that they will face from university officials?

JG: I don't think you're ever prepared for the injustice you're about to face while fighting injustice. In 1989, we weren't using the word "gaslighting" and we were pretty gob-smacked by the lack of attention and complete inaction of the administration to the "no means kick her in the teeth" backlash to our consent education campaign. Having a really good therapist is probably the best advice I can give to endure and grow from the experiences and to develop the skills to make decisions in the moment that you can live with.

SLN: In your contribution to the anthology *This Wasn't on the Syllabus,* you mention that your fellow activists had some conflicting opinions about next steps during your sit-in protest in Principal David Smith's office. How did you and the ROFFs manage this conflict? How did you stay aligned and unified? What advice do you have for students who experience internal disagreement?

JG: This was an interesting and unexpected outcome of the activism: that we would grow so big as to splinter in our rapid expansion. We tried to manage the conflict with consensus (it didn't work; we didn't have enough experience among us to pull that off successfully), with what we, the original ROFF group, saw as reasoning (which also didn't work as others saw things an entirely different way), and attempts at pulling rank—"We started this, therefore we should finish it and everyone else should fall in line"—(this also didn't work, as everyone else was now a bigger group than our small core, and this larger group was energized by their newfound activism and power).

Today, I suspect activists would be much better equipped to deal with conflict, having been exposed to more opportunities for conflict resolution, consensus building, and learning to facilitate difficult conversations. We just jumped into everything without a solid foundation of skills. We were babes, really. When our group was small this worked for us; when we grew with enthusiasm and numbers, we lost control of the message and the plot and had a hard time getting it back.

SLN: As you are aware, gender-based violence disproportionately impacts women, with men over-represented as the "doers" of violence. Many argue that it is not women's behaviour that needs to change, it's men's. They warn that it is essential to involve men in feminist conversations if there is to be any real and sustainable change. What do you believe is an effective way to involve men in feminist activism? How can men be feminist activist allies without becoming the dominant presence or voice in a female-centric space?

JG: If men truly want to disrupt the cycle of male violence against women, there needs to be a much larger, organized, and strategic movement of men working together to change the legacy that has been passed from one generation to the next, once and for all. I truly believe that this is their work, not ours, and it goes beyond allyship to ownership.

SLN: What can non-students do to support student feminist activists? What can parents of university students do to be supportive allies? How can community members be involved?

JG: Stay in touch with what's going on, show up, speak up, help out. Bring food to the potluck.

SLN: Do you have any advice for young feminist activists who wish to remain involved after they graduate?

JG: Never stop. Your circle of sisters will continue to grow your whole life, there will be an ebb and flow to the activism, and the subjects will evolve and be remastered. You'll be hurt by the process and elevated by the outcomes. Envision what you know is possible and believe it into being.

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Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice
Issue 46.2 (2025)
Day of the Girl Child Poetry Winners: First Place

A World Nothing Like Mine

by Mariana Martinez Caloca

Maybe her curfew won't be until nine

Maybe she will walk the streets when it's awfully quiet

Maybe she won't pretend to be on the phone, when a tall man is walking by her, when she is all alone

She won't get unsolicited, unnecessary, and inappropriate commentary from older men

She won't get "manterrupted" over a senseless rant

She won't get catcalled as she walks by, a car won't stop to kindly offer her a ride

Her mom won't justify his step dad's sexist and misogynistic jokes; inappropriate indiscretions won't be taken all in good fun

Her 7th grade math teacher won't have to watch her from beyond; she will be served justice for those lives, that are now gone

Her body and soul won't belong to those men who only leave behind their wallets and bones

Woman won't disappear every day; their mothers won't be tearing, tears of despair

They won't be punished for walking outside, for having opinions or driving a car

They won't be forced to cover their hair; they won't be beaten until they lay dead

Woman will get to live, and not just survive

This world that I hope for, looks nothing like mine

Maybe her "NO" will be actually taken as a "NO" and not as an invitation to force her to say "Yes"

Maybe her world isn't focused around protecting daughters, rather it will educate their sons

Maybe her eyes will look just like her mum's; I hope this new world I dream of does her no wrong

She will hear the screams of our rage, the loud noises we made just for her

She will be believed, unlike I was

She will live in a world that looks nothing like ours

Her mind won't even recall what the patriarchy took from us all

Her opinion will be loud to all, and very clear, though I'm proud of her I'll try not to tear

Her ears will only seem to hear the echoes of us who first lived here, in order for her
new world to appear

Being a woman won't be a liability, won't be a crime

The life she is living looks nothing like mine.

Mariana Martinez Caloca (she/her) was born in Mexico City. She is the daughter of Jose Luis Martinez Perez, an employment lawyer and a notable activist for labour rights. Mariana's involvement in feminist activism started from a young age. Her first direct contact with femicide was at age 14 when her math teacher Susana Garrido was brutally stabbed to death by her ex-husband. This moment marked Mariana's life as she hopes to obtain justice for her beloved teacher. When Mariana moved to Canada in August 2021. she vowed to continue with her work in the feminist movement and to bring attention to the unfortunate reality of many Latin American women.

Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice
Issue 46.2 (2025)
Original Literary Work
Day of the Girl Child Poetry Winners: First Place

To be brave

by Sam Sinclair

They are brave:
Words coarse with opposition
Mighty facing majority
A fervid cry to be saved.

He is brave:
He stepped past the supposed perimeter,
The first to journey onwards to
The new land.

She is brave:
Their barbaric taunts,
Jeering and leering,
Her bubble is a looking glass.
And oh how she is brave.

Not by her steel sword,
By her fierce tongue,
By her shameless elegance,
No.
So much more than that
She sleeps
And dreams of dawn,
Of doves and lilies and the sunrise
In lieu of the flames.
The ones from which her phoenix heart rises.

Samantha Sinclair (she/her) is a high school student whose passions include creative writing, music, and baking. She runs her own home bakery, Sweets by Sam, and works at Martinique Desserterie, where she crafts pastries, cakes, and confections. Musically, she pursues piano through private instruction and performs on trumpet in both concert and jazz bands. Through poetry, she expresses her views on beauty, love, and hope, and aims to capture the world as she sees it. Sam dreams of travelling the world but is even more eager to understand the people and places right at home.

Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice
Issue 46.2 (2025)
Original Literary Work
Day of the Girl Child Poetry Winners: Second Place

A Woman's Burden

by Jyotsana Balasubramaniyam

She wakes with a weight upon her chest,
A society that judges her, even at her best,
Her worth, her weight, her every move,
Constantly, relentlessly, but she tries to improve,

She is faced against expectations high,
To conform, and to comply,
To be sweet, to be serene,
To hide her strength, let it be unseen,

Try and try is all she does,
But still, will she ever be enough?
In a world that grins when women fail,
The echoes of her doubts begin to prevail,

She refuses to let this harsh world win,
Finding strength in struggle, even sporting a grin,
Eventually she finds her skin,
And she stands tall, unapologetically herself.

Jyotsana Balasubramaniyam (she/her) is a grade ten student who loves reading and exploring new ideas. She also enjoys taking walks as they help her to relax and clear her mind. Jyotsana believes that words are powerful and can make a real difference in the way we see and understand the world around us.

Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice
Issue 46.2 (2025)
Day of the Girl Child Poetry Winners: Third Place

I'd Like To Meet Her

by Catherine Khaperska

I'd like to meet her
She who is the gentle waves
That, given the power
Are bound to crash against the shore
She who controls the tides
She whose dreams are just within reach
If she took but just one step

I'd like to sit her down at a table
In a quaint little cafe
And listen to her gush and ramble
About her hopes
Desires, loves, aspirations, and interests

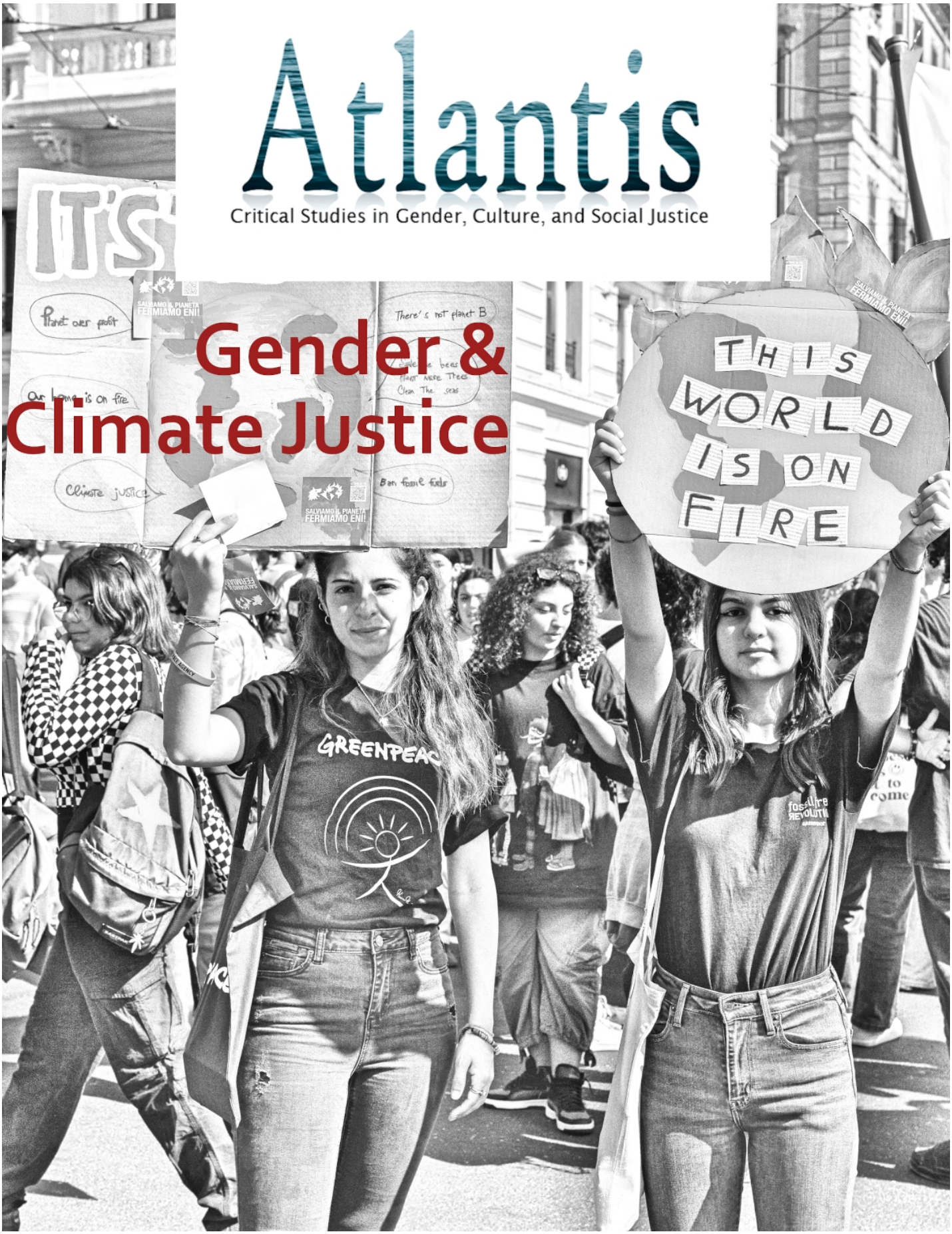
I'd like to hold her hand and tell her that she is strong and capable
Her brain is a marvel
The road before her clears of weeds
And dries of mud
Her future is her own
I'd like for her to know that

I'd like to look her in the eyes and see the stars
Her vision going further than she ever thought she could take part
I'd like for her to realise
The true power of an ambitious girl's mind

I'd like to see her flourish
I'd like to see her succeed, fulfill
Her every need
And stand on top of the world with a smile

I'd like to meet her, one day, and ask her
"Do you understand what I'm saying?
Take a second, breathe it in
If you don't believe me
I'll read this poem
To you
Again"

Catherine Khaperska (she/her) is a poet and novelist from Halifax, Nova Scotia. Her poetry features themes of transformation, hope and ambition, and her novels for young adults (mostly in the fantasy genre) include themes of family, love, and resilience. Her debut novel *Scarred* was published in early 2023 and its sequel *Scattered* was published in late 2024.


Atlantis
Critical Studies in Gender, Culture, and Social Justice
Gender & Climate Justice
THIS WORLD IS ON FIRE
Planet over profit
There's not planet B
Our home is on fire
Climate justice
Ban fossil fuels
SALVIAMO IL PIANETA FERMIAMO ENI!
GREENPEACE

Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice
Issue 46.2 (2025)
Special Issue: Gender and Climate Justice
Introduction

Gender and Climate Justice

by Lori Lee Oates and Sritama Chatterjee

Lori Lee Oates is a Teaching Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at Memorial University of Newfoundland. Her PhD is in global and imperial history from the University of Exeter. Lori Lee holds a SSHRC Insight Development Grant to pursue a project entitled Cursed: How the Resource Curse Manifests in Newfoundland and Labrador. She has been a contributor to the CBC, *The Globe and Mail*, Canada's *National Observer*, and *The Hill Times*. Lori Lee has also advised national environmental groups on the political economy of climate change and a just transition off fossil fuels.

Sritama Chatterjee is a literary and cultural theorist of the Indian Ocean World. She works at the intersections of Postcolonial Studies, Indian Ocean Studies, Environmental Humanities, and Feminist Studies. Her dissertation project titled "Ordinary Environments and Aesthetics in Contemporary Indian Ocean Archipelagic Writing" has been awarded an Andrew Mellon Pre-Doctoral Fellowship from the graduate school for outstanding research and scholarly excellence.

There can be no climate justice without gender justice.

Hanna Soldal, COP 28 Press Statement

The global-level threat that is climate change is now impossible to ignore. The Oxford English Dictionary (2025) defines climate change as "an alteration in the regional or global climate; esp. the change in global climate patterns increasingly apparent from the mid to late 20th century onwards, and linked largely with increased emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases caused by human activity." *The 2024 State of the Climate Report* maintains that "we are on the brink of an irreversible climate disaster. This is a global emergency beyond any doubt. Much of the very fabric of life on Earth is imperiled" (Ripple et al. 2024).

For some years now it has also become increasingly clear that the impacts of the climate crisis are not shared equally. Women and marginalized populations are disproportionately experiencing the worst impacts of climate change. This is exacerbated by the fact that in many regions of the world, women and girls bear most of the responsibility for securing food, water, and fuel (United Nations 2022). In 2022, *Al Jazeera* reported that households in Bangladesh that are headed by women allocate up to 30 percent of their income to protect themselves from climate change. The same article also discusses a study from the International Institute for Environment and Development which found that this figure was double the average of 15 percent, largely because women have lower incomes (*Al Jazeera* 2022). According to the Government of Canada's own climate plan, Canada is heating at twice the global average—three times as fast in Canada's North. Furthermore, Indigenous and Northern women are much more likely to be impacted by climate change (Native Women's Association of Canada 2025; Environment and Climate Change Canada 2022).

One of the important books reviewed in this special issue of *Atlantis*, *The End of This World* (2023), addresses the need for Indigenous sovereignty if the contemporary world is ever to achieve true climate justice. The book effectively makes the case that ending settler colonial capitalism is necessary for a just transition away from fossil fuels. Indigenous poets such as Jacinta Kerketta and Indigenous book publishing agencies such as Adivaani, based in India, are breaking new ground in environmental pedagogy. In a country that is disproportionately impacted by climate change, environmental pedagogy is, in and of itself an act of rebellion.

This special issue builds on decades of work by ecofeminists who have long paralleled oppression of nature with the oppression of women. This great body of work has included such scholars as Rachel Carson, Vandana Shiva, and Wangarî Maathai. Today, the links between masculinity and planetary destruction are ever more obvious as the climate emergency picks up speed. The simultaneous challenges of the expanding far right and climate change are, in part, rooted in a patriarchal desire to continue the white male supremacy that was foundational to the colonial project. Wheatherill (2024, 673) has effectively argued that "much of the reason for the lack of action on climate change is because vulnerability is discursively constructed as a racialized and feminized characteristic.… It is the feminized, racialized Other who is vulnerable, not the masculine, rational white male subject." The masculine interests that control our global commerce and governance seem to prefer that the planet remain under threat, rather than admitting that everyone is at risk, including the white men who control many institutions. Similarly, Daggett (2018) has made the case that there are links between climate denialism, racism, and misogyny. Developing the concept of "petro-masculinity," she considers how oil, gas, and coal are intertwined with masculine identity:

> Fossil fuels matter to new authoritarian movements in the West because of profits and consumer lifestyles, but also because privileged subjectivities are oil-soaked and coal-dusted. It is no coincidence that white, conservative American men—regardless of class—appear to be among the most vociferous climate deniers, as well as leading fossil fuel proponents in the West (27).

Political scientist Michael L. Ross gained a great deal of academic attention in 2008 when he argued that the lack of progress in gender equality in the Middle East was caused by oil, not Islam. Ross noted that fewer women worked outside the home and held positions in government in the petro-states he had studied. Ross attributed this to labour patterns which made it less likely that women would join the non-agricultural workforce in oil-producing jurisdictions. He followed this research with *The Oil Curse* (2012) in which he further explained the concept of "petroleum patriarchy." Ross's views were challenged by Pippa Norris in *Politics and Gender* (2009) on the basis that there are petroleum-patriarchy outliers such as Canada and Norway. However, scholars such as R.W. Connell (2020) increasingly argue that we must look more closely at context to truly understand how hegemonic masculinity manifests within specific jurisdictions and situations. This argument was brought home in the Canadian petro-province of Alberta in 2020 when a cartoon surfaced of then-teen climate activist Greta Thunberg being sexually assaulted. The design was printed on a sticker with an oil company logo and quickly went round the world in global media. While the oil sands may be often associated with petroleum patriarchy, Canada is generally seen as a global leader in gender equality. However, much more work remains to be done on petroleum patriarchy, including in oil states that are not ordinarily associated with gender inequality.

Situating racial and colonialist logics of reproduction is crucial for our conversation on climate justice and gender today. While discourses of over-population are anchored in eco-fascist movements that aim at controlling black and brown bodies, as well as trans bodies, globally, the work of gender studies and environmental humanities scholars now is to critique the eugenics and whiteness that permeates the over-population discourses. In 2019, scientists across the planet collaborated on an editorial in the journal *Bioscience* to warn of the "climate emergency" (Ripple et al. 2020). The authors clearly prescribed the policy directions needed to avoid the worst outcomes of global warming. Their most important recommendation for women and girls was that they should have access to education and family planning to curb population growth. Ironically, as the United States, a major global superpower, experiences more climate disasters, it has also shifted away from reproductive freedom. Donald Trump's simultaneous plans to "drill baby drill" and impose a national abortion ban suggest that climate deniers were never seriously interested in curbing populations as a climate solution.

There is a growing body of scholarship on global south and black feminist conceptions of reproductive justice. It includes scholars such as Jennifer C. Nash, Asha Nadkarni, and Sara Matthiesen who have investigated both the historical and cultural contexts in which eugenic and overpopulation discourses have thrived, disproportionately impacting black and brown women, and trans people of color. In the words of Margaret Atwood, author of the fictional story *The Handmaid's Tale*, "Who controls the women and babies has long been a keystone of every repressive regime on the planet" (Atwood 1985, 2). The same privileged nations that create most of the emissions per capita frequently point to the higher populations of India and China as the problem. To these climate denialists, North Americans have a right to drive cars, fly frequently, and own yachts, while families in India and China do not deserve coal-powered electricity (Oates 2021). As reported by Oxfam (2023): "In 2019, the super-rich 1% were responsible for 16% of global carbon emissions, which is the same as the emissions of the poorest 66% of humanity (5 billion people)" (viii). We also recognize the work of Farhana Sultana who discusses "the unbearable heaviness of climate coloniality," which argues for the need to address ongoing colonial violence that continues to be part of global governance, policy making, and research.

The articles, interviews, and book reviews in this special issue of *Atlantis* reveal what climate change can tell us about both the feminine and the masculine in the contemporary world. What these pieces have in common is a focus on what a *just* transition, rather than merely green transition, must look like. The authors included here ask us to look beyond ongoing corporatist solutions that are an extension of the colonial project. This scholarship also goes well beyond the usual Western media analysis of climate change to consider the need for decolonization.

Olstead and Burnett consider the "land ontology" of the Mi'kmaq First Nation. While acknowledging their role as settler scholars, they consider how "the coloniality of gender" (Lugones 2010, 742) underpins violence against the land. They effectively make the case that the normalization of violence against Indigenous women can help us understand the practices that underpin the destruction of earth.

An article from Hurlbert, Kairy, and Datta argues for "a shift away from top-down approaches to more participatory, community-led solutions." They argue for adopting the practice of listening to and collecting women's stories as a feminist decolonial methodology. The article makes two key contributions to envisioning global climate justice: (1) participatory methods are crucial to climate justice work in the academy and; (2) while the marine ecologies and vulnerability to sea-level rise are at the heart of dominant environmental scholarship on Bangladesh, it is crucial to center narratives on different kinds of water bodies.

MacDonald explores how feminist-queer environmental pedagogies, in different classroom spaces, could be a form of resistance. The article argues that reflections on the politics of place through personal histories can be a queer-feminist invitation to think about histories of land, labour, Indigenous dispossession, and gender dynamics. Furthermore, the author argues that a classroom that centers creative-writing practices and personal experiences can radically interrupt the corporate university.

As co-editors we were especially pleased that we were able to interview Camilia Dewan, author of *Misreading the Bengal Delta: Climate Change, Development & Livelihoods in Coastal Bangladesh* (2021). She effectively makes the case that we need to reconsider the concept of vulnerability in relation to the women of Bangladesh, who often have strong kinship with family members and extended families on which they depended. These contributions are then rounded out with book reviews of *The Intersectional Environmentalist*, *The End of this World*, and *Queer Ecofeminism*.

On a more personal note, we as co-editors, would like to thank all the contributors and reviewers for exposing these important issues of gender and climate justice. It is our desire that this work can help to take us, as scholars and activists, a few steps closer to developing climate solutions that are anti-colonial, anti-capitalist, anti-racist, and anti-patriarchal. We hope we have helped to demonstrate that these issues are at the very heart of the ongoing destruction of the Earth. We also want to take a moment to acknowledge our positionalities while editing this issue. Sritama is an international graduate student of colour and based in Pittsburgh while completing her PhD. This is also the ancestral lands of the Osage people. The special issue was largely completed at a time when the Trump government was com

ing down hard on immigrants of colour with ICE raids. Lori Lee, as a white settler, respectfully acknowledges that she works on a campus that is situated on the traditional territories of Indigenous groups, including the Beothuk, Mi'kmaq, Innu, and Inuit.

Onwards to achieving a just climate future.

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M'sɨt No'kmaq: Learning about Settler Relations and Responsibility in Trauma, Climate Change and Gender

by Riley Olstead and Kim Burnett

Abstract: This is a paper about the structural violence of settler colonialism in relation to the limits of the planet. As settler academics, we are involved in this violence. Here, we humbly seek guidance from the land ontology of the Mi'kmaq, reflected in the concept of m'sɨt No'kmaq (All our relations) to understand differently, ourselves, our responsibilities, and our place in 'a world on fire' (Rupa and Patel, 2021). Guided by m'sɨt No'kmaq we seek to learn how some of the concepts that we employ in our teaching and research—specifically "trauma" and "climate change" reproduce the core of settler colonialism—the disconnection and elimination of Indigenous peoples from the land (Wildcat et al., 2014, 1). Beyond a conceptual analysis, we also consider "the coloniality of gender" (Lugones 2010, 742) in how the materiality of epistemological violence manifests on the land through state violence directed at Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit peoples. Our learning throughout the paper shows us how colonial concepts obfuscate settlers' own relationship to land, which simultaneously undermines the possibility of a generative ethics of settler relationality with Indigenous peoples, and the earth.

Keywords: climate change; gender; Indigenous; settler; two-eyed seeing; trauma

Résumé : Cet article traite de la violence structurelle du colonialisme relativement aux limites de la planète. En tant qu'universitaires issus du colonialisme, nous sommes complices de cette violence. Dans ce contexte, nous nous appuyons humblement sur l'ontologie territoriale des Micmacs, incarnée par le concept de *m'sɨt No'kmaq* (toutes nos relations), pour repenser notre identité, nos responsabilités et notre place dans un « monde en feu » (Rupa et Patel 2021). Guidés par le concept de *m'sɨt No'kmaq*, nous cherchons à comprendre comment certains des concepts que nous employons dans notre enseignement et nos recherches – en particulier les « traumatismes » et les « changements climatiques » – perpétuent une des bases du colonialisme : l'éloignement des peuples autochtones de leur lien avec la terre et l'effacement de celui-ci (Wildcat et coll. 2014, 1). En plus d'une analyse conceptuelle, nous tenons compte de la notion de « colonialité du genre » (Lugones 2010, 742) pour comprendre comment la violence épistémologique prend forme concrètement sur le territoire, par la violence de l'État contre les femmes, les filles et les personnes bispirituelles autochtones. L'apprentissage que nous tirons tout au long de cet article montre comment les concepts coloniaux obscurcissent le rapport des colons à la terre, ce qui mine simultanément la possibilité d'une éthique relationnelle constructive entre colons et peuples autochtones, ainsi qu'avec la terre.

Mots clés : Autochtone; changements climatiques; genre; traumatisme; colon; approche à double perspective

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Introduction

This is a paper about the historic, structural, and ongoing violence of settler colonial systems in relation to the limits of the planet. As settler academics, we are involved in the machinery of this violence. Rather than look to our own western ontological and epistemic views, we humbly seek guidance here from the land ontology of the Mi'kmaq, reflected in the concept of m'sɨt No'kmaq (All our relations) in an effort to understand ourselves, our responsibilities, and our place in the world differently. With m'sɨt No'kmaq as our lens, we learn how some of the colonial concepts that we ordinarily employ in our teaching and research—specifically "trauma" and "climate change"—enact the core aim of settler colonialism: the disconnection and elimination of Indigenous peoples from their sources of knowledge and strength, which is the land (Wildcat et al. 2014, 1). We also come to see how such concepts obfuscate settlers' own relationship to land—naturalizing our presence by obscuring how settler lives have and continue to be made possible through a structure of violence, extraction and genocide. With m'sɨt No'kmaq as our framework, we then look to "the coloniality of gender" (Lugones 2010, 742) to acknowledge the materiality of epistemological violence as it manifests on the land, specifically through state violence directed at Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA (two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex and asexual) peoples. As we come to see, colonial concepts obscure understanding of the biopolitical entanglement of all of life, which undermines the possibility of settlers engaging in a generative ethics of relationality both with Indigenous peoples and the land. In other words, we come to learn how settler colonial erasures of land, enacted through our western concepts and normalized in our practices, underpin the destruction of earth.

As settler educators, we are newly learning about Indigenous knowledge, which guides us here in growing our understanding of the entanglements of trauma, climate change, and gendered violence. This work builds upon previous efforts of one of the authors (see Olstead and Chattopadhyay 2024) in order to continue to deepen our understanding about Mi'kmaw ontologies in support of decolonial teaching and learning about climate change. For us, this paper is part of an ongoing pedagogic commitment prompted in part by the release of The Truth and Reconciliation Report, which found that, in part with the residential school system, Canada has enacted a "race-based genocide of indigenous peoples" (TRC 2015a). The Report outlined 94 Calls to Action (TRC 2015b), which include pushing Canadian post-secondary institutions to ethically engage Indigenous communities and knowledge systems (TRC 2015a) to undertake efforts toward reconciliation, with the aim of correcting the historical use of education in Canadian colonial endeavours (Gaudry and Lorenz 2018, 221). Our motivations in this paper stem from the TRC but also beyond it: We also understand the necessity of undermining a settler future (Tuck and Yang 2012, 3), to be differently in the world should we ever wish to imagine a place for ourselves within generative networks of relational accountability to all of life. We have come to recognise and continue to learn about the necessity of unmaking the colonial world because even while it makes our lives, it does so by setting the earth on fire (Rupa and Patel 2021, 5).

Accordingly, this paper is about our learning to struggle with the deep and irresolvable contradictions of our own situatedness as settler academics. We feel ethically compelled to engage in a growing scholarship actively seeking to disrupt both the coloniality of the university and normative academic practices, yet our efforts continue to centre our settler expertise and worldviews in knowledge production. Informed by this irresolvable contradiction, we have written this paper not to decolonise our western concepts but, rather to pedagogically animate our own limited learning about the wisdom of an Indigenous worldview.

We are guided here by multiple voices and bodies of knowing—primarily Indigenous Elders, academics, land protectors, knowledge keepers, and through extensive listening of testimony at the TRC's (2015a) accounts of survivors. We make our lives on the territories of the Mi'kmaq Nation—a land that stretches from Unama'ki (Cape Breton Island)

down through the colonial border of what is currently called the United States and into Boston and, as such, we have been drawn to listen and learn specifically from Mi'kmaq peoples who have been in relationship with this land for time immemorial. We would like to especially express our deep gratitude for the teachings of local Mi'kmaq Elder Albert Marshall who shared his guidance throughout the writing of this paper. Elder Marshall's teachings, as we are best able to understand them, are existentially profound and deeply significant knowledge at this time of polycrisis. Specifically, we centre the Mi'kmaw concept of m'sɨt No'kmaq (All our relations) throughout this paper, which offers us a glimpse of the world from a perspective of Mi'kmaw laws of mutual relationships, interconnectivity, sharing, harmony, and respect. As Elder Marshall explains, the concept reflects a Mi'kmaw worldview informed by the land—a knowing and a practice of relationality with all of life (Marshall et al. 2021) which helps us to remain "aware of where you are, of what your responsibilities are" (Marshall, Marshall and Iwama 2010, 176). As settlers, the core aims of our paper are "to become aware of ourselves, of what we are, and our responsibilities."

Despite the fact that we are focussing our learning on m'sɨt No'kmaq, we are aware of the heterogeneity of Indigenous voices and worldviews around the world. Indigenous concepts are not generalizable and cannot be fully understood outside of their own relational context (Hunt 2014, 29). Thus, it is important not only to acknowledge the particularity of m'sɨt No'kmaq as a specifically Mi'kmaw understanding, but also to signal that our own settler interpretation of this concept is partial at best, given we are not part of the relational context in which this concept "lives." What we have come to learn, however, is that m'sɨt No'kmaq is one instance of a more generally held Indigenous collectivist ethos expressing a vitally interconnected relational epistemology and ontology. The ontological principle of connectivity with all of life is pervasive among Indigenous worldviews on Turtle Island (North America). The Nuu-Chah-Nulth (Central and Northern Coastal BC) say Hishuk ish ts'awalk, "Everything is one and all are connected"; the Haida (Haida Gwaii) say Gina 'waadluxan gud ad kwaagid, "Everything depends on everything"; the Secwepmc (Shuswap, South-Central Interior) say Kweseltnews, "We are all family." Each of these concepts reflect specific land-based ontologies and knowledge systems of the interwoven and relational interconnectedness of all of life (Muir and Bohr 2014, 68).

Throughout this paper, the Mi'kmaw land ontology of m'sɨt No'kmaq helps us see from a structural and relational view that allows us to "notice ourselves"—that is, to see how settler life and futurity is normatively and invisibly reproduced through dominant conceptions of trauma and climate change, as well as the "coloniality of gender" (Lugones 2010, 742). Our learnings here bring us to greater awareness of the necessity for settler academics like us to take up the Calls to Action of the TRC (2015b) to ethically engage with Indigenous communities and knowledge systems (TRC 2015a). This engagement is to develop a critical awareness and responsibility for how we--even as we may claim to be doing the important work of reconciliation, climate, and gender justice—are instrumental to the reproduction of these crises.

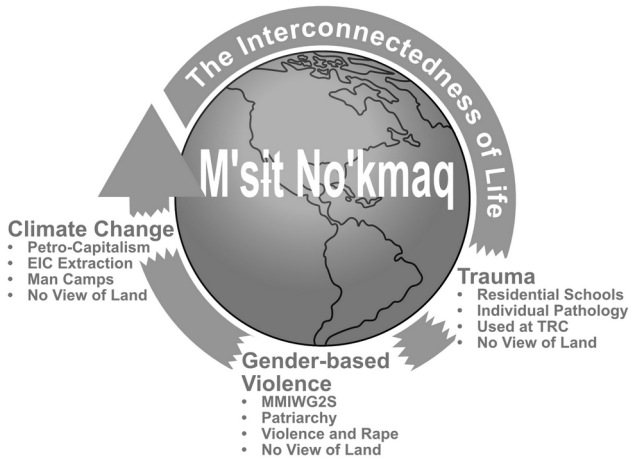

Figure 1. Created by Riley Olstead

Trauma

The TRC was mandated to "guide and inspire a process of truth and healing, leading toward reconciliation within Aboriginal families and between Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal communities, churches, governments, and Canadians generally" (TRC 2015a, 23), focusing primarily on Residential Schools. Between 2010 and 2015, the TRC collected and witnessed testimony from over 6750 survivors of Canada's residential schools and hosted seven national events and 17 regional hearings where survivors and their families were invited to communicate the truth of their experiences (TRC 2015a, 1).

Employed as centers of internment, as many as 150,000 Indigenous children were sent to Canadian residential schools with most being taken by state agents from their families and communities and subsequently submitted to deep physical, emotional, psychological, and corporeal/sexual torture and terror (Nagy 2020, 219). Despite operating until 1997, it has only been recently—with the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Report of Canada (2015a)—that Residential Schools, along with the systemic murder and disappearance of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA peoples (MMIWG), have been acknowledged as part of the specific eliminative machinery utilised by Canada to produce a "race-based genocide of Indigenous peoples" (TRC 2015a).

However, the founding apparatus of the TRC was widely criticized, with one of the most significantly voiced concerns being that the Commission was organised from the start around a western therapeutic framework, which isolated specific acts of abuse rather than locating these within the broader structures of settler colonial violence (Kirmayer, Simpson and Cargo 2003, S19). The TRC was thus seen not as forum for healing but as establishing "certain expectations of performing victimry for a settler public" (Robinson and Martin 2016, 44). Shaped by a colonial-therapeutic view of trauma, the TRC foreclosed understanding of the structural roots of intergenerational injury and loss of self-determination, which traced to the colonial rupture of Indigenous relationships with land.

The core of settler colonialism and the source of Indigenous trauma is the "specific, irreducible element" of "territoriality" (Wolfe, 2006, 388). Yet instead of highlighting how settler colonial violence is fundamentally about land, the TRC portrayed survivor trauma as a specifically "Indigenous pathology" (Million, 2014,103). Given this framing, settlers could look upon "narrations of horror" (Niezen 2017, 922) without ever having to make the connection between how their/our own bodies, lives, and futures were and continue to be made possible through Indigenous trauma. Unhinged from Indigenous relationships to land, the trauma concept deployed at the TRC was instead made useful to the settler colonial project, which could position Indigenous "healing" as a prerequisite to reconciliatory political action (Million 2014, 150). In such an equation, settlers can say "sorry" for historic abuses and loss but are not held responsible for ongoing colonialism (Whitlock 2015), nor for the return of what continues to be stolen/destroyed. Settlers' relationship to historic and ongoing trauma—that our lives are predicated on the disconnection of Indigenous bodies from the land we now occupy—was erased.

Indigenous scholars readily identified the strategic use of therapeutic conceptions of trauma at the TRC, describing this as "a complex move, where healing encompasses Canada's dialogue with Indigenous peoples, moving the focus from one of political self-determination to one where self-determination becomes intertwined with state-determined biopolitical programs for emotional and psychological self-care informed by trauma" (Million 2014, 6). Even while survivors resisted this by using the official space of the TRC to speak what was true (James, 2012), they did so "assert[ing] their own agency and empowerment over [what was, for many, regarded as a colonial] process" (Angel 2012, 209).

We offer here one account shared by Wab Kinew (2014) who, like so many other survivors, insisted on identifying how it was the theft and disconnection from land which was and is the structural trauma enacted through Canadian Residential Schools:

> We ought to teach that, yes, residential schools happened 150 years—more than 150,000 children. But we also need to teach that the origins of that system, the motivations of it, were to open up our lands for settlement. It's that the residential school project was tied, part and parcel, with the project of creating this country. And that's a much more challenging thing to teach. Because immediately questions are going to follow—like, well, what is my role in that legacy, right? (Kinew 2014, Testimony ABNE204)

Kinew (2014) centers land and brings a structural awareness through which questions of settler ethics and accountability are brought into view. In such ways, survivors' statements about land directly challenged the official colonial narratives fixated on Indigenous trauma as an individual psychological event (James 2012, 18), one tied to Residential Schools rather than a structure of violence that characterizes the ongoing relationship between the Canadian state and Indigenous nations.

We are witnessing today shifting political cultures. The very existence of the TRC (2015a) suggests a move away from an explicit politics of elimination toward a "politics of recognition" (Coulthard 2014, 3). However, this political shift is rhetorical in nature and conceals the enduring state fixation on appropriating Indigenous land and territory, which is at the root of Indigenous trauma (Coulthard 2014, 3). A politics of recognition seeks to "ensure continued access to Indigenous peoples' land and resources by producing neocolonial subjectivities that co-opt Indigenous people into becoming instruments of their own dispossession" (Coulthard, 2014, 156). At the TRC, colonial conceptions of trauma were elemental in legitimising a politics of recognition. This, on one hand, accomplished what appeared to be state acknowledgement of harm done by Residential Schools yet, at the same time, survivor testimony was stolen "from collective articulations of Indigenous ontologies and polities and turned into subsumptive forms of neoliberal individualism" (Coulthard, in Martineau 2016). So, while the TRC may have provided some space for survivors to name the profound wounds inflicted through the residential school system, officially the TRC remained a "colonial artifact" (Brown 1995, 101) operationalising an individualist-therapeutic trauma concept that refused accountability for the core objective of settler colonialism, which, always traces back to the rupture of Indigenous people from land (Wolfe 2006, 388).

Intervening in myopic colonial theories of trauma, Indigenous scholars such as Duran et al. (1995, 342) have proposed the soul wound concept, while Brave Heart-Jordan and DeBruyn (1995, 62) have offered the concept of Indigenous historic trauma (IHT). These concepts centre Indigenous relational "world making"—oneness—with land. They make clear that the structure of Indigenous trauma is settler colonialism (Million 2020) and thereby re-establish Indigenous ontological understandings that land is relationship (Coulthard in Walia 2015). This is why

> within settler colonialism, the most important concern is land/water/air/subterranean earth…. Land is what is most valuable, contested, required. This is both because the settlers make Indigenous land their new home and source of capital, and also because the disruption of Indigenous relationships to land represents a profound epistemic, ontological, cosmological violence. (Tuck and Yang 2012, 5)

For our own part, working toward relational accountability is also about coming to understand, as best as we are able, how connections to land are elemental to Indigenous life and being—a reality reflected in the many land ontologies, epistemologies, and cosmologies of Indigenous peoples developed through land-based relationality over time immemorial (Tuck and Yang 2012, 6). Concepts such as m'si-t No'kmaq express the coherence of Indigenous values, beliefs, customs, and protocols in ways "meant to maintain the relationships that hold creation together" (Little Bear 2000, 81). For Indigenous peoples, it is through relationship of land and people that all are brought into being in particular ways.

M'si-t No'kmaq alerts us that, settlers we have yet to appreciate how our own relationship to land is organised through structural trauma which, brings us into a particular kind of 'being'. Unlike settlers, "Indigenous peoples are those who have creation stories, not colonization stories, about how they came to be in a particular place—indeed how they came to be a place" (Tuck and Yang 2012, 6). Ongoing cycles of trauma in Indigenous communities include disproportionately high rates of suicide, homicide, substance use, accidental death, community/domestic violence, child abuse/neglect, and poverty, as well as other complex social problems (Marsh et al. 2015; Brave Heart 2000; Linklater

2014; Duran et al. 1998; Million 2014; Gone 2021). As we are learning about land-based relational ontologies, we are called to recognise our place in this violence and these injuries "perpetuated by the loss of land and the consequent loss of the stories and ceremonies that once connected indigenous peoples to the land" (Methot 2019, 22-23).

Climate

M'sɨt No'kmaq teaches us that the unique relationship of Indigenous peoples with land, acknowledged for instance by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP 2007), is also the unique relationship of land with Indigenous peoples. European settlers encountered land that was "profoundly and intentionally altered and managed by Indigenous communities" (Cronon 2003, 88) reflecting a deeply intimate, living, and co-constitutive connection between Indigenous peoples and the land. The central goal of settler colonialism was to destroy that connection, including Indigenous land-based knowledge, materiality, and practice, and in doing so produced ecological degradation of both lands and peoples (Cruz 2018, 8). And this was intentional: it "was always about changing the land, transforming the earth itself, including the creatures, the plants, the soil composition and the atmosphere. It was about moving and unearthing rocks and minerals. All of these acts were intimately tied to the project of erasure that is the imperative of settler colonialism" (Davis and Todd 2017, 770). Leanne Betasamosake Simpson identifies how, unlike many settlers concerned with a "sustainable future," "Indigenous peoples have witnessed continual ecosystem and species collapse since the early days of colonial occupation…. We should be thinking of climate change as part of a much longer series of ecological catastrophes caused by colonialism and accumulation-based society" (in Harris 2019, np).

We, the authors, are learning that land-based ontological concepts such as m'sɨt No'kmaq understand "that everything in the natural world stems from one Mother; our Mother Earth" (Marshall 2023). For us settlers, this knowledge of interconnectivity importantly awakens us to witness our own situatedness in both Indigenous trauma and trauma of the earth, or what we call climate change. This understanding is significant, as it reinforces for us how the devastating contradictions of the colonial structures that make our lives are also "a campaign to break the vital loops that constitute life on earth" (Whyte 2017, 153).

As the authors of this paper, we are reflecting as well on how our settler education systems are integral to the colonial project; "noticing ourselves" in conceptions of trauma and climate change shows us how settler colonialism embeds and reproduces itself, and us, through our participation in naturalising colonial concepts and ontologies. Obscured in such concepts is the historic epistemic violence that "shift[ed] relations to land, from the conception of usufruct land use held by many Indigenous communities to the recasting of land as private property by settlers (Cronon 2003, 54). What we are being shown in our consideration here is how Indigenous trauma and climate destruction are co-constructed through our own use of concepts that reify divisions and disconnections in the web of life. Actively working toward relational accountability requires a hyper-reflexive practice in which settlers come to "see ourselves," and therefore our interests, as we recirculate normative concepts in our teaching and thinking.

Cherokee Elder Corntassel has said: "One of our biggest enemies is compartmentalization, as shape-shifting colonial entities attempt to sever our relationship to the natural world and define the terrain of struggle" (in Smith 2013, np). For instance, the colonial language of "climate change," or "the environmental crisis" is discursively compartmentalized, much like the use of "trauma" as it was deployed at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015). The most common settler approach to climate change reflects this understanding: most settler environmentalists regard ecological restoration as for its own sake (even while in some cases "partnering" with Indigenous peoples), neither recognizing nor acting in ways attendant to the vital interbeing of Indigenous lands and bodies and the historic and ongoing assault on that relationality, occasioned by settler bodies. Through our learning, it is increasingly apparent to us that our western ontologies are functionally dissociative and work against our understanding of how settler colonial traumatization is at the root of climate destruction (Cruz 2018, 40). Because our worldview does not recognize land at the center of life, settlers like us do not generally understand that the violence of the residential school system is part of the same structure of elimination also producing biodiversity loss, greenhouse gas emissions, and sea-level rise.

Guided as we are here by m'sɨt No'kmaq, we have been offered the possibility to interrupt our epistemic habits, to see how climate change and the destruction of the land is "a colonial manifestation and a direct attack on Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous nationhood" (L. Simpson 2004, 377).

The Coloniality of Gender

So far, we have looked at how colonial concepts like "trauma" and "climate change" articulate a worldview in conflict with life and land. We have shown how colonial epistemologies are reductionist, siloed, individualising, and myopic, and therefore unable to recognise vital relational networks among humans and the more-than-human world. However, we are not only learning about the conceptual realm but also about how colonial concepts and views of the world are animated through a materiality of relations. It is that materiality to which we now turn as "by far the largest attack on Indigenous Knowledge systems right now is land dispossession, and the people that are actively protecting Nishnaabewin are not those at academic conferences advocating for its use in research and course work but those that are currently putting their bodies on the land" (L. Simpson 2014, 21).

Maria Lugones offers the concept of "the coloniality of gender" to describe how the modern/colonial gender system is one of the central axes of colonial oppression organising sexual access, authority, labour, control of knowledge, and intersubjectivity (2010, 744). Alongside m'sɨt No'kmaq, which reminds us of our interrelatedness and responsibilities to the rest of life, we find the "coloniality of gender" helpful for making sense of how Indigenous relationality is being attacked on the land--largely through confrontations between Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA peoples and settler men who often act as agents of the state or industry. As we shall discuss more fully below, it is disproportionately Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA peoples who are involved in generative resistance, resilience, and creative action, asserting continued Indigenous presence and vitality on the land (Vizenor 1999, 11). In doing so, they protect the land and water from petro-colonial theft and climate destruction. It is also the case that Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA peoples are most at risk of violence, criminalisation, harassment, disappearance, and death (Altamirano-Jiménez 2021, 215). As Pam Palmater, a Mi'kmaw lawyer and scholar explains, "The safety and health of women's bodies has always been tied to the land so closely. That's why the state has particularly targeted Indigenous women—to separate them from the land because it helps disintegrate their nations" (Palmater cited in Brake 2018, np).

Pre-invasion, the Mi'kmaq (like many Indigenous nations) were matriarchal and located women at the centre of m'sɨt No'kmaq—a circulating, relational, and cooperative social, political, and economic world. Unlike the patriarchal gender structures of the colonists, in Indigenous communities, respect and honour were afforded women and two-spirit peoples for their essential roles and contributions to Indigenous life and well-being (Lugones 2010, 744). Settler colonialism imported a binary gender system which was imposed on Indigenous peoples; Jesuit priests and settlers "steeped in patriarchy, complained about the lack of male control over women and set out to change that" (Fenton and Moore 1969, 182). Since invasion, the coloniality of gender (Lugones 2010, 422) has been a campaign of land theft accomplished specifically by attacking those bodies that "transmit the clan, and with that: family, responsibility, relatedness to territory" (A. Simpson 2016, 7). In other words, Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA peoples are the most powerful confrontation to the structure of settler colonialism as they embody, practice, and reproduce sacred land-knowledge of relationality, responsibility, and connectivity such as conceptualised in the concept m'sɨt No'kmaq. Because of this, the state seeks the elimination of these bodies as they signify "land itself, of the dangerous possibility of reproducing Indian life and most dangerously, other political orders" (A. Simpson 2016,15). The historic reality is that it has always been the ambition of the Canadian state to "seek the death and so called 'disappearance' of Indigenous women in order to secure its sovereignty" (A. Simpson 2016, 1).

Most notably, we highlight the coloniality of gender (Lugones 2019, 422) as it occurs in relation to the Extraction Industrial Complex (EIC). The EIC is a network of international corporate and industrial entities cooperating in various significant ways with settler and colonial states in the diversion of public resources and other social, financial, and political interests, all to promote petro-colonial state institutions and activities. This includes such things as the police repression of Indigenous land protectors, the manufacture of pro-corporate media ideology, and the establish

ment of extraction infrastructure, most often on the unceded lands and territories of Indigenous nations. Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA peoples are most impacted by the EIC in explicitly violent ways, particularly through the establishment of man camps (Martin et al. 2019, 3). Despite this, Indigenous peoples, and especially women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA peoples have maintained the knowledge and practice reflected in such concepts as m'sɨt No'kmaq—knowledge and practice of their vital connections to their lands, languages, and cultures. This knowledge is critical to ongoing resistance to colonization, the patriarchy, and climate destruction.

As they embody and reproduce the knowledge/materiality of land, women play a key role its defense. Despite this absolutely vital work, there is a profound absence of studies reflecting on the gendered and racialized impacts of resource extraction. In the face of this "invisibilisation," Indigenous women from Canada, Latin America, and the Philippines have themselves gathered data showing an alarming increase in violence against Indigenous bodies when resource extraction projects are established (Kairos Executive Summary, 2014, 3). These data are reinforced by findings from a 2019 study (Martin et al. 2019) on the Bakken oil-producing region of Montana and North Dakota, where reports state that incidence of aggravated assault has increased 70% alongside the rapid rise of oil workers to the region. Tellingly, violent victimization in areas surrounding the Bakken counties fell by 8% during the same period (Martin et al. 2019, 5). Amnesty International has likewise confirmed that "the presence of a very large, young, mostly male transient workforce adds to [the] risk [faced by Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA peoples], because young men are statistically more likely to be perpetrators of violent crime" (2016, 4).

In Wet'suwet'en territory, in what is currently called British Columbia, the Unist'ot'en clan matriarchs and land defenders explain that man camps are "temporary housing facilities for up to thousands of mostly non-Indigenous male workers brought into different Indigenous communities for industrial work" and that these "create the social conditions for an increase of violence against Indigenous women and children" (Unist'ot'en, n.d.). The Unist'ot'en (C'ihlts'ehkhyu / Big Frog Clan) are the original peoples distinct to the lands of the Wet'suwet'en. The Unist'ot'en have built a resistance camp, blocking seven proposed pipelines from a Tar Sands gigaproject and LNG fracturing projects. This extraordinary resistance to industry has been led by the matriarchs and women of the clan who have persistently made links between industrial extraction and violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA peoples. In a blog post on the Unist'ot'en website, they magnify the relationship between climate change, industrial extraction, Indigenous sovereignty, and gender violence in their demand to "end the rape of our territories" (Unistot'en, n.d.). Through this statement, the Unist'ot'en help the authors of this paper, recognise how the coloniality of gender (Lugones 2010, 744) seeks to undermine Indigenous self-determination through the elimination of women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA peoples from the land, which is directly tied to accelerating climate change (Million 2014).

In Canada, the intersection between destruction of the earth and colonial gender violence is evidenced further in data on missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA peoples. The MMIWG Inquiry Report found there is "substantial evidence" that natural resource projects increase violence against Indigenous women, children, and 2SLGBTQQIA individuals and that "work camps, or 'man camps,' associated with the resource extraction industry are implicated in higher rates of violence against Indigenous women at the camps and in the neighbouring communities" (Reclaiming Power 2019, 584). The Report explains further that "increased crime levels, including drug and alcohol-related offences, sexual offences, and domestic and 'gang' violence, is linked to 'boom town' and other resource development contexts" (Reclaiming Power 2019, 586). Citing Statistics Canada, Tasker (2019, np) reports that Indigenous women make up 25% of all national female homicide victims and are 16 times more likely to be slain or to disappear than white women.

While some data exposing the coloniality of gender (Lugones, 2010, 422) is being made available, the epistemic siloes of colonial thinking maintain the common perception that the activities and operation of the EIC—even when acknowledged as "bad for the environment"—are unrelated to the ongoing violence experienced by Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. Indigenous women themselves have been left to draw attention to the impact of the EIC through such efforts as the REDress Project. The REDress Project is an installation art project launched by artist Jaime Black in response to the staggering number of murdered and missing Indigenous women, girls, and

2SLGBTQQIA peoples across what is currently called Canada and the United States (Black, n.d.). Despite the findings of the MMIWG Report (Reclaiming Power 2019) that clearly outline the systemic harassment, intimidation, and violence faced by Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people, the Canadian state implicitly condones this violence through an informal policy of non-intervention (Martin et al. 2019; Amnesty 2016; Kairos Executive Summary 2014). As Coulthard reminds us, the liberal recognition paradigm in Canada has replaced the more overtly genocidal framework that preceded it; however, the eliminative aims of the state remain (2014, 3). In terms of Canada's non-intervention into the violence associated with the EIC, Audra Simpson argues that "states do not always have to kill, its citizens can do that for it" (2016, 5).

The coloniality of gender (Lugones, 2010) is visible in the rise of extractive populism—an inflammatory, rhetorical "strategy through which 'the people' and the petro-industrial complex are sutured together in symbolic nationalization" (Gunster 2019, 14). This "suturing" is supported by well-funded media campaigns through which the EIC is routinely constituted as a moral expression of white, working class, settler-patriarchal petro-nationhood. For instance, "Keep Canada Working" was an advertising campaign of the Alberta government, for which millions of dollars was spent over the past two decades to convince Albertans of their shared interests with the EIC (Gunster 2019, 14). Indeed, the EIC labour force is tasked with operating and maintaining, as well as guarding, promoting, and fortifying the petro-colonial infrastructure, which is "an unmarked center of whiteness, and definitely heteropatriarchal" (A. Simpson 2016, 3).

The growth and operation of the EIC is discursively organised to appeal to workers as their "lifeblood," particularly in ways that draw out historical connections to settler patriarchal masculinity—a particular version of colonial-manhood that has developed alongside global capitalist expansion, processes of colonization, policing, and frontier warfare. The EIC version of manhood is uniquely situated to extract from land and women on behalf of and with the armed protection of the state and funding from industry. We wonder whether other working class versions of masculinity receive this kind of direct/explicit government support or if it is exclusive to frontier masculinity?

Pointing out the role of settler men in the coloniality of gender (Lugones 2010) is not about ignoring or excusing women from involvement in settler colonialism, climate destruction, or even the patriarchal violence of MMIWG. Even without direct participation in the EIC, women's lives are structurally aligned with the extractive interests of colonial capitalism, even while the benefits of the patriarchy are in other ways withheld from them. Such is the understanding that m'sɨt No'kmaq offers, that reveals that all settlers-–regardless of the intersections of our identities or our ethical claims and efforts otherwise—have a relationality to the land and her people that is organised through a structure of elimination. We believe that for settlers like us, generating relational accountability with Indigenous peoples will not be possible unless we actively recognise our own investments as well as our direct involvement in reproducing colonial structures. By centring a Mi'kmaq land based ontological concept in our learning, we have sought to practice reflexivity, to ask questions about how colonial concepts like trauma and climate change—terms we and so many others like us use uncritically in the academic context—do the work of reproducing settler futurity. As we are coming to see, these concepts conceal the ways that our lives are made possible through harm done to Indigenous bodies and the land. It may be very challenging but m'sɨt No'kmaq has helped us disrupt, albeit only momentarily, our colonial ways of thinking to see how our settler interests are resourced through MMIWG and climate destruction.

Conclusion

Even though we are sure to have made mistakes in our novice understanding here, our learning about the wisdom of m'sɨt No'kmaq has been invaluable in helping us to glimpse beyond our limited settler categories and concepts, to begin to see our place in the world in a new and relational way. This is, for us, a starting place for the ongoing hyper-reflexivity necessary, should anything that comes close to looking like relational accountability to Indigenous peoples and lands be possible. Of many of the important lessons we have been offered through m'sɨt No'kmaq is that settler ontologies and epistemologies trouble our ability to recognise ourselves in relation to what has been done for, and to, the land and this undermines our own ability to ethically respond to the root of crisis. As we have sought to show, co

lonial concepts dangerously limit both settler self-recognition and accountability for our roles in the ongoing history of trauma and genocide of Indigenous peoples, which is at the same time the existential crisis of climate destruction. We have looked, for instance, at how colonial gender structures mobilize violence against the very bodies that seek to protect both the knowledge of and relationships with land, which are central to life on this planet. Uncritical reproduction of these seemingly innocuous concepts forecloses settler efforts around climate action, gender justice, and decolonisation. Indigenous worldviews that understand "we are all one" awaken us urgently to a need to displace the centrality of colonial registers and structures upholding our settler futurity (Tuck and Yang 2012), as all of life depends upon it.

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Feminist Community-led Perspectives on Disaster Adaptations: Stories from Wetland Local Women Communities in Bangladesh

by Margot Hurlbert, Barsha Kairy, Ranjan Datta

Abstract: This paper offers an in-depth exploration of the critical role played by women within vulnerable wetland communities in Bangladesh, particularly in the context of disaster adaptations. As climate change-induced disasters become increasingly prevalent, it is essential to recognize women's agency, knowledge, and resilience within these communities, and between minority Hindu and majority Muslim women. Employing a feminist framework, this research delves into the nuanced dynamics of gender, faith, and community-based disaster adaptation strategies. Through narratives and stories from local women, the paper unveils the innovative and adaptive approaches often overlooked in conventional disaster management practices, the heightened agency of majority Muslim women and their "witnessing" of the suffering of the minority Hindu women. It highlights the intersectionality of gender, faith, poverty, and environmental vulnerability, shedding light on the unique challenges faced by women in wetland areas, especially vulnerable Indigenous and Hindu minority women. The findings of this paper underscore the need for more inclusive, gender-responsive disaster policies and programs, and call for a shift away from top-down approaches to more participatory, community-led solutions. By amplifying the voices and experiences of local women in Bangladesh, this paper contributes to a broader discourse on sustainable disaster adaptation strategies, ultimately striving for greater equity and resilience in the face of climate-related challenges.

Keywords: conventional disaster management; resilience; sustainable disaster adaptation; women-led disaster adaptation

Résumé : Cet article explore l'importance du rôle des femmes dans les communautés vulnérables des zones humides du Bangladesh, surtout en ce qui concerne l'adaptation aux catastrophes. Alors que les catastrophes liées aux changements climatiques se multiplient, il est essentiel de valoriser le rôle, le savoir et la résilience des femmes dans ces communautés, y compris entre les femmes hindoues minoritaires et les femmes musulmanes majoritaires. En adoptant un cadre féministe, cette recherche étudie les dynamiques nuancées du genre, de la foi et des stratégies d'adaptation communautaire face aux catastrophes. Grâce aux récits et aux histoires de femmes locales, cet article révèle les approches novatrices et adaptatives qui sont souvent négligées dans les méthodes conventionnelles de gestion des catastrophes, le rôle prépondérant des femmes musulmanes majoritaires et leur « témoignage » de la souffrance des femmes hindoues minoritaires. Il souligne l'intersectionnalité du genre, de la foi, de la pauvreté et de la vulnérabilité environnementale, mettant en lumière les défis uniques que rencontrent les femmes vivant dans les zones humides. Les conclusions de cet article soulignent la nécessité de mettre en place des politiques et des programmes de gestion des catastrophes plus inclusifs et sexospécifiques. Elles appellent à l'abandon des approches descendantes au profit de solutions plus participatives et communautaires. En donnant la parole aux femmes locales au Bangladesh et en relatant leurs expériences, cet article enrichit le débat sur les stratégies d'adaptation durable aux catastrophes, qui ont pour objectif de renforcer l'équité et la résilience face aux enjeux climatiques.

Mots clés : gestion conventionnelle des catastrophes; résilience; adaptation durable aux catastrophes; adaptation aux catastrophes menée par les femmes

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Introduction

This article is part of a broader project aimed at developing practices and policies for Bangladesh's vulnerable and Indigenous populations in Bangladesh. Research on feminist community-led perspectives on disaster adaptations in South Asian Indigenous and local land-based communities reveals notable gaps that warrant critical attention (Khalil et al. 2020; Parekh 2023; Rodríguez et al. 2007). There is a deficiency in acknowledging and analyzing the intricate intersections of religions, gender, class, caste, and ethnicity within these communities. Studies have documented enduring colonial and patriarchal power structures that increase vulnerability, especially in times of disaster in Bangladesh (Dewan 2021; Dewan and Nustad 2023; Dewan 2023; Paprocki and Cons 2014). Existing studies often lack a nuanced understanding of how these intersecting identities shape the vulnerabilities and adaptive capacities of Indigenous women. Moreover, the limited representation of local knowledge systems in disaster literature remains a significant gap.

The power dynamics within local wetland communities in Bangladesh, particularly concerning western structures (i.e., mostly outsider-led), have been insufficiently examined in the context of disaster adaptations (Haque 2016; Newaz and Rahaman 2019). There is a need to investigate how power relations influence decision-making processes and thereby impact women's agency in shaping and implementing adaptive strategies. Additionally, the voices and experiences of local women are often marginalized or silenced in the discourse on disaster adaptations (Choudhury, Haque, and Habib 2018; Khan and Haque 2010). Research should strive to amplify these voices, shedding light on the nuanced perspectives of Indigenous women regarding vulnerabilities, adaptive capacities, and the complex interplay of their intersecting identities. Addressing these research gaps is crucial for fostering more inclusive and effective community-led strategies that account for the diverse experiences and needs of local wetland women in the face of disasters in South Asia.

The Oxford English Dictionary online (2025) defines Indigenous as "born or originating in a particular place; *spec.* (now often with capital initial) designating a people or group inhabiting a place before the arrival of (European) settlers or colonizers. Also, with *to* introducing the place in question." In our research, many participants emphasized

that Indigeneity is deeply rooted in land-based spirituality, cultural education, and everyday practices. For many, the land is not merely a physical space but is regarded as sacred understood as a living entity, a family member, or an extension of the body. Indigeneity, as expressed by participants of this research, is centered on responsible and reciprocal relationships with the land, shaped through spiritual, cultural, and embodied connections. In recognition of this diversity and relational understanding, we intentionally chose not to impose a rigid definition of Indigeneity. Instead, we approached it as a fluid and hybrid concept, shaped by localized meanings, practices, and histories.

Severe climate events such as floods, droughts, hurricanes, and coastal storm surges pose a worldwide danger to both human lives and livelihoods due to their significant impact on crops, businesses, and critical infrastructure, significantly affecting local women communities in wetland areas, in particular in Bangladesh (Bamforth 2017).Within marginalized[1] households in wetland areas, challenges such as malnutrition and gender discrimination arise due to limitations on women's employment and temporary migration of their husbands (Kamal et al. 2018; Sharmin and Islam 2013). This vulnerability is rooted in women's roles as primary resource users and their reliance on natural resources for livelihoods, making them particularly susceptible to hazardous situations (Enarson and Chakrabarti 2009; Sharmin and Islam 2013). Minority women and their children can be adversely affected by social and cultural norms that favour individualistic resilience strategies over communal ones (Datta, Kairy and Hurlbert 2024), hindering organizations' ability to alleviate the suffering caused by climate change-induced natural disasters (Crosweller and Tschakert 2020). Building a sustainable community necessitates diverse perspectives and local government support influenced by political orientation, mandates, and civic leaders. Digital tools, media, and networks enhance collaboration among community members, particularly during crises and emergencies (Wahid et al. 2017).

In the wetland areas of Bangladesh, we focus on feminist community-led approaches to mitigate the effects of climate change, with special attention to the women most affected. This project is part of a broader study aimed at developing practices and policies for Bangladesh's vulnerable and Indigenous populations. We draw upon the experiences and insights of women in wetlands, delving into their understanding of climate change, the challenges they face, and their adaptation strategies. Our research focused on Indigenous and land-based community perspectives on climate change and adaptation, with particular attention to flooding as a key impact. The community (described below) experienced a severe flood in August 2022, which significantly shaped their concerns and priorities. As a result, much of the community's adaptation efforts have centered on flood-related resilience.

The objectives of this paper are threefold: 1) to explore the distinct impacts of floods in Bangladesh's wetlands from the perspective of women, 2) to investigate women's participation during floods, and 3) to compile solutions proposed by the community's women. To accomplish these objectives, we describe our positionality and theoretical framework, followed by details about our methodology and theoretical framework. We then present the outcomes of our data analysis, organized into themes and sub-themes. Finally, we address the issues raised by the women storytellers and offer recommendations based on our findings. Ultimately, we reflect on lessons learned and discuss potential areas for improvement.

Researcher Positionality

The role of researcher positionality is of utmost importance in Indigenous research, as it significantly impacts the research process and raises ethical considerations (Datta 2018; Wilson 2008). It is essential to recognize that Indigenous research frequently delves into sensitive subjects and engages with marginalized communities. Researcher positionality encompasses their cultural background, personal experiences, and social identity, all of which can profoundly influence their interactions with Indigenous participants and their comprehension of the issues at hand. Acknowledging and understanding one's positionality is crucial for approaching research with humility and respect, reducing the risk of inadvertently perpetuating harmful stereotypes or colonial attitudes. It empowers researchers to establish trust within Indigenous communities, nurture meaningful collaborations, and formulate research questions that are culturally sensitive and aligned with Indigenous worldviews.

Margot Hurlbert: I am a climate change adaptation and governance researcher in Canada with experience working with Indigenous peoples and communities in Canada, South America, and South Asia. My goals are to build the adaptive capacity of people, especially women, and their community, address climate change, and advance climate justice.

Barsha Kairy: I am a member of an Indigenous community in Bangladesh and belong to one of the minority communities in the country. My involvement in this research stems from a desire to give voice to the unheard. With enthusiasm, I listen to the stories and aim to become a storyteller on behalf of vulnerable communities to the wider world. My affinity with other communities motivates me to collaborate with them.

Ranjan Datta: I am a land-based and decolonial community-based researcher with 17 years of experience in conducting research with Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in Canada and South Asia. As a minority scholar, I have developed a strong understanding of decolonial and anti-racist research frameworks, and my current research program is supported by a network of Indigenous, visible minority immigrants, refugees, and Black communities, scholars, students, practitioners, and professionals. Research is a lifelong commitment for me.

Our positionality is pivotal to addressing historical power imbalances in Indigenous research, where Indigenous communities have often been treated as subjects of research rather than active participants or collaborators. Through a critical examination of our positionality, we have redefined our research agenda to ensure that it aligns with the community's needs and benefits. Our positionality is fundamental for nurturing ethical, respectful, and empowering research relationships with Indigenous communities and advancing knowledge that genuinely serves their interests and well-being.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The decolonial feminist research framework holds a critical and transformative role in the context of disaster research within the wetlands of Bangladesh (Shefer and Bozalek 2022; Wijsman and Feagan 2019; Väyrynen et al. 2021). This region has rich cultural diversity and historical legacy and has experienced disproportionate impact of disasters, which often exacerbate pre-existing inequalities (Väyrynen et al., 2021). Decolonial feminist research acknowledges the interconnectedness of gender, power, and culture in the disaster discourse, recognizing that women, particularly in marginalized communities, bear a significant burden during disasters (Chapola 2022). By centering the experiences and voices of women in disaster-affected areas, this framework seeks to unveil the gendered vulnerabilities and resilience strategies that are often obscured in traditional research (Chapola 2022). Decolonial feminist research also highlights the critical importance of respecting and empowering local communities in the process, particularly those who have been historically marginalized and silenced. Decolonial feminist research thus provides a comprehensive framework that challenges existing power dynamics and colonial legacies, making it a valuable approach to understanding and addressing disasters in wetland Bangladesh.

We employ the methodology of qualitative research which is ideal for considering environmental justice for those who live at the margins. Furthermore, doing so through the decolonial feminist lens is indispensable for disaster research in the wetlands of Bangladesh because it recognizes the complex web of structural injustices and historical oppressions that shape the disaster landscape (Datta 2024; Wijsman and Feagan 2019). This methodology goes beyond traditional research paradigms by scrutinizing not only the immediate impacts of disasters but also their underlying causes, which are often rooted in social, economic, and political hierarchies (Datta 2024). It exposes the inadequacies of top-down, technocratic solutions and emphasizes the need for community-driven, context-specific strategies that account for the intersectionality of identities and experiences. By engaging in dialogue with local communities, particularly Indigenous and minority groups, and addressing their unique vulnerabilities and needs, decolonial feminist research fosters a more inclusive, ethical, and equitable approach to disaster management by embracing participation and giving voice to the women in the community. Ultimately, this methodology aims to redress historical injustices,

challenge hegemonic narratives, and promote resilience, not just in the face of disasters but in the ongoing struggle for justice and equity in wetland Bangladesh.

In line with the decolonial feminist research framework, we embraced deep listening and storytelling as our powerful and meaningful research approaches. Formally, Bangladesh does not acknowledge Indigenous people and has not adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Right of Indigenous Peoples. This has prevented a wholesome Bangladesh practice for identifying as a member of an Indigenous group. In our research we interviewed four people of whom two self-identified as belonging to land-based minority Indigenous groups, and three of whom were living and engaging in Hindu land-based practices. In August 2023, we engaged in conversations with these women, exploring in semi-structured interviews their experience in relation to the most recent flood, and valuing their narratives. Approximately 1% of Bangladesh's population is Indigenous and 7.96% are Hindu (BBS 2022). Our article concerns mostly, but not exclusively, findings from three interviews conducted in the watershed described below and its emergency response to a 2022 flood. Other interviewees provided insight into disaster response in Bangladesh. Two interviewees identified as Muslim, another as engaging in Hindu land-based practices and identified as Hindu. We conducted a total of seven interviews.

Deep listening played a fundamental role in respecting and honouring the perspectives of the women from the wetlands. Given that Indigenous perspectives are intimately linked to the land, steeped in the language, and deeply rooted in the Nation of the people, storytelling served to reestablish a profound connection with land-based wisdom (Datta 2018) and our interviewees participation in crafting solutions. As the interviews were conducted with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members present, participants from land-based minority communities were unable to openly share their experiences of oppression and discrimination in front of members of the majority group. In separate interviews with land-based minority participants, they disclosed powerful and deeply personal stories of marginalization. However, out of concern for their safety and based on their explicit request, we have chosen not to include these accounts in our findings. This decision reflects our ethical commitment to protecting the confidentiality, well-being, and self-determination of research participants. Our commitment extended to following traditional Indigenous rituals and ceremonies alongside conventional research methodologies.

In addition to qualitative research, using deep listening and Indigenous storytelling, we embraced reflective writing to delve more profoundly into our research findings and experiences. This practice allowed us the autonomy and freedom to engage in thoughtful reflection. Ultimately, it enabled us to distill and value our discoveries more effectively, enhancing the depth and quality of our research. We upheld strict adherence to ethical protocols, prioritizing the privacy and confidentiality of the respondents while demonstrating our respect and gratitude. Given the vulnerable status of the participants as members of a minority community, preserving their privacy was paramount. Moreover, we ensured that their participation was informed and entirely voluntary, underscoring our commitment to ethical research practices.

In our research we talked to women in the Jagannathpur Upazilla at Sunamgonj District as depicted in Figure 1 below.

Findings: Learning Reflections from the Women of Wetlands of Bangladesh

Bangladesh boasts a diverse array of ever-evolving wetland ecosystems, encompassing mangrove forests, natural lakes, freshwater marshes, reservoirs, oxbow lakes, beels (permanent freshwater depressions), haors (deep depressions in the northeast forming a vast inland sea during the monsoon), fishponds, tanks, estuarine waters, and extensive floodplains that are periodically submerged (Bird Life International, 2004). The country is home to several wetland regions. We conducted our research in the Kolkolia union of Jagannathpur upazila, situated in the Sunamganj district within the Sylhet division of Bangladesh. In Sunamganj district the ratio of Muslim is 88.16 % and Hindu community is 11.67 % of the total population (BBS 2022, p-37). Therefore, the majority is part of the Muslim community.

In our research, we engaged in multiple listening sessions, each focusing on different aspects of the recorded stories from the women of the wetland. We included women from both communities in our research. Our objective was to unravel the central themes and related topics discerned by our female co-researchers. After sharing and re-listening to the stories, we individually took time to reflect on our newfound insights, fostering a deeper understanding through introspection. Our research journey involved the ongoing process of listening and reflective learning, resulting in the development of main themes and sub-themes (see Figure 2). The primary themes encompassed the women's knowledge and perspectives, the impact of floods from the women's viewpoint, the roles women played during floods, and, finally, the solutions proposed by the women of the wetland.

Feminist Community-led Perspective of Disaster and Adaptation			
Women's Perspective on Disaster	Impact of the flood-Women point of view	Women's Role	Solutions

• Nature in the past • Climate Change	• Damage to Housing • Health • Food crisis	• How they participate • Barriers and what needed to be done	• Growing awareness of society • Role of the government • Role of the researchers

Figure 2: Main Themes and Sub-themes

Women's Perspectives on Nature, Disaster, and Climate Change

Within the wetlands, the women possess a profound understanding of nature. When asked about their perspectives on nature, one woman from the Muslim community, expressed, "We exist because of nature; it sustains us. While we endure the consequences of human activities impacting nature, we believe God created us and nature for the animal kingdom." Their awareness extends to the significance and various aspects of the natural world. This same woman, a primary-school teacher, shared her thoughts on disasters, stating, "I perceive it as the unusual behaviour of nature. We experience droughts, heavy rainfall, floods, and crop destruction." While they may not provide a precise definition of disasters, they recognize that nature occasionally behaves erratically, leading to destructive changes.

The women residing in the wetlands have observed a transformation in Bangladesh's climate over the past 20 to 30 years. They have acknowledged climate change, with one woman from the minority Hindu community remarking,

"Bangladesh used to have six seasons, but now we only experience two. I gauge climate change based on this transformation. The weather in Bangladesh has become highly unpredictable." Consequently, these wetland inhabitants believe that climate change is underway, leading to a considerable alteration in the local weather patterns. When inquired about the disparities in weather compared to the past, another woman from the community noted, "I believe the weather has indeed changed. Rain patterns have shifted, with heavy rainfall occurring at unexpected times. Winters now resemble what used to be a typical summer season, and the monsoon arrives either too early or too late, adversely affecting our crops." The women in the wetlands, from all the communities, possess a commendable level of knowledge about nature, disasters, and climate change, an asset for their community.

Women's Perspectives on Flood Disaster Impacts

In the wetlands, the people suffered greatly because of the flood, losing their houses, animals, and belongings. Also, their health was impacted, and they faced a food crisis during the massive flood. This section discusses the impact of the 2022 flood from the viewpoint of the women of the wetland.

Damage to Housing

In this wetland area, the flood in 2022 was of such immense magnitude that it forced people to abandon their homes. One woman from the minority Hindu community recounted her experience, saying, "My house was destroyed. My elder son attempted to repair it during the flood, but the water washed away the roofing. We lacked the means to restore it." The residents in this region are facing significant economic hardship, making it exceedingly challenging for them to repair their homes after the flood. Their houses hold immense value and are, in many cases, the only possessions they have. These homes carry great sentimental importance. When asked how people coped with living through the flood, another woman from the minority Hindu community explained, "Those fortunate enough to have relatives with sturdier, elevated buildings moved in with them." Relatives with more secure accommodations played a pivotal role in supporting the flood-affected individuals during these trying times. However, for those without well-off relatives, the hardships during the flood were severe, as they had nowhere to seek refuge, and the

rising waters swept away their belongings. Another woman from the minority Hindu community further noted, "Livestock were perishing, and herders faced a difficult choice between saving themselves or their animals. Essential documents and valuable possessions were also lost to the floodwaters." The general populace in the wetlands already grapples with economic challenges, and the loss of everything in the flood exacerbated their hardships, making life even more distressing. Losing their identity documents was akin to losing their very identity.

Health Impacts

For the women living in the wetlands, the flood struck suddenly and lasted for a period of three to four days. Its consequences were profound. The flood brought about substantial suffering, particularly in terms of health. A woman from the minority Hindu community emphasized, "Pregnant women bore the brunt, and it had a detrimental effect on their unborn children." During the flood, the transportation system broke down, hindering people's ability to reach hospitals. This lack of access to medical care was particularly detrimental to children and expectant mothers. Another woman from the minority Hindu community further explained, "In case of emergencies, people were unable to reach hospitals. During the last flood, the water level rose to such an extreme that even boats could not navigate."

The adverse effects of the flood were not limited to physical health; the mental well-being of the community was also deeply impacted. A woman from the Muslim community observed, "I witnessed people becoming despondent. Concerns about the safety of family members and relatives weighed heavily on their minds, aggravated by the non-functional mobile network. People experienced anxiety as they had lost everything in the flood." It is evident that the adverse mental health conditions had repercussions on their physical well-being.

Food Crisis

As per the accounts of the women living in the wetlands, they faced significant challenges in maintaining proper nutrition during the extensive flood. Typically, they would gather some dry food supplies to prepare for disasters, but these reserves became inaccessible during the flood. A woman from the Muslim community explained the situation, stating, "Most of the food they had collected was washed away during the flood." Consequently, they struggled to obtain adequate nourishment for an extended period, leading to malnutrition. While some individuals may have had access to food, they were still unable to consume it. Another woman from the Muslim community shared her experience, saying, "The flood swept away my daughter's cooking utensils, and we endured considerable hardship, unable to prepare and eat food." Initially, many people attempted to endure the flood within their homes, but as conditions became increasingly unbearable, they sought refuge in shelters. The woman recounted, "We eventually sought refuge in a shelter where we had access to some food." The shelter provided a source of sustenance during this challenging time.

Our research demonstrates that women's perspectives on flood disaster impacts, especially concerning health and food crises, reveal the disproportionate burdens they bear during such calamities, highlighting their vulnerability to physical and mental health challenges as well as nutrition deficiencies among family members. These perspectives underscore the urgent need for inclusive disaster management strategies that prioritize the well-being of women in the affected communities.

Roles of Local Women During the Disaster

Participation of the Women

During the flood, the wetlands lacked adequate shelters for the affected population. However, a college principal took

it upon himself to transform his college into a shelter, where people from nearby villages sought refuge for over a month. The principal, supported by the youth and his wife, managed the shelter. The wife of the principal, shared their efforts, saying, "We endeavoured to assist the flood victims. My husband purchased puffed rice, candles, saline, and other essentials." The shelter became a dependable resource for the affected individuals, although there were some distressing incidents. She recounted one such occurrence, saying, "A younger brother of one of my students passed away. We were unable to provide a proper burial, so his relatives resorted to floating the deceased body." She expressed her sorrow over her inability to address the situation, as she would have gladly assisted if she had been able. She actively supported the women in the shelter by providing food, healthcare, engaging in discussions on various topics, and caring for the children. She mentioned, "We had individuals for maintaining the shelter's cleanliness and a generator for electricity to ensure the safety of the women. Generous individuals sent relief supplies, cooked meals, and medicines." The Muslim women visited the shelter twice daily to monitor its operations and ascertain if the people required any additional assistance. The schoolteacher who is also the wife of the principal acquired grew leadership abilities during the flood. Other women (Muslim teenage daughters) also helped her to manage the overall system of the temporary shelter in the college. The women in the shelter understood that they have the power to help one another.

Minority Hindu women expressed complete loss in relation to housing, cooking, and even their identity while the Muslim women described their roles watching the suffering. Though people from every community suffered, minorities suffered a great deal. One of our story tellers stated that ''the mainstream community is not willing to help the minority community as they used to do before. The people who help them, they will help them due to the politics of vote.'' Minority Hindu women did not directly state they were discriminated against but did point out they were more "disadvantaged" than Muslim women as they did not have access to the same resources during the flood and suffered more acutely than Muslim women after the flood. One of the Hindu women said, ''In the mainstream community, if one person was affected, his rich neighbors and relatives would help him. Hindu people could not build their house and they are still suffering. They have survived by their own initiatives, by their own efforts, by their own hard work.'' These findings evidence that investments in Bangladesh's water infrastructure (Barbour et al. 2022; Cohen et al. 2022) have not alleviated the vulnerability of women, especially minority Hindu women who are often landless (Paprocki and Cons 2014).

We found that Muslim women played active roles during the 2022 flood. They helped impacted people, despite major obstacles and even in patriarchal settings where women's contributions are frequently underestimated. These findings question conventional gender roles and emphasize women's ability to lead during emergencies. While some Muslim women found agency and an ability to engage in social work during the disaster (a marked change from their inability to do so pre- disaster), many minority women were not able to engage in social work activities in the shelter, confirming existing literature that shows that Bangladesh disaster assistance fails to benefit the poor (Dewan 2021).

The minority Indigenous and Hindu women could not find any hope in their situation and therefore could not find the courage to assist others. They do not have the ability or financial backup needed to exercise power. Moreover, the minority communities lost everything in the flood. The minority communities in the wetlands do not have resilient systems such as shelters, disaster tracking systems, access to relief, or any kind of community-based disaster service (Datta, Kairy and Hurlbert 2024).

Barriers and Solutions

In Bangladesh's major cities, women engage in various activities, including income-generating pursuits, social work, and cultural endeavours. However, the situation differs significantly in rural areas, particularly in the wetlands. The primary-school teacher cited above emphasized this, stating, "Women in rural areas often find it challenging to participate in social work." This highlights the relatively limited involvement and awareness of social responsibilities among women in the rural areas, a situation that they stated leaves them dissatisfied and in despair. Women in rural settings frequently adhere to the directives of their male counterparts, and patriarchal dynamics continue to influence

these regions, including the wetlands. Nonetheless, those women who have been involved in various activities find it deeply inspiring. A woman from the Muslim community expressed, "Sometimes, I feel disheartened that I cannot contribute to society as men do. During the flood, I made a sincere effort to serve, and I found it gratifying. We cannot bring about change while confined to our homes." She reiterated that women need to step outside their homes to make a difference. She also remarked, "These circumstances must change. If a man can serve society, why can't a woman? This flood altered my perspective, and I believe that women can also make valuable contributions during disasters." It is important to note that the permission for women to contribute during the major flood was granted due to the crisis. In the absence of such an extreme event, the men might not have readily allowed women to assist the affected people. We suggest that this deep-seated mindset needs to evolve for the betterment of society.

Suggested Community-based Women-led Solutions

In this section, we delve into the solutions for the issues described in this article, informed by the insights of the women in the wetlands. Three key themes emerged from our discussions with these women: growing awareness of women's role in society, the role of the government, and the role of researchers.

Growing Awareness and Women's Engagement

Growing awareness of women's role in the community is fundamental for addressing the climatic challenges in the wetlands. The women stressed the importance of early response and preparedness. A woman from the Muslim community highlighted the delayed response from the local authorities due to logistical challenges during the initial stages of the disaster. We suggest that, to enhance preparedness, people must be proactive and willing to evacuate, when necessary, rather than hesitating to leave their homes. A woman from the minority Hindu community noted that those who didn't relocate to shelters did not receive relief. To empower the community, particularly women, education and awareness about disaster response and the significance of collective support are imperative. Women in the wetlands face limitations to engaging in social and voluntary activities; this norm needs to change. Education on disaster response and fostering a mindset of mutual assistance can facilitate involvement of women outside the home.

Our research underscores the common scenario in the wetlands where immediate disaster response is lacking, hindering rescue, treatment, and relief distribution activities. It suggests that women-led perspectives may save a great deal of time and prevent mistakes if impacted women could connect with and learn from the experiences of other women who have dealt with disaster-related issues. This urge for women-led disaster management is supported by studies that show women are deeply connected to their ecosystem and possess valuable knowledge for effective disaster adaptation (Aziz et al. 2021; Sarker and Uddin 2011; Van et al. 2014). While augmenting their role in prevention and planning, a disaster may also provide a window of opportunity for women to advance their role in the community. Gokhale (2008) argues that opportunities to lessen women's marginalization emerge early after disasters because the chaos that follows momentarily upends and weakens male-dominated family structures and social control norms. Therefore, recognizing the central role of women in disaster management ensures a more comprehensive and inclusive approach, tapping into diverse perspectives and harnessing the strengths of local communities for sustainable adaptations in the vulnerable South Asian wetlands (Deb and Haque 2011; Shi 2011).

The women's perspectives on improving disaster resilience informed our recommendations to raise awareness and increase women's engagement in government and academia. These perspectives highlight the need for women-led community strategies. Best practices in disaster risk reduction must be aligned with their education and include proactive planning for disasters and enhanced infrastructure. Furthermore, the women's request that scholars concentrate on workable, regional solutions emphasizes how critical it is to close the gap between scholarly research and community needs. A more comprehensive and successful framework for disaster management may be created by integrating women's capacity for leadership and lived experiences into practice and policy.

Role of the Local Governments

Policymakers must increase public awareness regarding the value of wetlands and ensure stakeholder involvement in wetland management to safeguard human well-being and livelihoods. The schoolteacher emphasized the need for individual shelters during floods, controlled canal construction, and planned infrastructure development. Strengthening national legal and policy frameworks for wetland conservation, as part of Bangladesh's National Adaptation Plan (NAP), is a critical and urgent task. A woman from the Muslim community suggested that educational institutions such as schools and colleges can be used as shelters during floods. Furthermore, she highlighted the importance of constructing houses at safer elevations, effective canal management, and well-planned infrastructure development to mitigate flood risks.

The Role of Researchers

According to the women, researchers and experts play a pivotal role in transforming the lives of Indigenous communities. Women from both communities emphasized that it is important for researchers to focus on adaptation and awareness-building programs. Researchers can contribute by incorporating practical knowledge into curricula, moving beyond theoretical teachings. By conducting studies on the wetlands, researchers can identify practical solutions and disseminate this knowledge to the community. One of the women further emphasized the need for practical knowledge, including pre-, during-, and post-flood measures, as well as making homes flood-resistant. Developing life skills and practical know-how is essential for the community to effectively cope with disasters. In summary, addressing the challenges faced by the wetland communities requires a multifaceted approach that involves raising awareness in society, policy changes and increased government involvement, and active contributions from researchers and specialists to empower these communities to adapt and respond effectively to natural disasters such as floods.

Conclusion

The findings of our research shed light on the insights and life experiences of the women who live in the wetlands of Bangladesh, especially as they relate to overcoming the difficulties caused by natural catastrophes such as floods. In addition to emphasizing women's distinctive contributions to comprehending disaster resilience from a feminist community-led viewpoint, this discussion places the women's insights within the body of existing literature. Wetlands in Bangladesh are highly susceptible to a range of natural calamities, including frequent floods during the monsoon season, lightning strikes, and droughts. These environmental challenges, poverty, food and water shortages, and the destruction of homes, severely impact the inhabitants' health and well-being. These impacts are expected to worsen with climate change. In this article, we explore the knowledge of women in these wetlands regarding climate change, the effects of floods, and the roles of women during flooding. We also propose solutions that are informed by our conversations with these women. The women of wetlands in Bangladesh have a deep connection to nature and are aware of the impact of climate change and the changes in Bangladesh's seasons on their lives. Previous research has shown that all women, Muslim and minority Hindu, face significant challenges and lack of agency which is a result of colonial powers (Dewan and Nustad 2023). During flood disasters, women face multiple challenges including housing destruction, health crisis, and food insecurity and these impacts align with global studies on gendered disaster experiences and highlight women's vulnerability due to pre-existing inequalities (Dewan et al. 2014). We suggest that structural inequalities exacerbate the adverse effects of disasters. Patriarchal systems and cultural norms frequently restrict women's capacity to participate outside of dire circumstances. Promoting gender-inclusive disaster resilience requires addressing these obstacles.

Decolonial intervention involves reimagining power, knowledge, and relationships to honour the diverse experiences of colonized communities. A feminist community-led approach, rooted in equity, care, and intersectionality, shifts focus from institutional solutions to grassroot efforts, prioritizing the voices and agency of women, Indigenous communities, and marginalized groups. Our research emphasizes the importance of women's engagement and leadership for gender equality. There is a need for women-led community-building initiatives that include both men and women, as individuals often work cooperatively with family members in the wetlands. Previous studies also found the gender engagement crucial in disaster adaptations in South Asia, particularly in Bangladesh (Alam and Rahaman 2019; Yadav and Lal 2018). As found in previous studies (Resurrección et al. 2019; Van Koppen 2017), women are

primary caretakers and foster resilience and preparedness against environmental challenges like floods and cyclones. Recognizing and promoting women-led community building is essential in these regions.

Our research also suggests that women-led disaster management and leadership is important for decolonization. In the wetlands women use their traditional knowledge to devise adaptive strategies to face disasters. Their leadership is holistic, and it is important for timely disaster response. Similarly, previous literature found that women-led initiatives foster community solidarity and contribute to the resilience of vulnerable regions, recognizing and supporting their vital roles in resource management, agriculture, and community well-being (Choudhury, Haque, and Habib 2018; Karistie et al. 2023; Khan and Haque 2010). Crosweller and Tschakert (2020) recommend that governments incorporate strategies to address the socio-economic causes of vulnerability, inequality, and injustice directly into resilience policy frameworks. Augmenting the capacity and role of the minority Hindu community will be important.

Implementing women-led flood crisis response in the wetlands of Bangladesh through a decolonial framework could change the established power system. The future holds promising prospects for integrating feminist community-led perspectives in disaster adaptations in South Asia and globally. As awareness grows regarding the multifaceted impacts of disasters, there is a growing acknowledgment of the need for more inclusive and gender-sensitive approaches to resilience-building. We hope our feminist framework will become integral in shaping policies, interventions, and community-led initiatives, ensuring that the unique vulnerabilities and strengths of diverse populations, particularly women, are considered. By centering the voices and experiences of women, these perspectives aim to foster more equitable and sustainable adaptations that address the root causes of gender-based vulnerabilities.

Endnotes

1. Marginalized groups are generally considered to have limited self-representation. They are consistently ignored by powerful actors and are subject to neglect, bias, discrimination, and mistreatment even when they make a meaningful social contribution (Chowdhury 2021).

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Uncertainty and Other Forms of Hope: An Environmental Pedagogy

by Tanis MacDonald

Abstract: It's axiomatic to declare that an environmental pedagogy, especially for women, queer folks, BIPOC people, assault survivors, and anyone who identifies as disabled or vulnerable, is vital to making space for ourselves geographically and psychologically in our workplaces and neighbourhoods. It is equally necessary politically at this stage of late capitalism where the spiked club of use-value is wielded to commodify everything, including our experiences of nature. Trust, risk, and the precarious present have been drawn sharply into pedagogical focus in recent years, exacerbated in the classroom and elsewhere by students' anxieties about the future that manifest as a withdrawal from the uncertainties of the present moment, including—but not exclusive to—climate anxiety. This article's examination of living in that shifting "now," in classroom discussions and in writing assignments, considers the important entanglement of uncertainty and experience as they inform, or even form, hope.

Keywords: climate change; creative writing; environmental pedagogy; future; hope; nature writing; place; uncertainty

Résumé : Il va de soi qu'une pédagogie axée sur l'environnement, en particulier pour les femmes, les personnes queers, les personnes autochtones, noires et de couleur (PANDC), les victimes d'agressions, ainsi que toutes les personnes qui s'identifient comme handicapées ou vulnérables, est essentielle pour nous permettre de nous approprier l'espace physique et psychologique dans nos milieux de travail et quartiers. Elle est tout aussi nécessaire sur le plan politique, à ce stade du capitalisme tardif, où le gourdin à pointes de la valeur d'usage est brandi pour tout transformer en marchandise, y compris nos expériences de la nature. Ces dernières années, la confiance, le risque et l'instabilité du présent sont devenus des sujets pédagogiques centraux, exacerbés en classe et ailleurs par les inquiétudes des élèves face à l'avenir, les poussant à se replier sur eux-mêmes face aux incertitudes du moment présent, dont l'anxiété climatique. Cet article explore la façon de vivre dans ce « présent » changeant, que ce soit dans les discussions en classe ou dans les rédactions, en mettant en lumière l'importance du lien entre incertitudes et expérience, qui éclairent voire forgent l'espoir.

Mots clés : changements climatiques; écriture créative; pédagogie axée sur l'environnement; avenir; espoir; écrits sur la nature; lieu; incertitudeTBA

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How will it be
to lie in the sky
without roof or door
and wind for an eye

With cloud for shift
how will I hide?
May Swenson, "Question"

I love this poem by May Swenson, which begins with the line "Body my house" and ends with the lines above and such vulnerability. I still read it as a queer love poem and as a love poem for the self but, increasingly, I have been thinking about it as an unintentional environmental poem. How can a body—anybody's body—do the hot work of hope? What if we can't hide? Trust, risk, and the precarious present have been drawn sharply into pedagogical focus in recent years, exacerbated by students' anxieties about the future that manifest as a withdrawal from the uncertainties of the present moment, including—but not exclusive to—climate anxiety. This article's examination of living in that shifting "now," in classroom discussions and in writing assignments, can be thought of in the same breath as Swenson's question: "How will it be" to be here, and be here in hope? There are no easy answers and yet everything about teaching people from the ages of 18–25 depends on this fierce and delicate inquiry.

*

To begin in practice, come with me to a humid August day in 2023, when I led a writer's walk for the second annual Fertile Fest in Toronto, a poetry festival organized by the wonderful writer, performer, and bookseller Kirby. I titled the event "The Truth about Bodies in Motion" and in the late morning, Kirby and I test-walked the route together, passing through the verdant Alex Wilson Community Garden in downtown Toronto, then plotting a route along several blocks of Graffiti Alley and back to the Garden. My goal for the walk was to suggest to the assembled writers that presence and rest would be emphasized as much as observation with optional—very optional—writing prompts. I had just read Tricia Hersey's *Rest is Resistance* (2022) and on the strength of Hersey's discussion of the power of dreaming, I suggested to the group who assembled that it was great to get inspired on a walk, but it may be just as important *not* to write, to let the slow pace and the sensual stimuli assist them in resting their thoughts. Hersey notes that resting in public is radical—for women in particular, and for women of colour especially. It shows that we dare to *not* do, that we are resisting the push to constant productivity. I'll add my own observation to Hersey's: often women and gender-fluid folks busy ourselves in public because appearing to rest makes us vulnerable. If we are reading or scrolling or taking pictures or making notes, we are less likely to attract unwanted attention, to be targeted.

As I spoke about these ideas, a few of the younger writers were taking notes and a few of the older writers looked a bit tight-lipped. Where were the writing exercises?

The garden was lush and the alley's art was vibrant. On our return to the Community Garden, I caught myself leaning too much on sight, partly from habit and partly because of the temptation supplied by the spectacular oranges and blues of the alley art. In the Garden, I closed my eyes and reached into the filament-like leaves of an asparagus fern. This fern was abundant in one of the garden plots and, as it touched my fingers and the backs of my hands, I compared the sensation to—what? Falling water? Gecko feet? The longer I stood in downtown Toronto with my eyes closed, the more I was flouting safety concerns. Even as I tried to honour the feel of the plant's fine wisps on the skin of my hands and wrists, I remembered the men who had been drinking in the park but left (or had they?) when my group of women and queer folks drifted in. I stubbornly kept my eyes closed and let the fern tickle me. When I opened my eyes, a young queer person was standing next to me, looking at another plant. Wanting to share the tactile gift of the asparagus plant, I said to them, "Hey, close your eyes" and, when they did, I guided their hands to the

asparagus fern. The two of us stood quietly as they felt the fern's strange prickle, its green hairiness, and its almost reptilian texture. After a minute, they opened their eyes and said, "When you said *close your eyes*, I had no idea what you were going to do." I hadn't thought of that, even though their comment mirrored what I had been thinking just a few minutes before: was it safe to close our eyes in a place that could be dangerous? But they trusted me and I was grateful to be trusted, grateful that they made themselves vulnerable just because I asked and that I could share the asparagus fern with them.

It's axiomatic to declare that an environmental pedagogy, especially for women, queer folks, BIPOC people, assault survivors, and anyone who identifies as disabled or vulnerable, is vital to making space for ourselves geographically and psychologically in our workplaces and neighbourhoods. It is equally necessary politically at this stage of late capitalism where the spiked club of use-value is wielded to commodify everything, including our experiences of nature.

As with the Fertile Fest walk, my classrooms are full of young cis women and gender-fluid people, BIPOC students and disabled students, people for whom the occupation of space is always highly negotiated, wild and semi-wild spaces even more so. I can't help but think of what the poet and community worker Leanne Charette, who uses a wheelchair, said at the launch of the "Moving on Land" issue of *The Goose* during the conference for the Association of Literature for Environment and Culture in Canada in June 2024: "Even when I think I don't want nature, nature wants me." Charette articulated something I've been considering as I set writing assignments in both academic and creative writing courses, assignments in which I ask the students to enter into the nearly impossible act of being here.

Entangled Disengagement: The Work of Being Here

Being here is hard work. I try it every day and succeed only intermittently.

Additionally, consciousness in public is painful for a wide variety of historical and contemporary reasons. For example, Tricia Hersey is clear that her work in *Rest is Resistance* is rooted in Black liberation theology. If non-Black people wish to work with her ideas, they must first acknowledge and think deeply about the role of white supremacy in denying Black people life-sustaining rest and the space to dream. Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* offers another look at a resonant historical consciousness—and its societal erasure—that are everyday experiences for Black people:

> Living in the wake means living the history and present of terror, from slavery to the present, as the ground of our everyday Black existence; living the historically and geographically dis/continuous but always present and endlessly reinvigorated brutality in, and on, our bodies while even as that terror is visited on our bodies the realities of that terror are erased. (Sharpe 2016, 15)

Something similar, but different, could be said of Indigenous experience: the act of being fully conscious on stolen land in a country that has sanctioned violence against Indigenous bodies for centuries is no easy prospect and never free of biopolitical concerns.

These concerns, and many others, appear in the classroom as part of students' daily struggles. My students' faces show the effort it takes to engage with other people, to respond to the environment around them, to show up mentally and emotionally, to give attention to the books we are reading and the ideas we are discussing, and to lavish their attention on their own words on a page or words they speak in class. For many students, disengagement does not have the flavour of rebellion, that blend of defiance or refusal or judgement that is so familiar to me as a GenXer. They are disengaged not because a university class is irrelevant but because nothing at all seems real or important or graspable, concrete, malleable, achievable, real. They are disinclined to believe in the present. They are, in Scott Hamilton's terms, deeply involved with "ontological insecurity": uncertain in their ability or, indeed, the necessity to be here (Hamilton 2017, 279).

Hamilton parses the concept of entanglement in the Anthropocene—that is, that humans are inevitably entangled with beings and systems—to challenge the desired outcome of an entanglement that puts human beings at the forefront. Noting that human survival has long been thought to be the primary goal, Hamilton suggests something quite different. In his formulation, the human *refusal* to entangle is the true marker of the Anthropocene: "A profound separation or *dis*-entanglement of humanity from nature…replaces what was once the primary and objective concern of security—i.e., survival, or avoiding death—with *anthropos*, the human being, as a new geological and spatiotemporal force to be problematized and secured in both the present and the future" (Hamilton 2017, 579). Published in 2017, Hamilton's article seems prescient about the kinds of separations that were about to explode into public life: the division between right-wing and leftist politics globally; the rise in misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia; and the isolation of COVID-19 restrictions, including the schism between those who could afford to isolate and those who could not, minimum-wage and service workers and the underhoused, especially. Further, while Hamilton notes the movement from prioritizing survival as the primary concern of security to the need to secure a future, he gestures to something arresting: "With the catastrophic prognoses for the Anthropocene's future making humanity's temporal, ontological, and epistemological essence uncertain, a paradox forms: an existential discontinuity, in which humanity must secure itself in the future *from* itself in the present" (Hamilton 2017, 280). Instead of securing ourselves from nature and its un/controllable forces, Hamilton identifies the challenge of the Anthropocene as "securing ourselves *from* ourselves" (emphasis in original).

Bleak as this may seem, Hamilton's paradox describes—eerily—what I've been seeing in the classroom: students who act out their uncertainty by uncoupling acts from aims, presence from learning, and sometimes, most disturbingly, the present from the future. In securing a future for themselves, some students devalue their present. They are not here. They are in the future. "Here" is an inconvenience that will soon be over. I can practically hear them thinking, "Good riddance."

From my perspective, this is not about the erosion of ability. Ableness and willingness meet somewhere in every students' (and every prof's!) mish-mash of family obligations, anxieties, achievements, hopes, encounters with rules and regulations, encounters with other people, and the professor's sometimes-distracted eye on how and why performance in a course at a particular time works well for some students and less well for others. With the advent of remote teaching, "here" didn't always mean a designated physical space. With the return to in-person teaching and with the advent of Generative AI, students' disbelief in the necessity of being "here" has grown. They understand fully that completing the course means a credit, means part of a degree, and may eventually mean a job. They want to secure the future for themselves but they are unconvinced that this will be accomplished by investing in the present. Hamilton's paradox proves true; they are divesting from the present in order to secure the future.

For students and allies setting up anti-war, anti-genocide, and pro-peace occupation camps on campus, this makes perfect sense. They are refusing the present in which universities and other corporations invest in war-making machinery and so they demand divestment from those blood-soaked practices in order to secure the future. But what of the student who shows up to class regularly but is consistently disengaged, staring out the window, scrolling on their phone, and not taking in any ideas, and then submits very weak material and—here's the important part—is thoroughly mystified by their lacklustre grade? Uncertainty in the necessity of the present would seem to kneecap the future rather than secure it.

But there's hope. My reading of Hamilton's paradox suggests a way to unlock the Escher-like tiles of this rickety Mobius strip of existential discontinuity in which we preserve ourselves in the future by protecting ourselves from the present. Just as it's hard to be engaged and fully present all the time, it's equally hard to remain disengaged 24/7. That's the pain I see on student's faces: fear of being drawn in, to committing to something, to letting in the world, despite their dedication to the idea that nothing matters. They wonder if being here will be painful and if the pain will be worth it. These are good matters about which to wonder; I often wonder about them myself.

I appreciate Sarah Jaquette Ray's discussion of her "failed experiment" in imagining the future, as she describes early in *A Field Guide to Climate Anxiety*, in part because I had a similar experience in asking students to think about the

past. Ray asks her students to do an exercise in which they would have a chance to visualize their ultimate climate-changed future and then identify the changes that they could break down into doable steps. Ray thought the exercise would, like Hersey's dreaming, be "empowering…free[ing] them from the immobilization we all feel in the face of a problem as enormous and intractable as climate change. But it bombed…. When I asked them about their ideal future state, I heard crickets" (Ray 2020, 2). My experience was similar. Following Rebecca Solnit's example in her foreword to the 2016 edition of *Hope in The Dark*, I asked students to name, as Solnit did, recent historical examples of things that had changed for the better. Solnit listed, among other things, the Civil Rights movement, the defeat of a violent regime in East Timor, and marriage equality. Since few of Solnit's examples were Canadian, I asked my students to list some changes they had witnessed in Canada. Again, crickets.

This was in no way the students' fault but rather a beam in my own eye. Young people who were in high school and the first years of university during COVID restrictions, young people who had been children when President 45 began loudly spewing hate speech, were unpracticed in finding positive change. They were, some told me, protected from bad news by their parents who wished to allow them to be kids instead of small prematurely-worried adults. We think of hope as a youthful predisposition, but I'm not so sure that's true. Older people find hope in seeing the way constant flux can favour change for the better. Small wonder then that my students were attempting to negotiate themselves into the future without setting foot in the present. Ray is right when she notes that nothing would happen—climate-improvement wise or pedagogically—without concerted attempts on the behalf of instructors to introduce students to a "politics of desire" and ways of "politicizing your angst" (Ray 2020, 7). And to do this, we all need to practice being on our "own interior terrain" (Ray 2020, 14).

Here: Making Place, Making Hope?

The emphasis on knowing one's own interior terrain is an old idea made urgent in our times. The craving not to be present is as potent in its own way as the craving to be present. This is a problem older than Thoreau's injunction in *Walden* to "simplify, simplify" and to choose to "live deliberately" but let's begin there. Thoreau was in his late twenties during his years at Walden Pond; his beloved brother John had died when Thoreau himself was twenty-four. As a young and grieving man, he wanted to relearn presence and humanity through semi-isolation, and to remember his deceased brother in part by slowing down his daily existence via living in a hunter's hut by Walden Pond in the back of the Thoreaus' family property. Thoreau's youth makes him more like my students than myself but, just as his simplification meant more presence, their simplification manifests as less presence, even disembodiment: to be in their bodies less, to disbelieve in the significance of attention as learning, in time as a concentration of moments, and in place as a potential personal signifier. These are all constructs which the transcendentalist Thoreau manifestly pursued.

Students can get anxious or even angry at the notion of attachment. Many years ago, I taught a student who yelped, as though his back was against the wall, "You can't make me write about my feelings!" He was right: I could not. Nor did I particularly want him to. All I could do was assure him that writing about one's feelings was not the assignment, even in (or to be perfectly frank, especially in) a course in creative writing. That student, now long graduated with a doctorate, may also have been saying *You can't make me act like anything matters*. *You can't make me like things*. *You can't make me present*.

Like my reply to my "no-feelings" student, I have to acknowledge that I indeed can't make anyone do any of those things. But unlike my reply to that first student, I now say to students in more recent courses, "In this case, being present—or making a genuine attempt to be—is going to be part of the actual assignment."

In their textbook *Writing True: The Art and Craft of Creative Nonfiction*, editors Sondra Perl and Mimi Schwartz describe an "essay of place" that emphasizes landscape as a character and in which "the writer's presence is felt, showing readers what is special" (2014, 275). Perl and Schwartz have chosen their sample essays well, demonstrating that an essay of place could take a variety of perspectives: discovering a new place, asserting a cultural importance of a place,

or feeling alienated from a place. But even with the good examples, I knew my students would need assistance. This pedagogical task—the need to urge a thoughtful process between impulse and final product—is the hot ground on which I walk. I often employ textbooks in class to assure students that I am not "making things up," that this is a real pursuit about which others have written. And *then* I make things up. That is to say, I take an idea from the book and enhance it, specifying for my students' needs. In short, I am constantly MacGyvering assignments to assure the students that I see them, including their gender and class identities and their struggles to articulate their realities. Putting a twist on standard assignments keeps me on my toes, too. We think together through the terms of the assignment and discovery is very much the point for all parties. So it was as I designed an assignment for the students to practice the skill of "being here" in a way that is personal and specific but also has a connection to creating presence on the page.

The essay of place assigned in *Writing True* begins with the writer's admonition to notice, to put oneself in a place and unpack the importance of a place via the five senses. It's clear to me that Perl and Schwartz want the significance of the place to grow from detail and then to grow larger than that. For me, via Perl and Schwartz, a big part of the assignment is daring to let yourself describe not only a place but some definition of *your* place, and muse productively about beauty and meaning and history and belonging or lack thereof as they relate to that writer's definition of place. So far, so doable.

But damn it, for me, it was a little *too* doable, too easy for students to slip from beneath the assignment's good intentions and muse about how soothing "nature" was and so commit themselves to saying almost nothing: a classic "here-but-not-here" strategy. I can hardly blame them; corporatism, capitalism, and colonialism conspire to imply that all places look the same, or if they don't then they are not worth looking at, travelling to, or paying attention to their inhabitants. Intellectually, students know that isn't true but it's hard to swim upstream against a tide of assurances that their screens—and only their screens—will show them every place worth being in. As for me, teaching essays of place has become impossible without invoking habitat loss, the manic speed of urban development, human migrations, and climate ontology: that weather is a place. I couldn't tell students to write about place without invoking Rob Nixon's "slow violence" of displacement that "refers to the loss of the land and resources" that affects Indigenous students, migrant students who have left war and poverty in their home countries, and students from farming families (Nixon 2011, 4).

Returning to my students' concerns as filtered through Hamilton's concept of securing one's future self from one's present self, what did that mean when gender identity and ability identity were added to the mix? I think of Donna Haraway (1991) shuttling between the cyborg manifesto as feminist work and her more recent research on species intercommunication as rooted in, as shaking loose from, machine-human-animal triangulation. I wonder about Robin Wall Kimmerer's description of her student who "becomes one with her inner muskrat,"plunging into a marsh to gather cattails in the "Sitting in a Circle" chapter of *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013, 287). I wonder about Cheryl Strayed's disquieting encounter with rapey trail walkers in *Wild* (2012) and the recent social media controversy over whether a woman in the woods felt more comfortable encountering a strange man or a bear. (And because I'm a Canadian literature specialist, I think of Marian Engel's 1976 novel *Bear*.) Thinking through and with all these women—scientists and hippies and feminists and Indigenous mothers—brings me to a conclusion that sometimes the most feminist thing I can do is go for a walk and honour everyone I see on the way who is vulnerable. Our uncertainty is our present and there is every reason to believe it will be our future.

Gendered Uncertainty and Other Forms of Hope

Back in the classroom, I saw a fight brewing about presence: presence as a value, as a methodology, and as something beyond toxic optimism of insisting the students "love nature." Some students were suspicious that I was trying to force appreciation on them, so I spoke with them about a climate change spin on Berlant's "cruel optimism" in which they would stand in the very space that they wanted to save with no hope of saving it or Berlant's further term "stupid optimism" (which I think they wanted to ascribe to me), a disbelief that the situation is dire, that all one needs to do is work within the system to find joy. That was not the goal, I assured them. They might feel those feelings—or

not—but I was more interested in the role of a sensation (part intellectual, part affective) that nearly all of them were experiencing: uncertainty. Far from being something that the future cannot abide, uncertainty is the substance of the future. As Timothy Morton puts it in "Beginning after the End," his introduction to *Dark Ecology*: "The future is unthinkable yet here we are, thinking it…. Art is thought from the future. Thought we cannot explicitly think at present. Thought we may not think or speak at all" (Morton 2016, 2).

To walk in semi-wild spaces, you have to be open to the element of surprise, to encounters with birds and animals and plant life that you haven't anticipated. To strangenesses and a lack of understanding. Those are encounters with beauty and sometimes death or woundedness, sometimes shock or fear, sometimes desperation. But all of that is connection. Risking engagement means both liking and not liking things: the drunk men and the asparagus fern. You also have to choose to like some things enough so that you will notice when they are no longer there because of the season, because of climate change, because of entropic decay and death. Violence towards our genders has long made us uncertain in both urban and wild spaces, and I am well aware of the irony inherent in asking students to engage with "thought we cannot explicitly think at present" á la Morton. Rebecca Solnit, in *Hope in the Dark*, suggests something similar, that "hope is not a door, but the sense that there might be a door at some point, some way out of the problems of the present moment even before that way is found and followed" (Solnit 2016, 22). As many wrinkled brows as there were in the classroom, others brightened at the notion of uncertainty as the cusp of knowledge.

What if our present-future paradox is our strength? "Security," forever a gendered issue, is at the core of these questions and its very definition – the feeling and provable reality that one is safe – has long been nigh unto impossible for historically oppressed members of the population. Who among us expects complete safety, a world wherein we are in charge all the time? This is different from craving or even working for such a thing. I well remember women's rights advocate and author Julie S. Lalonde noting in an online workshop on bystander intervention that she led in the spring of 2023 for the anti-harrassment organization Right to Be, "I know a world without sexual harassment is possible because my brother currently lives in it." Lalonde's point is hopeful in some of the ways that Solnit suggests but when I think about sending my students out to experience public space, I have to acknowledge that "security" in the Anthropocene has never been in the equation for the vulnerable and that security is something that only some people can afford. The rest of us have been figuring our way through the eminently dangerous world all along. Isn't the art of thinking the future in the grasp of every non-white, non-cis, or female person who reads of terrible times to come and thinks, "Hhmmmph, more of the same"?

On the Fertile Fest walk, I had delivered a blunt enough directive—"Hey, close your eyes"—but it still gave my walking companion some choice. They could ask why; they could say no and walk away; they could laugh and divert the comment; they could pretend I was talking to someone else. They and I were already engaged together in a dynamic of uncertainty, one in which I led them on a route, urged rest, did not demand productivity, and perhaps most importantly, demonstrated my own practice by doing all these things myself. They and I had solidarity as physically vulnerable people in a potentially hostile and dangerous atmosphere. They and I were in a comfort zone created by a group of like-minded people scattered around us. We were in a queer-positive feminist space, created by our host Kirby, the location and history of the Alex Wilson Community Garden as a space built to honour the legacy of a gay man who was a writer and a gardener, and the other walkers. All of that added up to some kind of temporary safety with the other walker's own trust and their generosity in extending that trust to me. How, then, could I support the students in being generous with themselves? In thinking towards the potential power of uncertainty?

With some of this in mind, I asked my students to choose a place, one that they are currently in or had been to recently, that they might think of a "homeplace" that could be well-researched, richly re-imagined, and rendered in a personal essay that unpacked the meanings, dimensions, pleasures, problems, and/or politics of "place." What is it to be here? I noted on the assignment sheet: "'Here' can be either the ground upon which you stand right now, or your homeplace as you define it, but it should be a definite geographical place, richly imagined and rendered. 'History' is your lived experience of a place with an emphasis on your (and possibly your family's) place in the political and cultural histories of the place you choose." Students could begin with a description of land: its shapes, flora and fauna, buildings, roads, parks, forests, suburbs, etc. In other words, they could include any information accessible via a walk

through the place and then enriched by research. If students wished to "re-visit" a past—or geographically distant—homeplace, they could get there virtually via films or videos, archival photos, cooking and eating cultural foods, etc. They could start with a family story (the older, the better) or begin with a locally famous event. They could work in opposition, correcting false assumptions about their homeplace or pinpointing discomforts brought on by the homeplace. I asked them to consolidate some of the affective aspects by digging into the ripples of history, especially the histories of people who shaped the place: Indigenous people; settler folks; waves of migrancy, industry, farming, urban planning, local fauna as impacts on a place.

My admittedly over-prepared worksheets notwithstanding, some students hesitated, asking questions that were thinly-veiled negotiations about the assignment. Could they write about a place they had never been? (Nope.) Could they write about Narnia or Hogwarts or Middle Earth, worlds that they argued they knew the best? (No, no, and no). With each question, it became clear that I had pressed my finger on a bruise that I didn't know existed. Everyone, including me, was taken aback by the pain.

The more they talked, the more I could see that their feelings of disconnection from place were not so much resistance as they were mystification. What did I really mean by "here"? What was the "right" here, the one I wanted them to experience? How could they do that? How could they protect themselves from the threat of being present? That's a good question: the act of detailed observation, of trying hard to be here, can be very painful, especially to those who have been told that they do not belong. But unlocking the ability to observe is a superpower. At the same time, I was asking them to do something that more than a few of them found offensive; I was asking for a sustained act of consciousness and uncertainty.

This has never been a perfect assignment; I still tinker with it. Some students wrote what they thought I wanted: a life-is-beautiful treatise. Others wrote about the history of a place without including themselves as inheritors of that history. While this very well could be a component of their relative youth, many struggled to define what was "allowed" to be space and story and what was not. What about places that are not considered places? Many students have been told by various authorities that their homeplaces are non-places, not important, not historical, not worth examining: a place that is not one.

But there have been some great moments too. One student wrote an essay about her hometown as shaped by a killing of a young woman ten years previously, and her own experience growing up female within the shifts and splits of living in that community. More than one Indigenous student wrote about the relief of returning to their communities after weeks of being at university. A student who had long thought he was of settler origin wrote about how the river he lived close to became a more complicated space for him once his father began discussing his Indigenous heritage. Another student wrote about growing up in a low-income housing complex in Markham and its unexpected pleasures.

As for whether or not we should be teaching hope in the classroom, we can only teach students to consider possibility and presence, and from there hope may emerge. As Ray notes, we must teach students (and ourselves) to be "good ancestors" to those who will follow us (Ray 2020, 14). She calls this developing the "muscle of radical imagination" (10), a phrase so apt I wish I wrote it myself. As Raymond Williams wrote decades ago in his far-seeing understanding of how working-class people resist dehumanization, "To be truly radical is to make hope possible rather than despair convincing" (Williams 1989, 75). We have a chance to discover history and connection and to defy the grimness of late-stage capitalism that strives to keep us unbalanced, disengaged, separated from our histories, our prides, our abilities, and from tapping into the joy of uncertainty as opposed to the fear of uncertainty.

May Swenson, thanks for the question.

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Appendix

EN369: Creative Writing: Nonfiction
Essay 1: Personal Essay on Place
Dr. T. MacDonald

From the syllabus: For this assignment, students will write a personal essay (see Chapter 8, Perl and Schwartz) about a place they know well (workplace, present or past home, neighbourhood, etc.) using a research component to illuminate the meaning, dimensions, pleasures, problems, and/or politics of "place."

More:
Consider the models we've been reading in class in which the authors consider place as a vital component in the personal essay, as in the examples that you have read in Perl and Schwartz's *Writing True*, and in Ariel Gordon's *Treed*. Your goal is to produce an essay of place that explores the practice of being in that place. As in the examples, it must be a definite geographical place, well-researched, richly re-imagined, and rendered.

For one example, Jericho Parms' "On Touching Ground" uses her grandparent's Texas ranch as a counterpoint to her study of art and movement, and her racial identity. Another example: Ariel Gordon's essays in *Treed* work with her local place (Winnipeg's urban forest) and also places far from her home (forested places in Banff and elsewhere).

With these models, consider the ripples of history and other aspects of place you could research. These might include research your lived experience of a place with an emphasis on your/ your family's place in it, and also histories of people who shaped the place: Indigenous people, settler folks, waves of people from global cultures, people working in industry, farming, etc. Consider too research into urban planning, local plants and animals, and historical events as they impact a local place.

A few suggestions about how to start:

5) Start with a description of the place: its flora and fauna, buildings, roads, parks, forests, suburbs, etc. If you are physically in the place, take a walk through it and see what's there.
6) If you are not physically in the place, find a way to get there virtually: YouTube, family photos, music of a time and place, etc.
7) Start with a family story: the older, the better.
8) Start with a locally famous event.
9) Work in opposition: "correct" false assumptions about that place.

Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice
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Interview

Lori Lee Oates and Sritama Chatterjee Speak with Camelia Dewan

Camelia Dewan is an environmental anthropologist who focuses on the anthropology of development. She is currently an Associate Professor of Anthropology at Uppsala University in Sweden. Dr. Dewan is the author of *Misreading the Bengal Delta: Climate Change, Development, and Livelihoods in Coastal Bangladesh* (2021; University of Washington Press).

Lori Lee Oates: Thank you so much for agreeing to do this interview. Let's start with what brought you to researching environmental justice in Bangladesh.

Camelia Dewan: I started working on development in Bangladesh in 2008. I was born and raised in Sweden but my parents are from Bangladesh. My grandmother lived with us in Sweden and practically raised me but then returned to Bangladesh. As a university student I wanted to go back to Bangladesh to see her and applied for an unpaid summer internship at BRAC Development Institute. My next work experience in Bangladesh happened after graduating from the London School of Economics with a MSc in Development Studies in 2010–11 and after a role as a Programme Officer in Sweden. I was hired as a research consultant for a one-year project where I led the qualitative survey on water governance and infrastructure in the coastal zone of Bangladesh.

Before this work, I did not know what a polder or an embankment was. It took going to Bangladesh to understand what they really are. I got interested in the work of BELA (the Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association) and their work regulating illegal and environmentally harmful practices conducted by tiger-prawn business actors in the southwest coastal zone of Bangladesh. The conflicts between shrimp farmers and rice farmers were a main theme from that qualitative survey and the second issue was how the canals and water bodies were dying due to the embankments.

For my PhD proposal, I wanted to look at land use conflicts, siltation of water bodies, and the maintenance of these embankments. At the time, the scale of climate change was quite small. It was not a big development priority, but it was emerging slowly. One of my Bangladeshi colleagues, who was internationally well connected, told me to add climate change to my proposal because that would get me funding. And he was right. It made me wonder what happened if everyone used climate change as a buzzword to get funding. I wanted to talk about siltation and political conflicts of land use. That's how I got into the terrain of environmental justice more broadly.

LLO: That's interesting because I did my PhD on 19th century British and Imperial history and the history of religion. It was hard for me to get funding to study it; I got a PhD funding, but I could never get any funding beyond that. As soon as I started looking into oil and the transition away from oil, I started getting funding.

CD: As academics, we sometimes must use masalas, I think. But it is one thing to do it for funding applications and another to reproduce that discourse in academic research. I try not to use climate as a spice in my academic writing, you know, because then I already have the funding. Why do we need to produce that discourse in academic research? I think that's something we need to push against.

Chatterjee Sritama: As a follow up to that, we tend to use climate change as a shorthand for a lot of serious environmental problems that are afflicting various regions. One of your essays that I personally appreciate is on women not being able to migrate from islands. I find this an important insight about not slotting women into either "climate victims" or "climate survivors."

You have spent so many years working in the developmental sectors. I'm curious if there are specific moments from your field work that were epiphanic in terms of bringing this shift in your thinking: from what constitutes climate change to what constitutes environmental change. How would you look at the positionality of women within that framework?

CD: That's a great question. The epiphany was the importance of matri-focal kinship relations. Because in these climate and development discourses it's always about [Bangladeshi Muslim] women being constrained by a religious, conservative, patriarchal society, and very little about their agency and ability to maintain emotional relations that sustain livelihoods. I was not trained in anthropology during my undergraduate or master's degrees and I came from a very development-studies mindset when I started my PhD. So, I thought that shrimp farming results in saltwater intrusion and that it destroys the land and people's livelihoods. I assumed there was a connection between the relationships between shrimp farming and the trafficking of women, particularly among female-headed households who are portrayed as the most vulnerable and poorest in rural Bangladesh. The privilege of doing a PhD in Anthropology is that you can change your entire research topic while doing fieldwork and reconsider what you find. I realized that these female-headed households are not so female headed, nor are they isolated entities. They are embedded in these wider kinship relations, and they have men around them.

Then when I started this research, I realized that one of the best approaches is to not assume everything is about climate change. The first translator with whom I had worked in the water governance project would ask how the environment had changed in Bangla. When you ask that broad question, the women talk about the siltation, when the embankments were constructed, and what happened afterwards in the waterlogging. They talk about the Green Revolution. In Bangladesh, this didn't happen in the '70s. In the '80s and '90s there were structural adjustment policies and the use of agrochemicals. The new seeds destroyed the soil and the earthworms.

I've not used the term environmental justice in my work but it's all about justice in a way, because it's all about these past economics and extractive modes of production. Those changed the environment in ways that negatively affected everyday rural livelihoods.

The biggest issue in terms of environmental justice is obviously the shrimp cultivation, the salinity, and the embodied and affective dimensions. It's not just that you get more money for selling shrimp. It's all the biodiversity you lose, the chores you can't do properly because there's no fresh water. I really appreciated that I could do anthropological PhD field work for a year and let my interlocutors frame their everyday livelihood problems themselves. That's how you find out various things—even a lot of things I didn't end up writing about.

The book would not have been complete without the last chapter on structural violence because it's not about a climate adaptation project. I really felt, after spending a year with these amazing people, that to not share their most pressing livelihood concerns would be unethical. So, that last chapter is for them because what do coastal vulnerabilities mean from a bottom-up perspective?

CS: I really appreciate hearing who the book was for and who you were writing about. You also mentioned that you came to your PhD in anthropological studies from a developmental studies background. What was this shift like for you? What was the training? What were the challenges? What was the potential that you saw in this work?

CD: Oh, that's such a tough one. I mean, anthropology is all about unpacking everything. One of my classmates or cohort members said, "What is development? What do you mean?" and then we went through the exercise of unpacking development. I think anthropology is a great tool for complexity and reflecting on your own positionality

and biases. It just makes you reflect critically on your own biases. I really value the fact that I did get anthropological training from one of the people in academia that I admire the most, David Mosse. His book *Cultivating Development* is what got me interested in anthropology.

CS: Yes, that's a nice segue into my next question. Who has been your inspiration? How would you locate your own work in relation to the scholars—and people outside academia—who have inspired you?

CD: There are so many people that I don't really know where to start. Working with all these Bangladeshi NGOs and researchers in Bangladesh, and seeing the importance of applied research, was extremely eye-opening to me because that's research done in the real world, rather than theoretical research. I had three supervisors in total during my PhD.

David Mosse was one supervisor. Sunil Amrith was the environmental historian who was my co-supervisor and Penny Vera Sanzo was from the field of gender and development. Sunil's work was so inspiring in terms of showing the importance of history.

With Birkbeck and SOAS [the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London] and being in the history department, I had to do two vivas because it was so complicated. I did my archival research in my first year of my PhD and looked at embankments through colonial history. That's when I saw the resonances and importance of understanding the past to understand the present.

So, without Sunil, I wouldn't have had that really rich historical context; he also helped me so much with the archival research. I was a Research Assistant for his project doing archival work in Bangladesh. He's the one who recommended Frederick Cooper's book for how it critically spoke about modernity. Because that's also a term we just take for granted, as something positive, right? So, my supervisors meant quite a lot. Then I was teaching at Stockholm Anthropology, and I was part of an Environmental Anthropology reading group. I was a postdoc in Oslo for five years and Environmental Anthropology is really strong there. My most recent article is on ship-breaking and is part of a special issue on re-figuring the future commons.

These conversations with colleagues about current publications and research have been really inspirational for me, as well as conferences. There are so many academics whose research I look up to. I don't think I do justice by mentioning just a few of them here.

CS: There will always be historians holding us accountable for our usage of terms, which I think is so important.

LLO: That leads nicely into our next question. I got interested in climate change when I started to see the colonial roots of climate change. A major theme of this special section on Gender and Climate Justice is the coloniality of climate change. Certainly, your work has gone a long way towards exposing this coloniality. Why do you think it took us so long to see the colonial, political, and economic patterns that have contributed to ongoing climate change?

CD: That is a good question and linked to the fact that, in academia, we have our disciplines, right? So, maybe environmental history has for a long time been its own niche rather than a resource and a methodology for other disciplines to contextualize their research. When I was an undergraduate exchange student at University of Pennsylvania, I chose to take a PhD course in historical sociology with Professor Rudra Sil. Even from that I realized how important history is.

I've always also had an easy time with the natural sciences and STEM subjects. For me, it is not that hard to grasp the main arguments in natural science publications. I think my book has not received any award in anthropology; it's quite interdisciplinary in that sense. You need to be interdisciplinary to understand time and also the material physical impacts on the political, social, and economic, and to have an understanding of power relations. We have been seeing for the past decade a lot of PhDs focusing more on these types of linkages.

SC: One of the primary arguments in your book is that there is often no causal relationship between sea-level rise and the local non-climatic factors. The fact that there are so many different kinds of floods in Bangladesh that are often overlooked leads to a series of misreadings regarding climate change in Bangladesh. There is often little focus on what people actually need.

This also extends to academics who universalize things. I'm curious how you arrived at that conclusion of misreading, especially at a time when we are trying to read many things in relation to climate change. Misreading itself emerges as a very key concept, not just in the book, but in some very implicit ways in what you have published since then.

CD: A great question. One of my biggest academic debts is to James Fairhead and Melissa Leach for writing the book Misreading the African Landscape. That's my inspiration and actually the title I wanted for my own book. It's reading climate change backwards. So, for instance, when you assume that Bangladeshi rural women are powerless victims of Islamic conservative patriarchy, you don't give them any scope for agency and their romantic choices. Bengali women are fierce. What they can do is mind-blowing. I'm so inspired by my interlocutors.

I guess my positionality also helped because the Bangladeshi context is very white supremacist in that you "should" be fair and not dark skinned. Now it's winter in Sweden and I don't have a tan but when I'm in Bangladesh I'm quite tan. I look like my interlocutors. So, when looking at images of me with my interlocutors, we look like sisters. But it bothered me when they thanked me at one point. I think some upper-middle class NGO workers that are Bangladeshi believe they're superior to these landless rural women. Also, it is a Muslim country. There are a lot of Brahminical Puritan things going on, you know, like not wanting to share food.

LLO: We want to talk about why you decided to publish your book as open access and if you have any advice for other scholars, particularly early career scholars who are also interested in publishing open access material.

CD: I must admit, it wasn't my idea. My publisher asked me if I had funding for open access and I said no. And then she looked around and found the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation's program called the Sustainable Histories Monograph Pilot.

Because my book is about history and environment, it was selected for the pilot. There's a big but here: If you're selected for this pilot, you cannot choose your covers. You can get a really ugly cover or a good cover. Personally, I find the cover of my book quite ugly, but I thought it was worth it if the book was open access and my interlocutors in Bangladesh could read it. It has been so crazy to hear that colleagues are using my book for teaching and kind enough to give me feedback.

I also realize that undergraduates can read my book because I did write it in a way that wouldn't be too complex. I used my lectures as templates for the book. I don't know about the US but in Scandinavia, if you're at a university, everything you publish in journals ends up being open access. I should also share that I've been invited to hold the 2026 Lewis Henry Morgan lecture for my second book tentatively called Living With Toxic Development.

LLO: We're really interested in your work about the shipbreaking industry in Bangladesh and toxicity. I'm here in Newfoundland and Labrador, which is a coastal area as well and an area that has historically depended heavily on the fishery. Could you talk about what brought you to this work and what lies ahead for you?

CD: Shipping, the global industry, may result in the end of the life cycle of shipbreaking of ships, or not. Parts of the ship that are broken down are recycled. My project was supposed to be about maritime working worlds and especially labour. For me to make the project my own, it was important to also have the environmental aspect in the proposal so that, when I spoke to workers, it was the working conditions—toxic working conditions and pollution—that would come out.

Once I was at the research site, I found I didn't want to talk only to shipbreaking workers. I wanted to talk to the people in the entire area, including the fishermen and communities living in between the yards. So, it was a bit that life brought me to work in shipbreaking and now it's hard to stop working in the sector. Once you enter the maritime industry and have a lot of colleagues working on different aspects of ethnography in the maritime industry.

CS: We have almost reached the end of this conversation. One of the primary readers of Atlantis are early career scholars and graduate students. What advice do you have for navigating interdisciplinary spaces?

CD: I've become more and more disciplined over time. It's hard to be interdisciplinary. If you notice my publications, they all strategically target anthropology journals. I did that to qualify for an anthropology job. So, it depends on what kind of job you would like, what kind of workplace you're interested in. It really matters where you publish. I know that's kind of a buzzkill. When I think about it, all my collaborations have been with anthropologists. I don't know how interdisciplinary that is.

I also think you have to communicate in the right way to get funding. I got external funding and a medical researcher from another department did not. And this researcher told me that he does not understand what I am doing because my research is all subjective.

You have to teach the collaborators. In terms of water and Bangladesh, my interlocutors, for a long time, were water engineers and natural scientists. They really appreciated the environmental history and the development critique in my book. So, they've invited me to collaborate when they want that perspective. I'm talking to another colleague, who is a natural scientist, about sedimentation. He wants an anthropological perspective. I can only speak from that disciplinary perspective of, you know, ethnography, but maybe historians can say this is what I can contribute to an interdisciplinary collaboration. As a last point, I suggest writing grant applications with interdisciplinary colleagues.

LLO: Finally, why do you think is it important to study gender and climate justice right now?

CD: I'm wary about how gender and climate justice can also become development buzzwords. It is important to be specific about what we mean by climate justice versus environmental justice. What do we mean by gender? The contexts vary.

I think in developmental contexts, unfortunately, gender is still usually equated with women. However, in the face of backlash against LGBTQI+ communities right now, it is important to queer any environmental movement. It is really important to fight the status quo because the status quo is unequal, not only socioeconomically, but also in terms of people who can't be who they are. Can you feel safe being queer? Probably not.

There is still a lot to do to make sure people can be themselves everywhere. In terms of social structures, what does gender and climate justice even mean? In what context and whose rights are made visible? Those are the questions for the future.

Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice would like to thank Camilia Dewan for her insights. Views expressed by the interviewee and interviewers are exclusively their own.

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Book Review

Book Review: *The Intersectional Environmentalist*

Reviewed by Nicole Vankooten

Book under Review: Thomas, Leah (2022). *The Intersectional Environmentalist: How to Dismantle Systems of Oppression to Protect People + Planet*. New York: Voracious / Little, Brown and Company.

Reviewer: Nicole Vankooten completed her Bachelor of Arts and Science from the University of Guelph in 2023. She is currently writing a master's thesis on the loss of medieval English forestry practices through colonialism and its legacies for modern Canadian forest management. As a Northern Ontario tree planter herself, Nicole hopes to use this research to introduce historical perspectives to conversations around sustainable forestry and ecologically responsible logging. In her free time, Nicole loves to camp, hike, and travel. She finds nature, and the forest specifically, as a crucial tool for resiliency in her own mental health journey.

In a new era of our planet's history deemed the "Anthropocene" by many leading researchers, Leah Thomas's book *The Intersectional Environmentalist* reminds readers that humans and the environment coexist within myriad interconnecting cycles and systems. Social justice and environmentalism, the author argues, must come together to dismantle "the same systems of oppression that oppress people [and] also oppress and degrade the planet" (32). She names this movement "intersectional environmentalism," a name that builds on Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality (1991). Using her book as an educational starting point, Thomas expertly combines thorough investigative research with her lived experiences as a Black woman and social justice advocate to compel her audience to think critically about the natural and political ecosystems that surround them. She actively critiques the historical and ongoing exclusion of key voices in environmental justice efforts using global case studies to exemplify the demand for intersectionality within environmentalism. *The Intersectional Environmentalist*, the book, is a vital start to approaching the ambitious goals of intersectional environmentalism, the movement, as Thomas delivers an achievable how-to guide for her readers to integrate this school of thought into their own lives.

Furthermore, Thomas carves space for many other leaders of intersectional environmentalism within her book, further enhancing the diversity of perspectives for her broad readership. She skillfully weaves their voices within her narrative by including interview questions, primary source documents, and quotations from a range of global figures. Uplifting the voices of prominent intersectional figures, such as drag queen icon Pattie Gonia and the revolutionary Combahee River Collective, not only strengthens Thomas's key arguments but also distinguishes her movement's unique ability to unite different communities across the globe.

Chapter One "Intersectional Theory, Feminism + Intersectional Environmentalism" provides an informative historiography of the necessary background leading up to the intersectional environmentalist movement. Thomas opens her readers to an alternative narrative of predominantly white-led feminism movements categorized by three "waves" in recent North American history. The author, unfortunately, missed an opportunity to discuss recent and emerging research among gender studies scholars that critiques the use of "waves" when describing feminist history. Nancy Hewitt's influential book *No Permanent Waves: Recasting Histories of US Feminism* (2010), for example, questions the validity of the wave metaphor when writing women's and social history.

While Thomas does touch on the exclusion of Black feminists from such history, a deeper analysis of the ongoing conversation regarding the harms of perpetuating the "wave" narrative would further educate her readers on intersectional theory. Kathleen A. Laughlin (2010) and her colleagues similarly challenged the wave model of feminism to achieve a more diverse narrative that includes the experiences of people of colour, working classes, and LGBTQIA+ individuals. Acknowledging this important discussion would strengthen Thomas's assertion of the need to adapt outdated notions of "environmentalism" using intersectional theory by similarly tracing the role of intersectionality in creating more inclusive narratives of women's studies, gender history, and social justice.

The Intersectional Environmentalist deserves abundant recognition for its creative and informative methods of conveying the author's message in an accessible way. The author excellently blends primary source analysis with her call to action using key excerpts from documents such as the *Principles of Environmental Justice from the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit* (1991). The tone shifts from Chapter Two onward as the author begins to move away from historiographical writing into a less formal and more personal approach to conveying the intersections that exist between social and environmental justice. Here, Thomas provides her readers with the how-to guide promised in the title of her book. She uses Intersectional Environmentalist Pledges to conclude each chapter and outline achievable ways to instigate change. These pledges represent *The Intersectional Environmentalist*'s incredible ability to encourage an audience to interact with the content of the book and actively situate it within their lived experiences. The author's approachable and personal methodology contrasts other intersectional scholars such as Ande A. Nesmith et al. in *The Intersection of Environmental Justice, Climate Change, Community, and the Ecology of Life* (2021), who address more academic audiences.

The "Tool Kit" at the end of the book is a brilliant method to give readers a stepping stone into their individual research and education on intersectional environmentalism. The author claims this section intends to "deepen your understanding of intersectional environmentalism, and continue on your environmental journey" (137). Through the inclusion of exclusive interview content and links to additional educational media, the "Tool Kit" delivers on its intentions by allowing a diverse audience to engage with intersectional environmentalism in a manner tailored to their unique life experiences. Thomas' continued dedication to providing resources and encouraging personal research throughout the book solidifies the author's confidence in intersectional environmentalism to instigate change through education.

Through this book, Thomas undoubtedly establishes herself as a leader in social justice and environmentalism. *The Intersectional Environmentalist* is a remarkable book for those seeking to gain new insights into climate justice and environmental advocacy. The author's accessible language and eye-catching format make this book enjoyable and educational while offering strong arguments for the need to include intersectional perspectives in the environmentalist movement. This guidebook-style narrative will certainly become an essential addition to personal bookshelves, classrooms, and syllabi around the globe.

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Book Review

Book Review: *The End of this World*

Reviewed by Carole Therrien

Book under Review: Alook, Angele, Emily Eaton, David Gray-Donald, Joël Laforest, Crystal Lameman, Bronwen Tucker. 2023. *The End of This World: Climate Justice in So-Called Canada*. Between The Lines Publishing

Reviewer: Carole Therrien is a PhD candidate in Anthropology at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada. Her research focusses on how women demonstrate cultural leadership in settings impacted by climate hazards.

In *The End of This World: Climate Justice in So-Called Canada*, six writers have co-authored a volume of essays that demonstrate the extent of climate injustice faced by Indigenous communities and what can be achieved by highlighting the structural oppression and evident racism experienced by Indigenous communities, when interacting with both state and non-state actors. Extensive, thorough, and passionately written, the text is exhaustive in its scope and referencing. A hybrid of interdisciplinary scholarly and literary work, *The End of this World* is a text that remains etched in one's memory.

After laying out six governing principles that would lead to substantive and decolonized climate justice, the book's objectives cannot be clearer: to bring to light "the violation of Indigenous peoples' inherent rights and sovereignty, and the fossil fuel economy that relies on this violation" (11). Further, the authors propose that a just transition allowing "everyone to meet their basic needs while remaining within global ecological limits" (89) will not occur unless settler capitalism in Canada is no longer the primary political economic structure. The authors argue that the recognition of Indigenous rights and sovereignty is central "to rescue a habitable planet" (6) and can no longer be considered an afterthought or add-on to the thinking among advocates of climate justice or state authorities. This is also a cornerstone for acknowledging past and current relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, and a path towards restoring a balance to a long-strained relationship.

The authors, who are academics, activists, and journalists, both settler and Indigenous, tackle five different ideas that define and propose to resolve the problem of climate injustice: the assertion of Indigenous sovereignty on Canadian soil and abroad; a commitment to maintaining the 1.5 degree Celsius threshold to stave the most destructive of potential climate damages; polluters and the wealthy paying their fair share; reliable and valuable work for women in a care-oriented economy; and a global equality.

The book's objectives and approaches are ambitious but consistent with the contemporary Canadian decolonization dialogue. All six authors claim that the dismantling of Western capitalism, which is based on fossil fuel extraction/production/transformation, is the only means to reach climate justice and bring attention to the many other injustices wrought by capitalist interests: violence, exploitation, land theft, inequality, greed, sexism, and racism. They argue that undoing the current way of operating is the only solution; by unweaving the complex interdisciplinary narrative, we find ourselves unwillingly complicit. At times, the book appears to be a manifesto, at others an ethnographic récit or academic treatise. From a literary perspective, this may appear contradictory but it is reflective of the non-linearity of the issues the book addresses.

The presented roadmap to short-term and long-term actions is very helpful for readers of this book who wish to inform themselves on the issue of Indigenous sovereignty and climate change; one cannot finish the book and not question the complexity of the issue nor dismiss any possible resolution. The call for an immediate end of everything that is familiar will intimidate settler readers reluctant to lean into discomfort. But it will motivate activists, proponents, and allies for greater Indigenous involvement in the climate debate.

While the use of extensive endnotes provides context or sources of information which contribute to the book's textual heft, it can disrupt reading at times. The absence of a formal bibliography of said references and sources made it challenging to find sources; some sources are inconsistently identified within the endnotes. In the spirit of decolonizing text, this is a metaphor for challenging or questioning the way one thinks of an essay compendium.

As a settler anthropological and political economy scholar who focuses on the impacts of change on women in structurally oppressed settings, I struggle to situate this compendium or call to action within any discipline-specific body of literature. Its interdisciplinary nature makes it difficult to pigeonhole and, as such, reminds me of popular activist texts such as *The Leap Manifesto* (2015) that bring together complex ideas and calls to action. The book does, however, sit well with other activist scholarship written by, for example, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Robin Maynard, and Deborah McGregor, whose collective works bring attention to the injustices by colonial institutional apparatuses to Canada's Indigenous and Black communities.

Published by Between the Lines, a self-proclaimed "social movement press," this is not a formal academic book. However, non-academic texts are also vital for contributing to the decolonization of the academy. Non-traditional academic texts can be particularly valuable for presenting Indigenous knowledge in a range of formats. This book's strength comes from its activist and interdisciplinary nature.

I would particularly recommend this book to readers who appreciate concrete examples and approaches that allow them to better understand a complex and historically charged modernity. Crystal Lameman makes a particularly strong contribution with her chapter on building a care economy where the expectation and delivery of care is based on human rights principles. Individual chapters would make interesting additions to academic syllabi in gender studies, Indigenous studies, Canadian studies, geography, or anthropology. The book in its entirety might also serve as a good think piece at the Canadian secondary-school level.

The End of the World is meant to question what many people ignore in Canada's contemporary political economy. It provides settler and non-settler strategies that can lead to climate justice. The book is written clearly and succinctly to unsettle, contend, explore, and instigate. As such, it presents a long-overdue and uncomfortable debate.

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Book Review

Book Review: *Queer Ecofeminism*

Reviewed by Sākihitowin Awāsis

Book under Review: Ourkiya, Asmae. 2023. *Queer Ecofeminism: From Binary Environmental Endeavours to Postgender Pursuits*. Lexington Books

Reviewer: Sākihitowin Awāsis is an Assistant Professor, jointly appointed to the Department of Geography and Environment, and the Indigenous Studies Program, at Western University.

Q*ueer Ecofeminism: From Binary Environmental Endeavours to Postgender Pursuits* contributes to an important and growing body of work that is moving ecofeminist analysis away from a colonial gender binary. The book does this by articulating the interrelations of gender and ecological justice. The enthralling, provocative, and timely work offers an ecocritical analysis of a wide range of media. This includes film, television shows, art installations, historical documents, and religious texts. The approach is designed to help move the field of ecofeminism towards a postgender future that is socially and environmentally just. The aim of the work is to fill the urgent need to address root causes of the climate crises by expanding research beyond the limitations of the gender binary.

Increasingly, scholars across a variety of disciplines are incorporating gender into ecological and climate research. Scholars such as Szilvia Csevar (2021), Baada, Baruah and Luginaah (2023), Goldsmith and Bell (2022), and Kivioja, Pongsiri, and Brody (2023) have effectively argued that climate change disproportionately impacts Indigenous women, women of colour, and gender and sexually diverse individuals. The origins of mainstream ecofeminism were grounded in a binary approach to gender. As such, research on the gendered impacts of climate change still largely rely on the colonial gender binary. However, the field is shifting towards a more inclusive, nonbinary approach that problematizes patriarchal, capitalist systems and intersecting forms of oppression. This new approach embraces gender diversity. Asmae Ourkiya, a nonbinary researcher of Amazigh descent, describes how this shift is in part motivated by the 2016 Orlando Pulse nightclub shooting and the current rise of far-right politics.

First-wave cultural ecofeminism emerged in the 1970s and is characterized by the essentialization of women, as well as a lack of intersectionality, inclusivity, engagement with queer theory, and politicization. Meanwhile, radical ecofeminism rejects the essentialist association of women with the earth and claims that this reinforces patriarchal domination and restricts the potency of ecofeminism. Following the lead of queer theory and radical ecofeminism, Ourkiya demonstrates the rich potential for ecofeminism to not only challenge the normalization of binary gender, intersex/transgender exclusion and erasure, and compulsory heterosexuality, but also to further develop its own distinct modes of analysis.

The book consists of five chapters that together provide readers with a framework for queer ecofeminism. The first chapter analyses the connections between the oppression of nature, women, and marginalized people through the lens of intersectionality and demonstrates that gender and climate justice are deeply intertwined with decolonization. The second chapter, "On De-essentializing Ecofeminism," develops ecofeminism as a movement and discourse that aims to promote nonhierarchical social organization by rejecting binary thinking. The chapter exposes essentialist entanglements in science and literature, calling for urgent de-essentialization. The third chapter details Ourkiya's interlinking of feminism and environmentalism as interdependent movements. The fourth chapter draws attention to the

post-gendered approach missing in gender and climate discourse, introduces postgenderism to ecofeminism, and challenges the heteronormativity of far-right politics. Artwork explored in this chapter includes the Amorous Couple painting from Iran's Qajar Dynasty and Alok Vaid-Menon's poetry. The fifth chapter reexamines and synthesizes the contributions that all chapters make to the development of a neo-ecofeminism.

Overall, this book carves a vibrant path forward for queer ecofeminist thought. Still, several oversights are apparent. First, the book contains a few formatting inconsistencies (most glaringly a reference to the "table below" that does not exist on page 30) that presumably are remnants from its prior form as thesis. Second, there is some replication of dualistic thinking, for example framing the Global North/Global South as colonizer/colonized. Considering the systemic oppression of the Uyghurs, can China be grouped with the Global South? Can Indigenous peoples of North America be characterized as part of the Global North? This dualistic framing risks essentializing geographic location and would benefit from more nuance.

Moreover, Ourkiya purports to challenge all forms of essentialism and I was left wondering how they would respond to Dene scholar Glen Coulthard (2014) who problematizes the anti-essentialist approach, arguing it overestimates its emancipatory potential because although it could adequately address the breadth of interrelated power relations, it can also serve colonial power structures. Coulthard states that "both constructivist and essentialist articulations of identity can aid either the maintenance or subversion of oppressive configurations of power" (2014, 102). Ourkiya may have inadvertently created another dualism by demonizing essentialism and glorifying anti-essentialism.

Ourkiya successfully brings ecofeminism into constellation with nonbinary genders and non-heteronormative bodies and sexualities, but this falls short of how Michi Saagiig Nishinaabe scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017) defines constellation as relationships that are informed by the radical resurgence of embodied Indigenous political orders. Although Ourkiya accounts for how early forms of ecofeminism "borrowed" from Indigenous communities and relationships with land, some Indigenous scholars consider this a form of appropriation (Nixon 2015; Kwaymullina 2018). The connections to Indigenous studies, and Indigenous feminisms in particular, could be strengthened.

Although Ourkiya aims to guide research on Indigenous peoples from the tenets borrowed by ecofeminism to a more expansive intersectional study of issues faced by Indigenous communities, a question arises and reflects a wider and long-standing gap in the field of ecofeminism: what does it mean for ecofeminism to center Indigenous knowledge systems? What does Indigenous ecofeminism look like? There was a missed opportunity here to animate ontological pluralism, further combat hierarchies of knowledge, and elevate the voices of queer Indigenous people. Despite these shortcomings, Queer Ecofeminism opens possibilities for new research methodologies and interdisciplinary synergies and has much to offer scholars, scientists, artists, and activists alike. Ourkiya implores us to bridge queer theory with critical ecofeminist scholarship because "natural spaces have always and will always be queer" (95).

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Literary Work

The Farmer and the Snake

It is my will to bite
when I come to and find myself
smothered against your chest.

My fangs ask no questions, simply
engage in a dance of stimulation
and response.

But you never were a very good dancer, were you Farmer?

I am a question, long and hot against the ground,
raveling and unravelling like a sailor's rope —
which font will I coil into today?

It is always a question
of what I choose or do not choose
to do.

Shoulderlessly, I shrug it off —
the skin you touched, the hewn stone
scales you picked at. I leave them behind in the dirt.

There is no me that was handled by you.

I bit off my own tail, made myself
a bleeding sock,

slunk into a hole in the ground.
I froze myself in a bucket, slept
in a curlicue of ice crystals.

But still you reach your short and
greedy fingers into my den.
I feel the earth falling over me, so I bite down
hard

and you yelp like a struck hound.
I expect dashed brains, so my middle contracts
and I make myself small.
How unsweet!
But you forgot what kind of thing I am —

Farmer, you and I were never friends.
No matter how familiar you make yourself
with the small red ribbon I keep
between the pages of my jaws,
you can never read
what I have written with my body.

Sophia Godsoe (she/her) is a writer, editor, and graduate of Mount Saint Vincent University in Kjipuktuk. Her poems have appeared in Toronto's *Lived* Magazine and she was shortlisted for the WFNS Rita Joe Poetry Prize in 2022. She will be attending UNB in the fall to earn her Master's of Creative Writing.