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## **PlatForum**

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### **Design**

Shelby Richardson

### **Photos**

Laura Murray

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Sarah Carmen Moritz

### **Web Support**

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### **Managing Editors**

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Stephanie Calce  
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## INTRODUCTION

The 2010-2011 **PlatForum** editorial team is very pleased to present the 12<sup>th</sup> Volume of **PlatForum** (formerly **Cultural Reflections**). As the longest running student-organised Anthropology publication in Canada, we are honoured to continue an outstanding legacy. **PlatForum** has always aimed to create an inspiring and open platform for conversation and dialogue that is accessible to all Canadian anthropology graduate students. This latest edition reflects a dynamic approach to the discipline and we are proud to present a variety of papers authored by graduate students from universities across Canada. The papers, all from individual students whose academic and personal backgrounds could not be more multifaceted, invite a comparison that highlights both, the commonalities as well as the uniqueness of each topic, adequately (re)presenting anthropology as a holistic and sub-disciplinary approach. As such, the papers are emblematic for an anthropology that has emerged through its own crisis of representation and postmodern critique as a dynamic and educational way of producing, consuming and circulating critical knowledge. The papers in this issue promote discourses and intellectual tools which are, to borrow from Claude *Lévi-Strauss*, 'good to think with'. Whilst **PlatForum** aims to contribute meaningfully to current anthropological debates, we are hopeful that the complex writing and editing process has helped in the production of a very accessible (plat)form of knowledge. Accessibility is something **PlatForum** strives for. We hope that during your reading of this year's issue, you will find accounts that, according to an anthropological saying, succeed at "making the strange seem familiar, and the familiar seem strange".

One of our authors, for example, invites us to explore the

way in which ritualized behaviour and magic are not restricted to “exotic” Haitian medical paradigms, but also exist in various forms within Western medicine and healing practices (Heather Millman). In a similar fashion, two authors invite us to take a close look at post-colonial processes with a focus on memory and remembering. Local discourses on “Ubuntu” are skillfully illustrated as acts of memory and critical to post-Apartheid South Africa reconciliation and sovereignty efforts (Graham Fox). Similarly, Palestinian art is aptly described as creating a “living memory” in an empowering effort to achieve sovereignty and to reject a dominant colonial narrative (Madalena Santos). While these accounts provide critical perspectives on the impacts of colonialism, two authors challenge widely accepted dominant colonial and historical narratives while emphasizing local particularities. In an account on the importance of bog iron for Vikings, the authors focus on the skills and strategies that made Vikings so successful rather than relying on the stereotypical and romanticized notion of the ferocious warrior and explorer (Graham Bowles, Rick Bowker and Nathan Samsonoff). In an account that looks at early contact between newcomers and First Nations in Canada, the potato as a colonial and indigenous trade good, is scrutinized in order to examine changing perceptions of indigenous land use in the eyes of European settlers (Stella Wenstob). While keeping the focus on locality, as well as place and space, two papers are critically reflexive and invite us to think about ways in which research can be conducted ethically. One of our authors draws on fieldwork in Ontario to illustrate some of the complexities and ethical challenges that are inherent within visual anthropology and applied fieldwork.(Matthew Hayes). Toronto’s waterfront, visited by participants of the G20 Summit 2010, becomes a space of collective action and field site to a researcher who experiences the changes at the water’s edge, and describes how urban boundaries overlap, shape and are shaped by these events (Ines Taccone). Urban spaces are crucial to another account in which the author disentangles the construction of GLBT and queer

identities in non-urban and rural contexts (Kelly Baker). The construction of the past and knowledge about the past becomes the focus of research conducted with transnationally adopted children (Jenny Shaw).

Such versatile, yet often overlapping anthropological themes, a complex editing process and the finished print version of **PlatForum** form part of graduate students' contribution to the anthropological debate, the production and dissemination of anthropology. As a peer-review journal, **PlatForum** encourages from start-to-finish a sharing of knowledge not only between the authors and the editors, but also between the authors themselves in order to deliver articles that best reflect the discipline and its relevant, contemporary issues.

The electronic format of **PlatForum** presents yet another, more accessible platform, which facilitates the intent of this journal's namesake and to be read at: <http://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/flatforum>.

In our opinion, this web platform functions as a public forum that encourages dialogue, discussion, debate and exchange. We would like to invite all our readers to join in and take part in this lively exchange of ideas, lived experience and knowledge. Enjoy reading this year's felicitous volume of **PlatForum**, the longest running Anthropology Graduate student journal in Canada!

Sincerely,  
Sarah Carmen Moritz and  
The PlatForum Editorial Team  
Editor-in-Chief

## CONTRIBUTORS

### 1. INES TACCONE

Ines' academic interests are focused on space, place and the many shifts occurring across urban waterfronts, which she has researched with support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council through a Joseph-Armand Bombardier, CGS scholarship. She has recently completed her M.A. in Public Issues Anthropology at the University of Guelph and will continue her studies in Social Anthropology at York University.

### 2. MATTHEW HAYES

Matthew Hayes is a M.A. candidate in the Department of Sociology & Anthropology at Simon Fraser University. He is interested in methodology, ethics, performance and epistemology.

### 3. GRAHAM BOWLES, RICK BOWKER AND NATHAN SAMSONOFF

As an undergraduate anthropology student of the University of Victoria his fifth year of study, he has been introduced to several aspects of archaeology. Nothing piqued his interests as much as the Viking archaeology course. He would like to thank Rick and Nathan for all of their contributions in his research and writing of this paper as well as Dr. McGuire for all her help with editing and for providing motivation.



#### 4. KELLY BAKER

Kelly Baker is a PhD Candidate in the department of Anthropology at The University of Western Ontario. She holds an MA in Anthropology from Dalhousie University, where her research explored identity and community among GLBT individuals living in rural Nova Scotia. Primarily interested in urban anthropology, visual anthropology, gender and sexuality, and space and place. Her forthcoming PhD research will examine the socio-economic impacts of gentrification in the north end of Halifax, Nova Scotia.

#### 5. MADALENA SANTOS

Madalena Santos is a Ph. D. candidate in Sociology at Carleton University. Her research interests are in the area of anti-racist decolonial feminism and creative forms of political resistance with a particular focus on Palestine. Throughout her studies she endeavors to use a critical interdisciplinary approach to investigate and contest language that is used to legitimize practices and processes of social injustice.

#### 6. HEATHER MILLMAN

Heather is a 24-year-old M.A. student in her final year at the University of Guelph, Ontario. She received a BAH in Anthropology from the University of Guelph, and will graduate in 2012 with a MA in Public Issues Anthropology. Her area of interest is the Anthropology of Health. She has recently completed two months of research on the selling of natural plant medicines in Paraguay. She hopes to pursue PhD studies in a related context.

## 7. GRAHAM FOX

Graham Fox is a Master's candidate in Anthropology at Carleton University. He is currently completing his MA thesis on the topic of sovereignty, security and citizenship in Nairobi, Kenya. He previously studied International Development at Dalhousie University.

## 8. JENNIFER SHAW

Jennifer Shaw completed her Master of Arts degree in anthropology at the University of Victoria in 2010. Her research interests include the anthropology of children and youth, feminist anthropology, migration, place, identity, and participatory action research. She currently works with newcomer youth at a settlement agency in Victoria, BC. She greatly enjoys applying her background in anthropology to the non-profit sector as well as learning directly from youth. She looks forward to pursuing a Ph.D.

## 9. STELLA WENSTOB

Stella Wenstob is a recent graduate of the University of Victoria, receiving her honours degree in anthropology. This paper was completed as part of this degree. Recently, she has started her own small crop of Ozette potatoes at her parents' home in the small coastal town of Bamfield. This past fall, Stella began her graduate studies at University of Victoria and she hopes to answer some of the questions she proposes in this paper.

# DRAWING THE BOUNDARY THROUGH THE CENTRE: REFLECTIONS ON TORONTO'S G20 SUMMIT FROM AN URBAN PERIPHERY

✿ INES TACCONE

## ABSTRACT

As I conducted research on Toronto's waterfront, a place that sits on the urban periphery, the G20 Summit of 2010 came to pass, producing multiple, complex experiences of place that shaped the city in unsettling ways. Urban residents and visitors alike witnessed mechanisms of control, collective activity and individual practices shift in manipulations of space and place. In the frantic unfolding of a global event, I remained embedded in the boundary as it splintered, shifted, overlapped and passed through the downtown core. Here, I note the changes that took place at the water's edge, and describe how boundaries overlap, shape and are shaped by the centre in the unfolding of events.

I stood in the middle of a once congested downtown, Toronto street that was now so overrun by spectators, activists, scattered residents, smoke and police officers that I could no longer recognize my whereabouts. The smell of a torched police vehicle drifted across a mass of people pressed against a barricade who, for reasons unknown, suddenly turned and went running, arms flail-

ing down the street in a panic-stricken stampede. Fortunately, I found myself at the back of the crowd, giving me a much-needed head start to the nearest intersection. I was, however, the slowest runner imaginable—to the point where I may as well have laid down in the middle of the road. There is no greater sense of defeat than to see those hauling backpacks and camera equipment not only sprint past but leave you behind, while the sound of the mob moves closer. Still I dashed across the intersection, and just as I could see a place of safety, an employee from a nearby shop, mouth full and sandwich in hand, charged passed me crying out that she just wanted to eat her lunch, causing me to give up in laughter as one of my group members tripped and fell flat on his face.<sup>i</sup>

Over the summer of 2010, I conducted research on Toronto's inner harbour area, a place on the border, where the city meets Lake Ontario. Given that waterfront development has accommodated recreational public activities, as well as work and residential life, the harbour front area currently attracts tens of thousands of people on any given summer weekend. Today, visitors to the water's edge find festivals, parks, marinas, markets, lake activities, an island airport, tourist attractions, art scenes, lounge chairs, promenades, condominiums, industrial zones and workspaces alike. These are not uncommon sights, as this form of waterfront revitalization has become a common global occurrence (Desfor et al. 2011).

Although a designed milieu is often understood as a pre-given entity, even as a space of control in a Foucauldian sense, it is also one that is in constant transition. Michel de Certeau (1984:91-114) has conceptualized this difference in terms of the "concept city" versus the city that is used and constantly transformed in practice. The use of urban space is akin to a speech act, entailing invention and "unlimited diversity," as de Certeau put it (1984: 97-99). It accumulates stories within a city of mobility through practices of walking (de Certeau 1984:91-110), and in acts of "making do" (de Certeau 1984:29-42). When approached in this manner, the city becomes a highly complex and confusing pro-

cess with no one course of action (see de Certeau 1984:99). In another sense, it becomes eventful. Edward Casey (1996:42-44) has described places in terms of “elasticity”— or fluctuating events with “porous” boundaries that are both spatial and temporal.<sup>ii</sup> They are entities that contain multiple interconnected and conflicting meanings, relations, voices and many locations in a politicized, historicized and contextualized manner (Rodman 2003). Each moment fluctuates between multiple relations, experiences and events; and as events unfold, these experiences and relations (which can be powerful, passive, collaborative and rebellious all at once) construct space and place in many ways, and on many levels. It is in experience that we are ‘placed’ within fluctuating events, and as such, I too, as a spectator walking along the sidelines, experienced and contributed to the unfolding of a global event, and in accordance, the making of place and its extended whereabouts from within and between moving boundaries.

Over the course of my fieldwork, the G20 Summit came to pass in Toronto, and it was here for the first time that I experienced the centre and the edge connect, overlap and move through each other in the passing of events. As has been the case for G8 and G20 summits elsewhere, barricades, fences and great security measures have been employed to protect the world leaders and surrounding vicinity. Toronto proved to be no exception. I noted the changes taking place at the waterfront— an increased presence of police, garbage cans removed, and fences set up in certain areas. On the day of the event, I noticed that the lawn furniture was missing, and very few visitors mingled about the harbourfront grounds. It was then I recognized that the centre had already been drawn to the edge, Toronto’s harbour.

On the Saturday of the G20 Summit in Toronto, a day of major demonstrations, it was obvious that the waterfront was not its usual self. With the sound of helicopters, rather than planes, passing overhead and an eerie silence projecting from the direction of the downtown core, I found myself following the fences from the street adjacent to the water into the centre.

Just the day prior, I could not decide whether I should at-

tempt to access my field site during the Saturday event. I had already assessed the effects the security measures had on the waterfront— emptied, garbage cans replaced with plastic bags taped to poles, a presence of police in riot gear at a place that attracts an abundance of surrounding residents, tourists and pedestrians alike. I had experienced the zigzagging of a barricaded city that held what looked like strong, steel chain link fences so thick and tightly ‘linked’ that I could not so much as put my finger between the spaces for fear of not getting it back. These slabs of steel, bolted to cement, ran every which way across the central part of Toronto in no consistent form, at least not as experienced by a pedestrian on ground level. I wore a white hat and t-shirt; a friend, who tagged along with me, wore strapped on sandals and held a camera. We carried no bags. We played the part of innocence perfectly. Yet, within three to four metres in every direction I could feel the eyes of a visible presence following my every move. After nervously climbing the stairs to the Metro Toronto Convention Centre, I collected a wonderful view of the fortified city down to the waterfront. This view included security personnel, possibly snipers, on top of the same buildings I once referred to as Christmas trees—a reminder of how much the office lights looked like bulbs on trees when I used to walk around this same area with apple cider during holiday evenings. After seeing the city and waterfront in this state, I felt it was enough. Yet a few days later, there I was in the middle of the demonstrations experiencing the city in ways I had never imagined: I found myself standing in a randomly dispersed chaotic mess, knees skinned, light-headed from exhaustion and encountering the place I once called home from the centre of an ordinarily traffic-ridden street.

When I arrived in the downtown on Saturday morning, the streets were mostly clear of any debris, especially when approaching the locked-down Metro Toronto Convention Centre and its surrounding area. Few cars were parked, trash receptacles were expectedly missing, and there were no signs of traffic. Before noon, there were almost no demonstrations or pedestri-

ans. What began as a morning walk to the city's periphery—the waterfront— through an urban centre so devoid of people that I was inclined to call it an apocalyptic wasteland, I later found myself drawn right back into the downtown centre where the demonstrators had also arrived. Not only did the barricades work to connect the downtown to the waterfront, but so did people. I, for one, walked along the streets due to a temporarily shut down section of the subway line. On ground level, people made their voices heard, police emitted a feeling of hostility towards those literally parading in a marching band, and spectators crowded the sidewalks to catch a glimpse of the commotion.

Demonstrations moved down the streets en masse as I ran about taking orders from police. For the most part, the atmosphere was rather cooperative. I found myself to be much more at ease when holding my cell phone around the officers—a mark of mere interest and not protest. The streets, however, went from silent to chaotic in the time it took for me to turn my head. The boundaries and masses travelled from one street to another with the movement of police officers, cars, buses, bikes, smoke, fire, buildings, gates, horses, shouts, and in the crowds.

I predicted that the day would be unforgettable as I drove into Toronto on the morning of the major demonstrations. It was the most easygoing and enjoyable drive into the city that I have ever had the opportunity to experience. No traffic, no accidents, no problems. This is in sharp contrast to the 12-dollar, one-way ride, and three modes of transportation I had relied upon to take me approximately 30 kilometers to the waterfront from just outside of Toronto. It was a day filled with unusual circumstances indeed.

With cars on fire, police mounted on top of horses in riot gear, and as we raised an eyebrow at the sight of officers striking their shields with their batons, there I was having the time of my life! I moved back and forth for the duration of the day while photographing helicopters, and chatting with random spectators. I was surprised to calmly ask directions from armour-laden police officers, and yet remained unfazed when pushed out of

public corridors. I explored parts of the underground city by following fire routes, climbed into normally inaccessible areas, followed a marching band, jumped railings, interacted with dancing street performers, and ran from the black bloc. The crowds were loud and at times chaotic, but I encountered little panic. Although bruised and tired, as a spectator, I had the freedom to explore the city like never before. I became an intricate part to the making of an event—yelling in the streets, and working out my experience, followed by a mid-afternoon coffee and donut as the demonstrations continued just beyond the doors of the coffee shop.

With the passing of Saturday's events came extreme police measures, when both spectators and demonstrators were arrested and harassed. Images of "Fortress Toronto" and wire cages invaded the Internet leading up to and after the event. People spoke against the loss of civic rights on the one hand, while others complained about protesters' failure to submit to authorities for a limited period of time on the other (see Grant 2010, Toronto Star 2010, Weinstein 2011).<sup>iii</sup> There were activists, journalists and pedestrians—many of whom were university students—who were blocked up, put away and made to realize that we could lose everything.

I never discovered what made the people up against the barricade turn in a mad dash. It may have been the pop I heard that startled the crowd; it may have been arbitrary mass panic. The news reports were never quite accurate or informative, and the footage shot from above seemed to be used interchangeably between different places and times. Still, after running in a futile frenzy and finally stopping to help up a fallen comrade, I realized that the way to survive a stampede does not depend on one's ability to be faster or stronger than everyone else. As I stood there watching the crowd leave me behind, it occurred to me that I had more reason to laugh than to worry. We had plenty of places to go, room to move and many more options to the making of place than one based solely on being trampled.<sup>iv</sup>

With the passing of a global event, complete with its secur-



ing of a place, the waterfront's passage through the city became evident. On the day of the Toronto protests, I witnessed the boundaries to my field site draw over the centre of the city and back with the allure of quiet contempt. I had the opportunity to experience the making of place, and in accordance, the making of events at every moving boundary.

## NOTES

- i This is in recognition of Clifford Geertz, in *Interpretations of Culture*, 1973 (see p.13 and pp. 414-415), although, it is quite obvious that I never caught up to the crowd, nor did I find my 'place' within it.
- ii See also Edward Casey's, *Getting back into place: Toward a renewed understanding of the place-world* (2009) for a more detailed philosophical account concerning place.
- iii The documentary *You Should Have Stayed at Home*, The Fifth Estate (Weinstein 2011), showcases live footage and interviews with people who were detained by police during the G20 demonstrations. In much of the film, interviewees describe why they attended the demonstrations in the first place, as well as their perceptions before and during their experiences.
- iv A class action lawsuit concerning the force deployed by police during the summit has recently been granted approval to seek certification (Small 2011). This is yet another example of how space and place—including the meanings, relationships and events that emerge—continue to fluctuate

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# EMBARRASSMENT IN ONTARIO

✦ MATTHEW HAYES\*

## ABSTRACT

Drawing on a short stint of fieldwork in Ontario, I call attention to some difficulties of doing visual ethnography. These include the unique ethical challenges associated with filming; the ambiguity of applied fieldwork; and what happens when you anger the participants of your study. Through an analysis of the changing terrain in visual anthropology, I show how and why a short “ethnographic” video I created did not serve the purpose I had hoped for.

I hit the red circle on my camcorder just as the horse starts to neigh and kick. I’ve already missed the beginning of the event, crucial seconds gone unrecorded. A group of men, four in total, struggle to guide the horse into a trailer. They heave on ropes, grunting with the effort. On my LCD screen I can see sweat beading on their foreheads, dripping from their faces with the monumental effort. The scene is otherwise silent; everything focused on these men, struggling against this gigantic beast, its own muscles vivid and tense. A woman stands to the side, watching the men. Her face is etched with concern. Whether this is for the horse or the men, I’m not sure. I wonder why she’s not helping. She’s easily as large as the men; taller, and seemingly

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\* This article is meant to be read before/after viewing the short film found online here: <http://www.vimeo.com/14294242>

more fit than a couple of them. I think she's the driver of the trailer. I see a set of keys dangling in her hand, her arms crossed across her chest.

I pan to the side, side stepping for a smoother shot. The horse has forced the men out of position. It's now struggling perpendicular to the trailer's entrance. The men are losing the fight, and I can see them getting tired. Suddenly, in a matter of moments, almost quick enough so I don't catch it on film, the horse heaves and kicks one of the men, sending him flying. He stumbles backward over the railing surrounding an empty paddock, falling harmlessly into a pile of hay. The men shout out to him; he shouts back, rising gingerly.

I jump at a voice behind me. "I'd appreciate it if you didn't film this. They wouldn't want this on tape. Embarrassing situation for them, you understand." It wasn't a question.

A cold dread settles into my skin. I look up and to my right. A tall man stands there looking down at me. He has white hair, which seems premature. He squints his eyes at me, glaring intensely. My dread spreads as I hear the struggle continue behind me; a bout of renewed grunting and cajoling. I thumb the red button on my camcorder, close the LCD panel and turn it off.

"Yes, of course. Sorry about that," I stammer. I dearly hope this hasn't ruined the relationship. What was I thinking? I should have at least asked to film. My face floods beat red with embarrassment. I suppose I feel like the struggling men behind me, who still find a second to glance surreptitiously at me, despite their efforts.

The man behind me must be Dr. Mike Pownall, of McKee-Pownell Veterinary Services, in the small township of Cavan Monaghan, Ontario. I came to make a short documentary film on Mike and his practice, which specializes in sport horse medicine. Freshly graduated from Trent University with my undergrad in Anthropology, I landed a summer job working on a cultural mapping project. I'm finishing out the contract by producing a series of short films, highlighting and promoting

cultural resources in the area. I contacted Mike weeks ago, hoping to get an interview. It took a lot of follow up to finally get access, and now I think I've bungled it before it's started.

"Hi, Mike?" I try to sound innocent, as if I haven't been filming his customers for the past five minutes. I guess I figured, since Mike had already agreed to participate, that he would have notified everyone on the premises.

"Yes, you must be Matt," he replies. We don't shake hands. "I'd appreciate it if you didn't use that footage for the movie. It's not exactly the best promotional material. And my clients here wouldn't want anyone seeing their trouble."

"Of course, no problem. Sorry about that, I just figured I'd start filming while I was waiting..."

Mike cuts me off. "That's okay. How do you want to do this?" He speaks quickly. I can't tell if that's just how he talks, or if he's impatient to get me out of here.

Immediately my mind jumps ahead. I think of the finished film, and how this is going to affect what the audience sees. Will they be able to tell I pissed off the main character before I even properly met him? Will the audience interpret his terseness in a negative way? What will they think of me, the filmmaker, and the way in which I obtained the footage?

I suppose I shouldn't complain though. It was my fault for not bothering to ask permission. Isn't this the kind of stuff I had read about? Always ask permission. Never assume anything, especially when you're using film. Don't try to be unobtrusive; it doesn't work. There's nothing objective about filmmaking. By engaging with your participants you develop a relationship based on trust. In this case, I had neither engaged with the people I was filming nor participated in the event. I had simply stood off to the side, silently filming them as they grappled with the horse. I felt ashamed of myself. I felt I had immediately failed to put into practice all I had learned as a student.

But then I thought, what if Mike had not been bothered? Perhaps there was the equal chance that he wouldn't have cared, or even thought it was a *good* idea to film the event. Maybe it

was the type of action he had envisioned for the piece, and if I hadn't proceeded to film without asking, he would have thought I missed out on the best footage I could have obtained that day. After all, there was no opportunity to ask permission, considering the men were busy enough without me waltzing up and pestering them with questions: "excuse me, do you mind if I film you? What do you think of this camera in your face? How are you feeling at this moment? What do you think of sport horse culture?"

My doubts settled back in. I had better be on my best behaviour. I meekly follow Mike into one of the buildings on the site, after the men finally get the horse into the trailer, closing the door and nearly collapsing on one another. For the next half hour I film Mike helping a client; her horse is having trouble with one of its eyes. This client seems unperturbed by my presence. I can only assume Mike requested her permission before I arrived, as the question of access never arises during the brief appointment. The client leaves quick enough and then I am alone again with Mike. He cuts an imposing figure as he towers over me in the dimly lit building.

"What do you want to do now?" he demands of me.

I have to ask. I have to get the project done, after all. "Maybe an interview?"

"Sure. Where?" His tones are clipped now. I sense impatience, but I'm still unsure. The finished film is somewhat disjointed as a result. Boring. The audio rises and falls with his voice, which is quick and sharp, loud and impossible to slow down. I had to insert the best pieces of the diminutive seven-minute interview I could. That's all he would give me. I still wonder what the audience gets out of the video. Is it informative, or is it distracting?

I struggled with what I had read about in my research on visual anthropology. Can this video be considered ethnographic? Or, to put it better, how ethnographic is it? I had attempted to use my academic skills while making the film. The problem was, I wasn't even sure what skills this project required. My boss told me he had specifically looked for an anthropology graduate. He

obviously wanted me to use my specific training. So when making a film, how do I know I'm informing the method with ethnographic theory? What exactly makes an ethnographic film? I conducted an interview. I observed an event, and participated as far as I was allowed. I did the ethical thing, and didn't use the embarrassing footage. In the quotes I used from the interview with Mike, I attempted to maintain a balance between directly relevant "ethnographic" and commercial, promotional material.

I suppose what I did was more along the lines of what's been called "applied visual anthropology." But then again, I've never really been able to tease out the intricacies of these various definitions. To most in the outside world, who have very little or no knowledge of the steps recently taken in visual anthropology theory, the differences in genre are trivial. It was all the same to those I filmed. I was a student with a camcorder, and the training I had received meant little beyond the final product. My participants wanted to look good on film, and if what I had read about visual anthropology helped them do this, so be it. Otherwise, it was all irrelevant.

The film lacks a narrative. I think that's the main problem, and one that reaches beyond visual ethnography; it concerns social science in general. Anthropologists study such fascinating people, are privy to such incredible stories, yet end up writing unbelievably boring books. We are storytellers, yet we seem to have forgotten how to tell stories, in a way anyone but a professional academic understands. Telling an interesting story is all I had wanted to do with the film; what came out was something sterile, devoid of life.

Visual anthropology used to prize such unimaginative films, when anthropologists still thought they were scientists. Esotericism was social capital; it was a hallmark of professionalism. But we no longer subscribe to such a paradigm. The sub-discipline has moved on. It now values a more aesthetic approach to a subject, and tries to incorporate narrative. In other words, much recent, decent visual anthropology tells good stories, in an engaging manner. In my embarrassment of the moment in

Ontario, I forgot all this, and found what little comfort I could in an outdated model of data mining. I “got” what I needed, and then left. The result suffered.

I finished the short film on a whimsical note. I couldn’t think of what else to do. I ended up with very little footage. I wasn’t at all sure of what I had filmed. What was its significance, both to those I filmed, and wider theoretical discussions? Does anyone even remember what I considered my blatantly unethical behaviour? I’m left with a flurry of questions, but no answers. How typical. How ethnographic. Like the cat wandering aimlessly around the veterinary practice, looking for a purpose, I had simply passed through.



# VIKING EXPANSION AND THE SEARCH FOR BOG IRON

✠ GRAHAM BOWLES, RICK BOWKER AND  
NATHAN SAMSONOFF

## ABSTRACT

The Vikings have been highly romanticized in popular literature, portrayed as ferocious warriors and incredible explorers. What we do not see are the strategies and skills that made them successful. This paper focuses on the settlement and expansion patterns of the Norse people, and how they used bog iron as an important resource to aid their expansion across the seas. We will plot known Viking settlement sites against bog iron extraction areas in order to highlight iron's importance as a resource to the Vikings. Bog iron is a type of iron found in bogs, lakes, and rivers that is abundant, easily extracted and processed. This made it an ideal source of iron for a population that was looking for accessible resources in newly settled areas. An examination and subsequent comparison of archaeological site reports from Viking settlements in Northern Europe and North America reveals that there is a direct relationship between Viking sites and bog iron deposits.

## INTRODUCTION

The Vikings were a dominant force in northern Europe for approximately 300 years (Brink, Price 2008). They originated in

Scandinavia and due to being excellent mariners they dispersed and settled in large portions of northern Europe. Frequently during this expansion, the Vikings had the opportunity to settle in a variety of locations of their choosing. This was either because the land was uninhabited, as in Iceland, or because their fighting prowess was far superior to that of the farmers that inhabited these new regions. As such, their settlement locations were not random, and not simply born out of convenience.

Until now, no substantial research has been conducted to correlate bog iron and Viking settlement locations. Bog iron was the primary source of iron ore throughout the Viking world (Brink, Price 2008). This is because it has many properties useful for shipbuilding, such as a resistance to rust. We propose that there is a positive relationship between settlement locations during the period of Viking expansion and the availability of bog iron at these locations. This paper includes a detailed explanation of bog iron use and manufacture patterns in order to show that Vikings actively sought bog iron as a prerequisite for establishing a settlement.

Bog iron is typically found in peat bogs and, to a lesser extent, in rivers and lakes. It is easy to spot potential areas that contain bog iron as there is generally surface discoloration in stagnant areas that provide a visual marker for the dissolved iron content in the water (Weronska 2009). As compared to conventional and complex mining, bog iron extraction is a relatively simple course of action. The bog ore is easy to process with limited technology due to the fact that it does not need to be molten to remove many impurities. Additionally, bog ore often contains silicates, the majority of which do not purify out with the slag. This leaves a final product with a glassy finish that helps to resist rust, which is ideal for saltwater conditions.

The production of iron in Scandinavia began in Denmark in 500 BC (Eriksson 1960) and spread to Norway and Sweden shortly thereafter. Many bog iron processing pits have been found near major waterways and since the Vikings utilized them for many different reasons, this not unexpected. While archaeo-

logical remains related to the production of iron were originally mistaken for cooking pits, a more recent reconsideration of the evidence has shown that these pits are actually the result of a process of pre-treating the bog ore (Espelund 2006). These pits represent the first stages of bog iron metal work and tend to be in close proximity to bog iron sites as well as other types of settlements.

In order to determine if an archaeological site was important for the production of bog iron, various site reports such as Warmlander's 2010 investigations of a Viking Chieftain's farm at Hrísbú in Iceland and Helge Ingstad's writings about the Viking settlement at L'Anse aux Meadows will be examined. We will be looking to see whether or not the sites contain any processed iron, iron artifacts, anvil stones, buildings dedicated to iron production (smithies), smelting furnaces, and most importantly slag (remnants of the smelting processes). The sites' locations will be investigated to see if they have been constructed near bogs, lakes, or rivers that may have provided the ore for smelting.

## SCANDINAVIA

In Scandinavia, specifically at the site of Mosstrond in Norway, a more recent evaluation of pits which were originally thought to be used for cooking or ceremonies have been shown to be used in a pre-treatment of bog-iron (Espelund 2006). These flagstone-lined dug-in furnaces are referred to as *hellegyster*, by the archaeologist T. Hauge (Espelund 2006), and are described as being 45cm deep, 50cm across at the bottom, and 60cm across at the top. Large quantities of slag have been found in association with these pits, sometimes as much as 50kg (Espelund 2006), which emphasizes their importance in the iron production industry of Scandinavia. Carbon-14 dating has placed the *hellegyster* at Mosstrond from 550-800 A.D. Eriksson (1961) states that bog iron dominated the iron production of Norden, the Norse populated areas including Scandinavia, Denmark, Finland and

others, from 500 to 1300 A.D. According to Espelund (2006), Mosstrond is well known as having been a prominent iron production location. Since the damming of Lake Mosvatnd, the water level has erased many peat bogs that were once scattered throughout the area. Despite this, bog-iron ore can be found in the gravel along its shores (Espelund 2006).

In his paper on the charcoal iron industry of Scandinavia, Eriksson (1961:268) provides a map that plots the locations of major settlements such as Telemark and Bergslagen, in relation to known areas that would have allowed for bog iron extraction. The areas around Telemark and Bergslagen in particular were found to have numerous pockets of available bog iron. Another interesting correlation seen on this map is the lack of settlements where there is no evidence for bog iron deposits. Trondheim is the only settlement of a noticeable distance from any deposit. This could possibly be due to our lack of knowledge regarding the location of bog iron deposits at that time, or maybe it was simply a site that was used to gather other resources. Regardless, the information presented here provides good evidence for the importance of this resource to the Norse population.

Since bog iron was originally used to create farming tools and only later used for boat nails and weapons (Eriksson 1961), the local smithies were fairly small-scale operations used by multiple farms. With the relative ease of pre-treatment in the *hellegyster*, any farmer would have been able to produce iron ingots, bars of raw iron that could be processed at a neighbour's smithy. Knowledge that related to accessing iron was widely known among the Norse people (Eriksson 1961), and any settlers leaving Scandinavia would have brought this information with them. The exact techniques that were used vary with time and location due to restrictions within the different environments, and the development of new technological innovations. The fact that most people would have known the basics of metal work may have allowed for easier colonization and expansion. This is demonstrated by evidence for unskilled smelting at L'Anse aux Meadows. As discussed later in this paper, the people were not

as well versed in smelting as compared to people at the “Iron Farms” in Iceland, but they still produced iron.

If more data were available relating to the exact chemical composition of slag found in association with smithies and other metal working areas, the use of these pre-treatment pits would be even more easily tracked throughout the environment. In slag that is produced by smelting iron ore, the SiO<sub>2</sub> % is always 25%, regardless of region, time frame or technique (Espalund 2006). However if it has only gone through pre-treatment the SiO<sub>2</sub> % is much lower (approximately 10%). More research could possibly track this unique technique, not only across Norse colonies, but also across other societies.

## ICELAND

Three main categories of bog iron sites are seen in Iceland. These are based on the level of specialization and dedication towards the production of bog iron. Large scale processing sites, which are also known as “Iron Farms” seem to have been established primarily for the mass production of bog iron. Smaller scale production sites, which consist of large farmsteads and some of the original Icelandic settlements, seem to produce only enough iron to be self-sufficient. Finally there are the non-production sites, which contain little to no evidence that iron was produced there. These non-production sites consist primarily of small farms and possible trading centers, such as markets or ports, and do contain processed iron ingots and artifacts. This would suggest that these sites had iron supplied to them through trade with the large scale “Iron Farms”. Eight Icelandic sites in particular will be examined in the following section. These sites include: Hríðheimur and Hofstaðir (large scale “Iron Farms”); Granastaðir, Háls, and Hríðbrú (large farms with small scale iron production); Reykjavík (an original settlement with small scale iron production); Sveigakot (a small farm with no iron production); and Gásir (a port town with no iron production).

The small-scale sites will be examined first, starting with the site of Reykjavík which is located along the western coast of Iceland and is considered to be one of the first Viking settlements (Einarsson 1995). The first settlement at Reykjavík included a smithy with a furnace for the smelting of bog iron, as well as slag deposits (Einarsson 1995). This indicates that there was iron production at this settlement. However the amount of iron produced was likely only enough to satisfy the settlement's regular iron consumption. While there are no bogs in the vicinity of the site (Einarsson 1995), the local land has been terraformed by generations of Icelanders and any bog that may have existed could have been filled in. *Reykjavík* is located on lowlands along the coast so the likelihood that a bog once existed in the area is very high.

Hrísbrú is a large site located in western Iceland, just north of Reykjavík in the Mosfell Valley. The site consists of a very large farm that is thought to belong to a chieftain or elite Icelandic family (Warmlander 2010). Hrísbrú, like Reykjavík, has a dedicated smithy with a smelting furnace, large slag deposits, and is located next to moderately sized, iron producing bog (Warmlander 2010). The iron production at this site would have been more substantial than what was found at Reykjavík. However, Hrísbrú was a large farm which would have had a higher iron consumption rate than that of Reykjavík, and therefore the iron produced was probably only enough to supply the farmstead.

Granastaðir is a large farm site located in central Iceland, south of Gásir in Eyjafjardarsýsla. Granastaðir is a slightly smaller farm than Hrísbrú, but still includes a smithy with a smelting furnace (Einarsson 1995). Due to the large bog and slag deposits located at Granastaðir, it would appear that iron production was on an even larger scale here than at Hrísbrú. The iron production at this site would have easily sustained the farm with enough left over for trading purposes (Einarsson 1995).

The next site is the farm of Háls located in northern Iceland, between Gásir and Hofstaðir. Háls is an interesting site because even though it was a small farm, it had a comparatively large

iron production industry (Smith 1995). Much like Hrísbú and Granastaðir, Háls includes a smithy, smelting furnaces, slag deposits, and is located next to a bog (Smith 1995). Unlike the other sites, the relatively small size of Háls compared to its iron production facilities suggest that bog iron could have been a staple of trade or wealth for Háls. This does not place Háls into the large-scale production classification because the iron industry found at this site is much smaller than that of Hofstaðir or Hrísheimur.

We will now look at the two large-scale iron production sites, aptly dubbed “Iron Farms” (Edvardson 2006), due to their massive iron production capability. Hofstaðir is located in northern Iceland in the Mývatnssveit, next to a massive iron producing bog. Hofstaðir, though quite large, seems to be more specialized in the processing of iron than other farms such as Hrísbú or Granastaðir are (Ascough 2007). Hofstaðir includes a smithy with a large smelting furnace (Ascough 2007). However, the amount of slag and a closer proximity to such a massive bog would indicate that the ability to produce iron would have greatly exceeded other sites. This would have made Hofstaðir a very wealthy settlement as it is a large farm with a large iron production industry attached to it.

The largest site of iron production site would be that of Hrísheimur, located in northern Iceland next to Hofstaðir in the Mývatnssveit. Hrísheimur, unlike the above-mentioned sites, was specifically built to harvest and process bog iron (Edvardsson 2006). The site contains at least one smithy, though it has been suspected that there may have been a second building, separate from the smithy, used for iron production due to the presence of iron filings (Edvardsson 2006). There may have also been several smelting furnaces near the bog, which would explain the large amount of slag that is deposited across the site (Edvardsson 2006). There is no doubt that Hrísheimur was established for large scale iron production, though it has also been theorized that the site was set up to supply all of the local farmsteads in the area with iron and a communal iron works (Edvardsson 2006).

The last two sites, Sveigakot and Gásir, contained no evi-

dence of iron production, but did contain processed iron ingots. Sveigakot is located south of Hríðheimur in the Mývatnssveit. This site is a small farm, which seems to have been abandoned between its establishment in the late 9<sup>th</sup> century and its subsequent re-establishment during the 12<sup>th</sup> century (McGovern 2006). This site contains some iron ingots, but there is no evidence to suggest it was used for iron production (McGovern 2006). Sveigakot is located very close to Hríðheimur and most likely supplied the “Iron Farm” with agricultural supplies in exchange for iron (McGovern 2006). The last site is the port of Gásir, which is located on the northern coast of Iceland, to the west of Hofstaðir. Gásir is a fairly recent settlement that dates to the 12<sup>th</sup> century (McGovern 2008). Iron ingots and agricultural products that are not thought to have been produced on site suggest that this settlement may have served as both a port and as a local centre for trade (McGovern 2008).

Reykjavík, established in the early 9<sup>th</sup> century (Einarsson 1995), is the oldest site that was examined and seems to represent the standard model of large farms in Iceland. This model includes access to a bog, a smithy, and an iron-smelting furnace in order to be self sufficient in terms of iron production. Hríðbrú, Granastaðir, Háls, and Hofstaðir were all established in the late 9<sup>th</sup> or early 10<sup>th</sup> century using the Reykjavík model, though Háls and Hofstaðir seem to have begun to rely on specialized iron production as a source of trade wealth (Warmlander 2010; Einarsson 1995; Smith 1995; Ascough 2007). Hríðheimur was established in the 12<sup>th</sup> century (Edvardsson 2006) and unlike the other settlements, was designed for large-scale iron production instead of a balance of iron production and agriculture. Sveigakot was small farm, most likely part of a larger farm such as Hofstaðir (McGovern 2006). It was established in the late 9<sup>th</sup> century, abandoned shortly after being created, and reestablished during the 12<sup>th</sup> century (McGovern 2006). Sveigakot was most likely reestablished in order to provide food and other agricultural products to Hríðheimur, which at the time seemed more concerned with the mass production of iron (Edvardsson



2006). Finally, there is Gásir, which was established in the 12<sup>th</sup> century (McGovern 2008). Gásir was a port and most likely a centre of trade for the local area (McGovern 2008) since it was neither a farm nor an iron producing settlement. Processed iron ingots have been found at Gásir which indicates that iron was processed elsewhere, such as Hríðheimur, and then transported to Gásir for trading purposes (Edvardsson 2006). Fish and other marine animal remains have been found at the inland sites of Hofstaðir and Hríðheimur (Ascough 2007), which may also indicate that trade occurred between Gásir and these two sites.

#### L'ANSE AUX MEADOWS

In the summer of 986 A.D. the North Atlantic Sagas tell us that 24 boatloads of people set out from Iceland on their way to Greenland under the leadership of Erik the Red (Fitzhugh, Ward 2000). Not all of these boats made it, but nevertheless the initial settlements of Greenland were successful. It is believed that the population of the Greenland settlements may have at one time peaked above 5000 (Brown 2000). This success, however, did not last indefinitely. A number of factors contributed to the eventual failure of the Greenland settlement, including a reduction in the number of Norwegian merchant ships visiting, and a complete lack of ships from Germany's Hanseatic League (Brown 2000). This meant that there was reduced trade access to necessary goods like iron and tools. As the Greenlanders processed their own bog ore, they further depleted the already scarce resources of wood. Recognizing the necessity of finding wood to burn for processing ore, Leif Eriksson set out west towards North America (Brown 2000).

Viking sagas mention that there were a number of locations along the North American coast that Vikings landed at, but there is currently only one confirmed Viking settlement, L'Anse aux Meadows. The excavations at L'Anse aux Meadows have turned up considerable evidence for the processing of bog

ore, and the production of iron. These findings seem to suggest that there was a purposeful effort to situate the settlement near bog ore sources. The settlement had a sedge peat bog immediately west of the Norse houses (Wallace 2000) and there have been substantial amounts of slag found similar to that at the Scandinavian sites. Fifteen kilograms of slag, most likely from a one-time firing of the furnace, was discovered and it is believed that this would have produced approximately 3kg of usable iron (Wallace 2000). Analysis of the slag showed that the ore had come from the nearby bog and that the workers processing the ore had not been skilled, as considerably more iron could have been smelted out of the ore (Wallace 2000). This supports the idea that iron processing knowledge was likely widespread and not restricted to major centers of trade and commerce. Explorers and settlers would likely have been capable of identifying bog ore sources and producing useable iron on their own.

In addition to slag, there were 98 nail fragments found on the site (Wallace 2000) as well as considerable evidence for wood-working which points to the settlement possibly being used for ship repair. This evidence, combined with the fact that so little iron was manufactured at the site, would suggest that the iron produced from bog ore was used primarily for new nails and not tools. As well, the furnace used to fire the ore was found, and the location of the smithy was determined to be in a separate building from the smelting. The settlement is located adjacent to a source of bog iron and was used for, amongst other things, iron production and ship repair. This provides evidence that the explorers, knowing their ships needed repair, actively sought out a location where they could acquire bog iron and produce new nails.

## CONCLUSION

The importance of bog iron can be seen through the continuous inclusion of smithies and smelting furnaces in Iceland and at L'Anse aux Meadows, combined with the close proximity of

these smithies and furnaces to iron producing bogs. The self-sufficient model of farming would allow Icelandic Vikings to eliminate any sort of dependence on imported iron imports, which would have been difficult and expensive to acquire, especially during the winter storm season. Isolated Viking settlements such as L'Anse aux Meadows and those in Greenland would have had few options for obtaining iron through trade. With the establishment of a focused iron industry at Hríðheimur in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, more Viking settlers would have been able to immigrate to Iceland and set up small farms or villages that did not need to include iron production abilities. By relying on trade with the large iron producing sites these smaller sites could then flourish, allowing for rapid Viking expansion in to Iceland. It also provided an opportunity for the establishment of port towns such as Gásir, which could then be used for transporting large quantities of processed iron around Iceland to other market hubs. These market sites would then become major Icelandic trading centers as well as stopping points for Viking explorers on their way to Greenland or Vinland.

This paper has shown that bog iron was an important resource for the Vikings. Local iron production in Norway was responsible for producing the majority of the farm tools and equipment that they used; it was also used for shipbuilding and weaponry. The Norse have a long history of iron production and bog iron was a major contributor to the raw iron that was used. With new evidence of a two stage refining process for bog iron, we have gained new insight into the importance of metal working in the Viking world. The ability to show that bog iron was important and found at most sites across Norway helped us track its migration along with the expansion of the Viking people. Demonstrating that this was a key resource they looked for when searching for a new settlement location. Further research is needed to uncover more of these pits, and to explore evidence that may have been overlooked at previously excavated sites. This information is required if we wish to fully understand this novel technique.

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# CONCEPTUALIZING RURAL QUEERNESS AND ITS CHALLENGES FOR THE POLITICS OF VISIBILITY

✿ KELLY BAKER

## ABSTRACT

Historically rooted in cities, GLBT identities and communities have been mapped onto a narrative of rural-to-urban migration. Often represented as homophobic, rural space is valued insofar as it is left behind. This article posits rurality as an often-ignored yet pervasive thread of identity, which is absent from hegemonic conceptualizations of queer visibility. While urban queer visibility politics center on the different-but-equal paradigm, I argue that rural queer visibility politics involve a delicate balance of queerness and localness, putting forth an approach of different-but-similar. The construction of GLBT identities in non-urban contexts may therefore complicate dominant conceptions of the closet model.

## INTRODUCTION

This article will conceptualize “the rural” as an alternative mode or intersection of identification that works to complicate, and in some cases run counter to, the basic tenets of queer visibility politics. Recent critiques have shown that much queer theory “unquestionably posits an urbanized subject” (Creed and Ching 1997:7) without considering the vital role of the rural or rus-

tic. Only a handful of works (namely in the disciplines of human geography and literary and cultural studies) have examined sexual identity and community as it manifests outside of North American urban centres (Gray 2009:10). As such, rural places are continually deemed significant insofar as they are left behind; they are presented as playing an unimportant role in the actual constitution of authentic queer identity (Halberstam 2005; Weston 1998). As Creed and Ching note, the urban operates as the assumed reference within much social theory, and this “convergence of rural and urban lifestyles . . . overshadows the continuing significance of rural-based identities” (1997:4). Rural identity, culture, and experience is itself marginalized within both academia and popular culture.

I will begin by briefly discussing the spatiality of queerness and queer subjectivity, noting in particular the inherent urbanness of gay or queer subjectivity. I posit rurality as an often-ignored yet immensely pervasive thread of identity, which is absent from hegemonic, and I would add, urban, conceptualizations of queer visibility. Drawing on my own ethnographic research among GLBT individuals in rural Nova Scotia, I then move into a more detailed discussion of the politics of visibility, highlighting the ways in which rurality is incompatible with the basic tenets of mainstream urban queer visibility politics. While queer visibility politics champion the “out-ness” and visibility of sexual difference as instrumental in achieving such legitimation and liberation, the familial reliance, local power dynamics, class relations and cultural marginalization inherent to rural areas render them ill-suited to such strategies of visibility.

## THE SPACE OF QUEER SUBJECTIVITY

The notion of space has become a useful lens through which to understand both the construction of queer identity and community, and the operationalization of power and oppression (Brown 2000). Indeed, how we inhabit space, both materially and meta-

phorically, plays a fundamental role in the formation of our identities, outlooks, strategies for survival, and communities (Brown 2000). As Ahmed points out, sexual orientation is a matter of how we reside in space; it determines the direction of our desire and with whom we inhabit space (Ahmed 2006:1). While space is crucial to the constitution and reproduction of social identity, social identities, meanings and relations likewise play an active role in producing and reproducing space (Valentine 2002:146). As anthropologist Mary Gray argues, spatial relations play a pivotal role in the particularities and meaning of individuals' claims to queerness (Gray 2009:8).

Foucault (1990), among others, has pointed to the fundamental relationship between space, sexuality, and power. More than a representation of power, space materializes power; it is the dimension of social relations through which power and knowledge become actualized within the world (Brown 2000:3). Indeed, spatial relations segregate and compartmentalize human interaction; controlling presence and absence, as well as inclusion and exclusion, spatial relations work to materialize oppressive and disciplinary relations of power (Brown 2000:3). For instance, Foucault points out that medical and legal definitions of non-normative or queer sexual acts during the late seventeenth century resulted in their debasement and degradation, as well as their segregation and compartmentalization (Foucault 1990:3). As Henri Lefebvre puts it, "space subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships" (1991:73); "[it] is what permits fresh actions to occur, while. . . prohibiting. . . others" (Lefebvre 1991:73).

Homophobia and heterosexism thus operate through the production of space. Indeed, the production and experience of everyday space serves to reinforce heterosexual hegemony in that educational, religious, legal, and medical discourses work to degrade and constrain the public presence of queerness (Berlant and Warner 1998:554). Berlant and Warner point to the institution of intimacy in particular, which works to segregate "personal life" from the public sphere and renders sex in public, or more spe-



cifically, queer public sex cultures, out of place (1998:553). Judith Butler's notion of performativity is also a useful lens through which to understand the heterosexing of space. For Butler, much like the gendering of bodies, the heterosexing of space is an act of performance that is naturalized through repetition and regulation (Butler 1999:25,33). That is, the seeming naturalness of heterosexual space is maintained through subtle and repetitive performances of heteronormative sexuality and gender, including bodily displays of public affection, advertisements and window displays, gendered mannerisms and dress, and conversations and music (Somerville 2000:141; Valentine 2000).

Berlant and Warner, however, point out that the heterosexuality embedded within everyday spaces is not necessarily fixed or stable (Berlant and Warner 1998:555; Valentine 2000). The instability of heteronormative space allows queer individuals to restructure it; they can produce their own spaces or "read heterosexual space against the grain" (Valentine 2000:5), experiencing it and producing it differently. So while on the one hand, everyday space is produced and reinforced as heterosexual, this hegemonic construction can be subverted. As such, the "queering" of urban public space has been historically linked to the emergence of gay politics during early twentieth-century America (D'Emilio 1989). For example, throughout the 20th century, the establishment of gay spaces, such as parades, cafes, bars, bookstores, and neighbourhoods, created the possibility for collective consciousness, struggle, and activity (D'Emilio 1989; Valentine 2002). Such spaces provided public venues in which political consciousness and movements for public recognition could emerge; they provided safety, visibility, and a sense of commonality (D'Emilio 1989; Valentine 2002). In this way, gay culture has been theorized as having a special relationship with urban space.

Much of gay and lesbian history has therefore mirrored the history of the city, with major urban centers being intrinsically linked to the formation of global gay politics and the historical construction of gay identity and community (Halberstam

2005:34; Weston 1998:33). As D'Emilio points out, gay identity emerged in concert with the historical development of urban capitalism, which spearheaded a boom of rural to urban migration and transformed the role of the family and the meanings behind heterosexual relations (1989:102). Similarly, Gayle Rubin, among others, has argued that erotic dissidents required the anonymity and heterogeneity of an urban setting (Rubin 1984). Certainly, while the size, density, and diversity of urban populations work to insulate and alienate individuals from one another, such factors have also been theorized as providing the ideal setting for subcultural formations (Tonkiss 2005:8). The city's capacities to create visibility, consolidate capital, and foster political power among spatially bound groups rendered it the key site for the formation of early gay and lesbian identities (Gray 2009:7).

## QUEERING RURALITY

The development of gay community and identity has paralleled processes of urbanization. As Halberstam points out, the construction of gay subjectivity is itself embedded within a narrative of rural to urban migration, which maps the psychological journey of "coming out" onto a physical journey to the city (Halberstam 2005:36-7; Weston 1998:39-40). Following Mary Gray, this can be understood as a matter of narrative. As such narrative structures "do the cultural work" of privileging one narrative at the expense of others (2009:9). In this way, she argues, the community histories of North American gays "cohere through and hinge on unrelenting narratives that imagine rural spaces as . . . closet[s]" or "premodern trappings" (Gray 2009:9). Purportedly isolated from gay identity, this narrative of progress positions the rural as the necessary shadow against which the political accomplishment of urban gay visibility can be measured and its superior urban spatiality sustained.

In this sense, gayness is configured through a symbolic opposition between the urban and the rural, whereby the latter is po-

sitioned as a closet from which an authentic, metropolitan sexuality must emerge (Halberstam 2005:37; Weston 1998:39-40). Queer subjectivity has been situated within a “linear, modernist trajectory” (Halberstam 2005:36-7), with urban GLBT or queer identities serving as markers of modernity. As both Halberstam and Weston point out, the image of the escape from the countryside into the anonymity and diversity of urban space was embedded within the gay subject from the start (Halberstam 2005:10; Weston 1998:40). A “beacon of tolerance and . . . community” (Weston 1998:40) for queer individuals, the city has been cast as a refuge from the oppression and discipline of small-town surveillance. And much like the distinctions of right-left and east-west discussed by Ahmed (2006:14), the rural-urban distinction is not neutral or even; rather, the urban serves as the straight line, while the rural is a deviation.

Indeed, for Weston, “the gay imaginary” is a symbolic space that configures gayness through a hierarchical distinction between urban and rural space (1998:40). That is, queerness is not only thought to be embedded within an urban location; it is also situated within a symbolic opposition between urban and rural life (Weston 1998:55). This opposition reveals the rural to be the devalued term, and renders rural queers as out of place or somehow “stuck” in a place they would rather not be (Halberstam 2003:162). For the rural-born queer, the process of coming out can be seen as embodying what Ahmed calls “a migrant orientation” (Ahmed 2006:10); that is, “facing toward a home that has been lost, and to a place that is not yet home” (Ahmed 2006:10). Rural space is often represented as inherently oppressive, and characterized by highly traditional gender roles and compulsory heterosexuality (Bell and Valentine 1995:115). It is also portrayed as “a locus of persecution and gay absence” (Weston 1998:40) with tales of isolation, prejudice, and physical violence characterizing the experiences of the queers who live there. And rural queer subjectivities, if discussed at all, are framed as lacking or incomplete (Gray 2009:10). So while rurality plays a key function, albeit as the “other” against which the production ur-

ban queer identities can be measured, much work on sexuality and space fails to consider rural space at all. Not only is rurality neglected with regard to queer theorizing, but the spatial construction of rural queer identities and communities themselves are also absent.

Before entering a more detailed discussion of rurality, it is important to note that queer experiences of space play out on a number of spatial scales, which are “porous, inter-related and provisional spaces” (Valentine 2002:151). Battles over queer rights are fought at the scale of the nation as well as the body and the globe (Valentine 2002:151). Certainly, battles over issues such as AIDS are global crises that are interrelated with and reworked by processes and initiatives formed at the local, and even individual or bodily, level. Likewise, local processes and initiatives are constituted through the global; they are the “product of interactions between local social relations and global influences” (Valentine 2002:151). Western, metropolitan queer identity thus gets reworked and re-contextualized as it is constructed and experienced within non-western, as well as non-metropolitan spatial and cultural contexts (Halberstam 2005; Phillips 2000).

Western models of sexuality and sexual liberation, Phillips argues, should be regarded not as “the ultimate achievement”, but as something that has been produced in distinct conditions (2000:22). That is, the spatial production and experience of sexuality in the specific economic and social conditions of Europe and North America is produced and experienced very differently, and has very different meaning, in non-western and non-metropolitan locales (Phillips 2000:22). Therefore, while recent communication technologies, such as the internet, have allowed those in such locales to participate in “global gay life” the identity of queer sexuality as it is constructed and experienced within non-metropolitan and non-western places does not mirror that of the west or the metropolitan, rather, it is a reworking of global influences within local cultural contexts (Phillips 2000:45).

Indeed, Kennedy and Davis point out that the queer spaces

which proliferated in the United States during the early twentieth century mark the beginning of a distinctly modern as well as western, and metropolitan, queer identity (1993:8). They note that the queer identities that prevail in contemporary urban Europe and America are unique to both this culture and time period (Kennedy and Davis 1993:8). Accordingly, Foucault argues that the notion of a gay identity and community emerged during a time when homosexual acts were becoming increasingly medicalized and pathologized (1990:44). For example, during the latter part of the nineteenth century, “the homosexual” became both a personage and a species, which prompted those identified as such to demand acknowledgement and legitimacy as a collectively identified community (Foucault 1990:43,101). This dominant model of sexual identity is characterized as the “closet model”, whereby gay subjectivity initially lies dormant, “awaiting only the right set of circumstances to emerge” (Halberstam 2003:163). Mobilizing a collective understanding of what it means to be queer or gay, these modes of self-identification, Weston points out, classify gay people as a finite, bounded group; they employ, and universalize, a Western conception of selfhood in which sexual acts and desires are purported “thoroughly to infuse a self” (1998:33).

While such a model of sexual identity has been privileged within much current and historical queer narrative, rural queerness can complicate or work against such identity claims. Indeed, Halberstam reminds us that not all rural queers leave home to become queer; thus, we must consider the possibilities that “the condition of ‘staying put’” may offer in terms of producing alternative or complex queer subjectivities (2005:27). For instance, with their relative isolation from metropolitan queer identity, some rural queers may not position sexuality as the “definitive characteristic of self” (Wilson 2000:210), because doing so could easily negate other parts of their identity, such as ethnicity, class, and local familial history. Rather, rural sexual communities must be understood as a “complex interactive model of space, embodiment, locality, and desire” (Halberstam 2005:45);

and they may exist in proximity to, rather than in distinction from, heterosexualities (Halberstam 2005:39). While hegemonic constructions of mainstream queer identity are inflected with urban-ness, so too are rural queer identities entwined with spatially constructed notions of rural-ness.

However, in order to understand how rurality inflects and challenges hegemonic, metronormative constructions of queer subjectivity, we must first conceptualize rurality as a basis for identity. Creed and Ching point out that within cultural hierarchies such as the rural-urban one, it is the marginalized group who experiences the distinction more intimately and for whom it becomes a more significant element of identity (1997:4). The deeply rooted opposition between urban and rural space has therefore become highly significant in the construction of rural identity. So in some instances, their marginality and alienation can render rural populations vulnerable to the conservative maneuvering of the far right, who exploit rural people's alienation, and "transform... their bitter desperation into [conservative] political action" (Creed and Ching 1997:29). Certainly, there are particular fears that take shape within rural white populations whereby fear of Jews, blacks, and queers can be emblematic of white rural masculinity and marginal, rural identity (Halberstam 2003:29,31). However, our limited understandings of rurality and the social construction of place has prevented us from considering how (rural) place intersects with class, race, gender, and sexuality to produce meaningful, self-consciously resistant, means of non-urban identification (Creed and Ching 1997:27). Manifested in everyday "mundane cultural activities," such as music, food, clothing, and recreation, and in tandem with more situated markers of (rural) place such as regional dialect and claims to hometown origin, the rural/urban hierarchy in general, and rurality in particular, generates not only political, but also social and personal identification (Creed and Ching 1997:3).

For instance, often "riddled with insider-outsider social structures" (Wilson 2000:208), the key to survival in many rural places revolves around social conformity and community interdepen-

dence. In this sense, the power of small-town loyalty and familial ties should not be overlooked (Wilson 2000:214). In places built upon solidarity, familiarity, and belonging, and where familiar locals are valued above any other identity claim, such ties can work to transform the “strange” or the “queer” into something, or rather, someone, who is both recognizable and familiar (Gray 2009:31,38-9). As Gray points out, many rural queers enact “politics of rural recognition” which privilege one’s credentials as “just another local” (2009:37) and denounce claims of difference. Rather than simply being “out and proud,” rural queers often express their queerness within and through the norms of their communities. In this way, the spatial construction and experience of gay or queer identity in non-urban contexts may defy or complicate dominant conceptions of the closet model (Gray 2009:37; Wilson 2000). Operating as a thread, rather than a core identity (Seidman 2004:89), queerness may be negotiated so as not to undermine other elements of one’s identity.

#### RURAL QUEERNESS AND THE POLITICS OF VISIBILITY

Like Anna Clark, who aims to “restore agency” (Clark 1996:27) to the process by which individuals’ sense of self is deliberately constructed in direct personal, material and cultural contexts, I too seek to posit rural queerness as a legitimate identity practice in its own right, and not a lesser or lacking version of mainstream, hegemonic, urban queer politics. Indeed, the modern self, Clark argues, is “a reflexive process”; something that is “worked on, invented, and reinvented” (2000:27), based upon individual experience and context. And place also matters (Clifford 2001); it enters our bodies, minds, and hearts and serves as a “way of seeing, knowing and understanding the world” (Allnut 2009: 3). We, as individuals, are always emplaced; “there is no body without its place in the world, no matter what that place is” (Allnut 2009:3). While I have thus far discussed the heteronormativ-

ity of space and the concomitant queering of it; the hegemonic urbanity embedded within narratives of queer subjectivity; and the challenges queer rurality poses to such narratives, I will now discuss the politics of visibility, and illuminate how such politics are incompatible with the structures of life, community, and identity in rural space.

While Gray's "politics of rural recognition" illustrates the challenge rural queerness can make to the hegemonic, metronormative closet model of sexual identity, it simultaneously illuminates an alternative approach to the politics of visibility. Indeed, gay and lesbian visibility politics are dependent upon the politics of identity inherent within the closet model of sexual identity. Simply put, identity politics operationalize identity as a "crucial ground of experience, a course of social knowledge, and a basis for activism" (Halperin and Traub 2009:25); they rely on collective identification as a mode of political empowerment (Halperin and Traub 2009:25). And as previously noted, the collective definition of such identification is formed by hegemonic metronormative narratives of urban queer subjectivity, which both assumes an urban location and privileges sexual identity above all other identity claims.

While the current goals and achievements of the gay pride movement, Halperin and Traub argue, revolve around acceptance and assimilation, they also include the right to be different and be legitimated based upon that difference (2009:3). Visibility politics draw upon this assertion and champion the "out-ness" and visibility of these differences as instrumental in achieving such legitimation and liberation. Rural subjectivities, however, are inherently incompatible with such visibility claims. The accomplishment of gay visibility is inherently graphed onto urban space and actually requires the rural as an "otherness" against which this achievement is measured (Halperin and Traub 2009:9). As such, the visibility politics that underlie modern, authentic gay and lesbian identities, are, as Gray points out, "tailor-made" for the "population densities; capital; and systems of gender, sexual, class, and racial privilege that converge



in cities” (2009:30). The familial reliance, local power dynamics, class relations and cultural marginalization inherent to rural areas render them ill-suited to the strategies of visibility taken up by the predominantly middle-class, urban-focused North American GLBT movement (Gray 2009:30).

It must not be assumed, however, that rural places are “en-demically hostile” or somehow incapable of making room for queer differences (Gray 2009:30). Rather, in order to foster belonging and visibility in rural areas, rural queers must work through the structures of rural life, especially the dynamics of class, gender, race, and location (Gray 2009:30). The combination of physical proximity and social distance, or, indifference, within cities has been theorized as representing politics of tolerance whereby differences are by default generally accepted (Tonkiss 2005:23). The internal makeup of cities, or what urban sociologist Georg Simmel referred to as “the conditions of metropolitan life” (1950:410), revolves around the conglomeration of large numbers of people with diverse interests and perspectives. Rural areas, in contrast, are governed by sameness and familiarity, and are organized around an appreciation for solidarity, which is expressed through blending in (Gray 2009:38). Rooted particularly in family connections, familiarity and belonging are central to the structures of rural life.

Indeed, rural constructions of selfhood revolve around family, which operates as the primary category through which rural dwellers obtain and return respect (Gray 2009:37; Wilson 2000). Family connections, and community standing in general, have tangible consequences. In poverty stricken rural areas, the family unit represents the structure through which information regarding employment, housing, and many other civic services often taken for granted in cities, is exchanged (Gray 2009:39). At the same time, strangers, who are not marked by a familiar family name or local presence, are easily dismissed as intruders meddling in local affairs (Gray 2009:37). In this way, Gray argues that the invoking of familial ties can operate as a key strategy in the politics of rural queer visibility because it not only

allows rural queers to avoid marginalization and be integrated into their local communities, but it also maintains their access to the bare necessities that are needed to simply get by. While urban queer visibility politics, at their very tamest, center on the different-but-equal paradigm, rural queer visibility politics involve a delicate balance of queerness and localness, putting forth a logic of different-but-similar.

My own ethnographic research in rural Nova Scotia serves as a case in point. For instance, although Janis, a queer-identified woman in her early sixties, did not move to rural Nova Scotia until she was in her twenties, she attributes her hard work, community involvement and neighbourly connections as granting her respect and acceptance within the rural community. Rural community dynamics, in her opinion, render rural areas more, not less, capable of acceptance:

People in the country are more capable of accepting us. They are more dependent on us, and they're more aware of that . . . my involvement has protected me. . . helping people, repairing things. My neighbour was a well-respected member of the community, a very solid neighbour. . . . In the country you're protected by certain things . . . hard work is respected, and they saw that I was working hard, and was working good with people.

For Janis, the community interdependency that characterizes rural areas renders rural folk more capable of accepting difference. Echoing Gray's "politics of rural recognition" (2009), Janis's involvement within the community, via hard work, helping people, and repairing things, along with her claims to local-ness via her relationship with her neighbor, helped her earn respect, acceptance, and integration within the rest of the rural community.

In a similar vein, Chris, a gay man in his mid-thirties, teaches high school in the same town in which he grew up. He states: "99% of my students have been supportive . . . I mean, [their families] knew me since they were born. It [being gay] doesn't make me different." For Chris, the fact that his students and their families have known him all his life has earned him support and acceptance. However, for Chris, being gay "doesn't make [him] differ-

ent;" as he states, "I don't let that aspect define me." Like Janis, Chris draws upon his familiarity and similarity with the rural community as a source of acceptance. His claim to a gay or queer subjectivity is mediated through the structures of rural life posited by Gray (2009). Rather than drawing upon his sexual difference as a basis for identification, Chris searches for similarity; he embraces his personal and familial history with other families in the area as a source of identification and acceptance.

Betty, a lesbian in her late-fifties, who moved to rural Nova Scotia in her twenties, similarly points out:

"50% of the community knows who I am and they seem to like me and to have accepted me for what I am, it's not a problem. But I'm not out there, 'I'm lesbian; I'm just me, I'm just, you know. . . ' you probably wouldn't even know [that I was a lesbian] if I was in a crowd, you know how you can tell sometimes. But, you know, I fit right in here, no problem at all."

For Betty, sexuality is not the definitive aspect of her identity. Rather, she notes, "I'm just me." While half of the community is aware of and has accepted her sexuality, she is also not "out there" about it. Here it is again evident that not only are rural areas not ultimately hostile to sexual difference, but sexual difference can itself be expressed in unique ways that counter mainstream approaches to queer community and visibility. While Betty is not closeted, she is not particularly "out there" or expressive of her sexual difference. Her statement: "I'm not out there 'I'm lesbian'; I'm just me" demonstrates that counter to mainstream visibility politics, Betty locates her sense of self by fitting in with her rural community rather than marking herself as different. This is also echoed by Bonnie, who notes:

I was never one to be you know, rash and overt about my orientation. . . . So you know, I didn't push the envelope. . . everybody knows that I'm a lesbian. . . . I don't shy away from being who I am but I am also not overt about my being queer. It's within a context of neighbourliness and friendships and just kind of sharing, you know, going to community events at the local hall, and you know, being a part of the community.

For Bonnie, although she is out of the closet, and doesn't "shy away" from being herself, she is also not "overt" about being a lesbian; she doesn't "push the envelope." Rather, the importance lies in "neighbourliness," "friendships," and "community events," that is, being an active member of the rural community. Openly asserting her orientation or "difference" at every opportunity would hinder or neglect those parts of her identity. While not denying that aspect of her identity, Bonnie, like Chris and Betty, values her sexuality without building her life around it; she approaches it as an identity thread, rather than a core identity (Seidman 2004:89). Such an approach, Halberstam points out, does not necessarily signify the closet (2003:163). Rather, for some rural queers, the spatial construction and experience of GLBT or queer identity in non-urban contexts may defy or complicate dominant conceptions of the closet model and the politics of visibility (Seidman 2004:163; Wilson 2000). Contrary to embracing a politics of GLBT or queer visibility, such individuals may seek and gain acceptance of their sexuality not by asserting their difference, but by reinforcing their familiarity and commonality with the members of the rural community. That is not to say that many urban queer folk approach their sexual difference in similar ways; rather, my aim here is to draw attention to the alternative approaches to community and identity evident among queers living in rural space.

## CONCLUSION

In this article, I have demonstrated how rurality is an immensely pervasive thread of identity, which works to complicate dominant models of queer identity and politics of visibility. Examining the rural in this way not only highlights alternative constructions of queer subjectivity; it also exposes the hegemonic urbanity implicit within mainstream constructions of queer subjectivity. Indeed, queer subjectivity is itself spatialized as urban; constituted within the specific historical conditions or

the city, and mirroring processes of urbanization, queer identity is structured as a migration, with the space of the city working to authenticate modern queer subjectivity. Rural space is simultaneously constructed as the closet from which identities can emerge, and escape. In this way, queer subjectivity is governed by a symbolic urban-rural hierarchy; at the same time, rural queer subjectivities are rendered either impossible, incomplete, or inauthentic.

While the heteronormativity of everyday space, and the concomitant queering of it, have been examined within queer studies, the distinction between urban and rural space has not. Rural space, when visible, is rendered insignificant or hostile to queerness, and the politics of visibility that characterize the modern GLBT movement are inherently spatialized as urban. This hegemonic urbanism makes invisible the particularities and significance of rural space; the structures of life, community, and identity within rural spaces is incompatible with the basic tenets of mainstream visibility politics. Rather, queer visibility politics in rural areas must work through these unique structures, operating through familiarity, rather than difference. This article has demonstrated much queer studies' shortcomings in acknowledging and theorizing rural space, and has illuminated the important omissions with regard to rural queer subjectivity that exist as a result.

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# BEYOND NEGOTIATING IMPOSSIBILITIES: THE ART OF PALESTINIAN CREATIVE RESISTANCE

✦ MADALENA SANTOS

## ABSTRACT

In this essay I explore the idea of art as creative resistance against the modern-day colonization and occupation of Palestine. I reflect on Achille Mbembe's post-colonial subjectivities in "crisis", modes of self-writing, and necropolitical models of occupation and sovereignty to suggest ways beyond negotiating impossibilities in the colonial context. I consider Mbembe's theoretical contributions to put forward an alternative perspective that recognizes the importance of art in creating living memory, preserving historical narrative, and transforming the dominant ethno-national narrative which has purposely excluded a people from its story.

## INTRODUCTION

In Stephen Duncombe's (2002:8) scholarly resource on political activism, he explains how cultural resistance and political action can create a "free space" to challenge and transform the ideological and material hold of dominant power. Ideologically, cultural resistance creates a space for "new language, meanings,

and visions of the future” (Duncombe 2002:8). Materially, it provides places of community, networking, and organizational opportunities (Duncombe 2002:8). Rather than render the resistance I explore as *cultural*, in this essay I consider the possibilities for what I term creative resistance against ongoing colonization and occupation of Palestine. To suggest ways beyond negotiating impossibilities in the colonial context, I reflect on Achille Mbembe’s (Mbembe and Roitman 1995; Mbembe 2001, 2002, 2003) post-colonial subjectivities in “crisis”, modes of self-writing, and necropolitical models of occupation and sovereignty. In considering Mbembe’s theoretical contributions I put forward an alternative perspective that recognizes the importance of art in creating living memory, preserving historical narrative, and transforming the dominant ethno-national narrative which has purposely excluded a population from its story. i

While Mbembe’s (Mbembe and Roitman 1995; Mbembe 2001, 2002, 2003) suggestions for the exercise of self-hood apply to Palestinian resistance from within Palestine and in the greater Diaspora, there are important aspects of colonial resistance that his theoretical proposal is unable to address. This includes aspects of art that interrogates gender and utilizes dichotomous colonial categorizations to resist, challenge, and ultimately transcend historical simplifications. In this paper I retain Mbembe’s (Mbembe and Roitman 1995; Mbembe 2002, 2003) thought on the impossibility of the post-colonial as the framework for my discussion on the dissonance of Palestine. However, I then shift the emphasis of my study to the novelty that art makes possible in considering the question of Palestine. Through the expression of creative resistance in Hany Abu-Assad’s film *Paradise Now* (2005), Maryse Gargour’s documentary film *The Land Speaks Arabic* (2008), and selections from Rafeef Ziadah’s spoken word album *Hadeel* (2009 a,b), I explore the use of art as a political practice that enables the formation of new ideological and material spaces. Arguably, such spaces challenge and resist the status quo discourse on Israel/Palestine. In elaborating on possibilities, I return to the beginning of my initial reflections on the creative

resistance of art to discuss how diverse strategies can be used to reshape, counter, and transform the logics of racialized exclusion and political violence that have been silenced in the storytelling of the Israeli nation.

#### (IM)POSSIBILITIES FOR THE LIVING DEAD

In *African Modes of Self-Writing* Mbembe (2002) critiques the historicist thinking of Afro-radicalism and nativism, which he argues, have hindered rather than assisted the process of attaining an African selfhood. According to Mbembe (2002:240), the “current” of Afro-radicalism uses “Marxist and nationalist categories .... [to present itself as] ‘democratic’, ‘radical’ and ‘progressive’”, while nativism emphasizes the unique identity of Africans to assert African self-hood. Central to each “current” are the historical events of slavery, colonization, and apartheid, which are attributed with “a particular set of canonical meanings [related to self/other alienation and notions of property]” (Mbembe 2002:241). To move beyond what Mbembe calls “the dead end” of simplistic historical notions of victimization in the struggle for selfhood, he asserts that it is necessary to overcome arguments which equate identity with race and geography to reveal “intersecting practices ... to settle [not only] factual and moral disputes about the world but also to open the way for *self-styling*” (2002:242).

Mbembe’s (2003) conceptualization of *necropower* and *necropolitics* provides a fitting image for the impossibility of the present-day situation of Palestine. As such it encapsulates Israel’s policies and practices of apartheid, ongoing colonization and continued appropriation of Palestinian land for the expansion of Jewish-Israeli settlements (Abu El-Haj 2010:39, Abu-Laban and Bakan 2008:644, 646, 651, Goldberg 2008:40). Rather than the Foucauldian notion of the biopolitical as a regulation and determination of life (Foucault 2003:241), necropower places the sovereign’s right over death at the fore of the political. According

to Mbembe (2003:40), necropower marks the contemporary political space of “death-worlds. Bureaucratic discourse and Western rationality show state sanctioned killing as justified and something other than murder (Mbembe 2003:23). Mbembe (2003:18) underscores the relationship between the technical advancement for putting people to death and the racist ideologies of the nation-state including class-based racism. This, he asserts “in translating the social conflicts of the industrial world in racial terms, ended up comparing working classes and ‘stateless people’ of the industrial world to the ‘savages’ of the colonial world” (Mbembe 2003:18). Accordingly, with the rise of the nation-state, race is imposed upon groups based on constructed differences such as class or statelessness that are not necessarily connected to biological notions of race difference. The racialization of certain human bodies diminishes their value and worth as people. Furthermore, racialization facilitates the removal and destruction of human bodies, which are consequently seen as less than human.

Mbembe’s (2003:17) discourse on the significance of racism to nation building and the colonial enterprise is similarly shared in Hannah Arendt’s (1973) renowned work *Origins of Totalitarianism*. Arendt (1973:159) contends that while it is possible to trace what she describes as *race-thinking* and the racist practices that race-thinking inspired sometime between the eleventh to the early nineteenth century, the idea of racism based on a single ideology rather than a multitude of conflicting opinion only took hold in the early twentieth century. It was during this period of imperialism and colonialism, and upon the foundation of the eighteenth century scientific revolution that the systematic genocidal application of race theory began to be employed to categorize race difference for political purposes (Arendt 1973:158-9). For Arendt (1973:158), race thinking associates “dignity and importance” to the idea of racism and moves the conception of hierarchical race difference beyond that of a matter of opinion to the construction of knowledge. This is based on the uncontested notion of a ‘hierarchy of races’

or in other words on “the ideology of race” (Arendt 1973:158). To Arendt (1973:158), race-thinking ideology during and following the enlightenment period was based on pseudoscience and anthropological difference that syncretically merged religious, nationalist, economist, cultural, and biological categories to create distinct racial groups. The pursuits of imperialistic and totalitarian power at this time link directly to the emergence of race-thinking as an ideology through which political powers identify the legal mechanisms to legitimize the segregation and killing of populations: the escalation which occurred in tandem with the rise of the nation-state (Arendt 1973:161).

The political ability to separate and kill populations with legal sanction leads Mbembe (2003:12) to interrogate the apparent contradiction between the sovereign’s right over life and death: “Under what practical conditions is the right to kill, allow to live, or to expose to death exercised? Who is the subject of this right? [...] Imagining politics as a form of war, we must ask: What place is given to life, death, and the human body?”. Mbembe’s (2003) variation on Foucault’s biopolitics and bio-power focuses on the rule and regulation of death rather than life to transform the perspective of analysis from that of the sovereign to that of the ruled. ii

## COLONIAL OCCUPATION

According to Mbembe (2003:25) all forms of colonial occupation create “a new set of social and spatial relations” that “seize, delimit, and assert control over a physical geographical area”. The creation of such new spatial relations or “territorialisation” establishes colonial “boundaries and hierarchies, zones and enclaves”, “subverts existing property arrangements”, “classifies people according to different categories”, “extracts resources”, and “manufactures large reservoirs of cultural imaginaries” (Mbembe 2003:25). As he explains:

*These imaginaries give meaning to the enactment of differential rights to differing categories of people for different purposes within the same space; in brief, the exercise of sovereignty. Space is therefore the raw material of sovereignty and the violence it carries with it. Sovereignty means occupation, and occupation means relegating the colonized into a ... zone between subjecthood and objecthood.*

(Mbembe 2003:25)

Thus, Mbembe (2003:26) identifies the zone between subjecthood and objecthood as common to occupation. Yet he notes that the “spatialization of colonial occupation” embodies particularized structural forms. For instance, Mbembe states that in South Africa

*“...the functioning of [reserve] homelands and [structural] townships entailed severe restrictions on production for the market by blacks in white areas, the terminating of land ownership by blacks except in reserved areas, the illegalization of black residence on white farms (except as servants in the employ of whites), the control of urban influx, and later, the denial of citizenship to Africans”*  
(2003:26).

In comparison, the spatialization of the French colonial occupation of Algeria divided space through force which was both discursive and material to create “boundaries and internal frontiers epitomized by barracks and police stations; ... regulated by the language of pure force, immediate presence, and frequent and direct action; and ... premised on the principle of reciprocal exclusivity” (Mbembe 2003:26).

In both cases the relations of rule in the colonial project enabled the sovereign “to define who matters and who does not, who is *disposable* and who is not” (Mbembe 2003:27). The ability of the sovereign to determine death is therefore common to

all colonial projects. What differs is the practices for regulating, disciplining, and destroying the human body. Consequently, the methods and means of resistance and agency also differ.

While past and present colonial regimes share many commonalities, Mbembe (2003:27) maintains that “late-modern colonial occupation differs in many ways from early-modern occupation, particularly in its combination of the disciplinary, the biopolitical, and the necropolitical”. The necropolitical is governed by the regulation of death rather than the life. Through the regulation and control of death in the form of “the terror of the sacred”, the late-modern colonial state claims “sovereignty and legitimacy from the authority of its own particular narrative” of historical suffering, or in Foucauldian terms, its *counter-history* (Mbembe 2003:27). This is further complicated by the notion of its “divine right to exist” (Mbembe 2003:27). The use of such narratives not only obscures the nature of the colonial project, but further attempts to distort the understanding of who is colonizer and who is colonized.

For Mbembe (2003:27) three major characteristics are at work in relation to “the specific terror formation”. First, the colonizing power fragments territory using the mechanisms and techniques of modern colonial projects to seal off and expand settlements. This “render[s] [the] movement [of the colonized] impossible and ... separate[s] [the colonized and the colonizers] along the model of ... [an] apartheid state” (Mbembe 2003:27-8). The fragmentation of territory under late-modern occupation is also vertical in a three-dimensional manner “though schemes of over - and underpasses ... [that separate] airspace from the ground”(Mbembe 2003:28). iii Second, these colonial surveillance techniques are both “inward” and “outward” looking (Mbembe 2003:28). Despite such constant surveillance, the segregated colonized populations are also secluded in what Mbembe (2003:28) refers to as a “splintering occupation”. Third, the use of technology, which facilitates “the occupation of the skies” and targeted precision-killing is combined with what Mbembe (2003:29) identifies as “the tactics of medieval

siege warfare adapted to the networked sprawl of urban refugee camps". These three mechanisms and techniques of ruling mark the most distinctive differences between what Mbembe (2003) identifies as the archetype of late-modern colonial occupation in Palestine and that of the modern colonial occupation of Algeria and South Africa.

## CREATING LIVING MEMORY

In documenting the modern-day actualization of the policies and practices of the racialized Israeli colonial state that seizes, limits, and asserts control over Palestinian "bare life" (Agamben 1998), the art of Abu-Assad's film *Paradise Now* (2005) poetically illustrates the frustrating experience of a people who exemplify the living dead. In doing so, Abu-Assad's (2005) film creates a space for conversation that interrogates the West's notions of modern "democratic" governing rationalities. *Paradise Now* (2005:00:30-01:58 min) opens with a checkpoint scene - a routine part of daily life for Palestinians. Armed Israeli soldiers check personal identification and bags. Long lines of taxis and people on foot wait for permission to enter and exit within the occupied territory that is their home. The everyday is marked by an inability to move freely or to live with reasonable security. The materialization of barbed wire fences and concrete walls of separation, military vehicles, watchtowers, and invisible drones soaring above ground are symbolic of the imprisonment of the population. Through the necropolitical governing techniques of verticality over land, water and air, Israel produces and regulates Palestinian death (see Mbembe 2003:27-28).

The subjective experiences of the characters in *Paradise Now* (2005) speak to the miserable and humiliating conditions of the everyday crisis of Palestine. Yet, it is precisely the necropolitical landscape presented in the film, which urges viewers to question how one population can have such control over an other and how people continue to struggle against this domination.



The observation of the everyday subjective experience of the crisis that is recognized as banal and ordinary, institutionalized and further normalized (Mbembe and Roitman 1995:325) is what *Paradise Now* (2005) seeks to resist, counter, and ultimately transform.

The main character in the film, Said, chooses political action that will inevitably bring about his own death. Through his death he chooses to lay to rest his father's transgression as a collaborator, and simultaneously to resist the on-going violation of his humanity. Said's death represents his agency to choose freedom over a living death. Arguably, it is the film's capacity to provoke a desire to comprehend a political situation in which freedom exists through death, rather than the subjective experiences of individual characters, which reveals a way forward beyond the agency of death. The dialogue between other characters in the film, Suha and Said, Khaled and Suha, and later Khaled and Said, exposes the complexity in the choice of martyrdom, which beckons the audience to contextualize everyday life in contemporary Palestine. For example, Suha argues that the use of suicide bombings as a tactic will never enable Palestinians to achieve freedom since they only result in further oppression by the Israelis, while Khaled contends that other methods of struggle have also failed to achieve this end and that life has become a continuous process of death (Abu-Assad 2005: 66:07-68:06 min). The seemingly equivalent number of martyr and collaborator videotapes further signifies the impossibility of negotiating freedom for Palestinians under occupation (Abu-Assad 2005:61:46-62:17 min). Choices other than death as resistance exist for Suha and Khaled. Said, however, is limited by the reality of historical conditions of occupation connected directly to his family. While Said negotiates the impossibility of his freedom in choosing the agency of death, it is through the characters' exchange of ideas that Abu-Assad's (2005) narrative creates a "living memory". As a result, one comes to understand the complexity of responsibility and accountability in the modern-day colonial situation.

In the film *Paradise Now* (2005:20:00-21:15 min), Suha questions Said about why the cinema was destroyed in a Palestinian demonstration against an Israeli invasion. Said's response to this question expresses the futility of living a life in which arbitrariness, even the arbitrariness of the initial colonial exploit, reigns: "Why us?", he retorts. Said's provocative question is considered in Gargour's documentary film *The Land Speaks Arabic* (2008). In many ways, the Zionist movement chose Palestine arbitrarily. Zionism was and is not a religious movement but has rather used and continues to use religious dogma as moral authority to justify the choice of Palestine for the creation of an ethno-nationalist Jewish state (Pappe 2006:10). Through an intersection of discourses *The Land Speaks Arabic* (2008) provides an account of the history of Palestine from the beginning of the Zionist movement in the late 1800s until al-Nakba or the colonial establishment of the state of Israel on May 15, 1948. iv Gargour's film presents the work of religious scholar and historian Dr. Nur Masalha. Masalha uses archival data of official Israeli documents, Zionist literature, and British and American newsprint to recount how the Zionist movement structured a narrative based on the falsified notion that the land of Palestine was uncultivated and almost barren. Following this Zionist myth - as Palestine was inhabited by only a few nomadic peoples with no established communities and because Jewish peoples had been persecuted for centuries and needed security - it made for the perfect Jewish homeland (see Said 1992:5,7). v As Mbembe (2001:25) points out, when sovereign right is used arbitrarily or under the "right of conquest" there appears to be some rationale, however illogical and irrational, behind actions and ideologies.

While *The Land Speaks Arabic* (2008) makes reference to the Second World War, it does not discuss the Holocaust, as the Nazi concentration camps did not initiate the design of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Instead the documentary corrects the misinformation concerning the establishment of the Israeli state

to reveal the premeditated design to transfer the Palestinian population and colonize the land (see also Pappé 2006:10-15). The perspective which Gargour invites in her film on the question of Palestine, demonstrates the existence of a dynamic population of Arab-speaking Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Palestinians living in urban centres as well as in the countryside prior to the establishment of Israel. The film suggests that it was the idea of transforming Palestine into an all-Jewish state that created problems with Palestinians, which at the beginning of this process included Jewish Palestinians. Accordingly, the Zionist colonization of Palestine was not based on questions of religion or immigration but based on the injustice of the colonial project. Before 1919 there was very little Jewish immigration to Palestine. Indeed, as is well documented in much of the literature on Zionism, Jewish people comprised one-third of the population and owned less than seven percent of all the land of Palestine prior to May 1948 (Davis 1987:22; Falah 1996; Khalidi 2001:12; Pappé 2006:29-30; Yuval-Davis 1987:39). However, since Zionism set Israel out to be *the* nation for Jews, regardless of where they resided or claimed citizenship at the time, there was a perceived need to make Jews the majority of the population (Davis 1987:9).

Gargour's film outlines the processes used to establish the Israeli state, which involved forced expulsion, exile, murder, massacre, and the political assassination and imprisonment of Palestinians. Through visual and narrative means she also illustrates the destruction of hundreds of Palestinian towns and villages that although implemented and performed by Zionist rule, were facilitated through the laws and governance of Western colonialist forces. vi As a direct result of British rule, in particular the Balfour Declaration, concrete steps were taken to ensure the creation of the Zionist state (see also Abu-Laban and Bakan 2008:647; Pappé 2006:13). According to the Palestinian story put forward in *The Land Speaks Arabic* (2008), drastic demographic changes began to occur in the period from the 1920s to the 1930s when Palestine was under British colonial power. Since the late 1800s until the 1930s officials in the public do-

main spoke of cooperation with Palestinians and the legitimate purchase of land (Gargour 2008:28-30:20 min). Privately, however, they deliberated on the idea of “organized transfer” - the engineered removal of the Palestinian population (Gargour 2008:28-30:20 min). Archival documents such as meeting minutes reveal the plans to transfer non-Jewish Palestinians to TransJordan and Iraq. The Zionists and their supporters determined that transfer was the only solution to what they determined to be the Palestinian problem. As the 1941 Director of the Land Department of the Jewish National Fund Yozef Weitz stated: “They [the Palestinians] are too much and too rooted. The only way is to eradicate them and cut them at the roots” (Gargour 2008:33:22-33:33 min).

Gargour’s film also documents the popular Palestinian uprisings against such acts - much which remains out of the dominant Western purview - in the 1935 rebellion in countryside as well as the 1936 strikes in Jaffa. The British ultimately crushed the rebellion (Gargour 2008:34:20 min; Qumsiyeh 2011:72-73). Additionally, throughout the period from 1936 to 1939 the British supported the Zionist cause by disarming the Palestinians, which prevented them from being able to engage in military action in 1948 (Gargour 2008:34:38-34:40 min). At the same time, the Zionists were permitted to have an arms industry and were trained as a military garrison (King 2007:54-55; Qumsiyeh 2011:87,96). Gargour’s film reveals that after 1948 the idea of transfer became a Zionist military project. People were driven out of their homes and off their land by a variety of methods - grenades, shooting, and bombs. The first Prime Minister of Israel David Ben Gurion clearly articulates the project of Israel in terms of war. For him the notion of transfer can only apply in a situation of war as the “idea of ours and not ours is a concept of peace” (Gargour 2008:46 min).

## TRANSFORMING THE DOMINANT ETHNO-NATIONAL NARRATIVE

At the heart of population transfer is the question of ethno-demography (Kanaaneh 2002:28; Pappé 2006:13,34-5). According to Himani Bannerji (2003:99), all ethno-nationalist projects construct a “hierarchical set of differences between people living within a national/political territory on grounds of racialized ethnicities, including religion, thus calling for their erasure from and subordination in the main frame of society, culture and history”. Remarkably, in colonial contexts, indigenous populations are racialized as ‘the Other’ while white colonizers represent themselves as citizens who belong to the land. Natives are thus transformed into “aliens” (Abdo 2003:133; Bannerji 2003:102). The mechanisms and techniques used to create differences between colonizers and indigenous peoples in the ruling apparatus of colonial states are easily identifiable in the case of Israel/Palestine.

Rafeef Ziadah’s (2009a:00:00-02:18 min) personal story as a refugee in her spoken word “Savage” contests the Israeli state’s moral authority to create an all Jewish state and further interrogates the notion of homeland, indigeneity, and terrorism as well as self-determination and resistance in the Israeli-Palestinian context:

*Tonight, tonight, I make no apologies/ ... I am what I am  
indigenous from Palestinel... I am your savage, your terrorist/  
... Demographic threat, born to a demographic threat and  
inshaallah will give you your next demographic threat/ Wrap  
her in a hattah and name my baby girl Yafa/ ... My mother  
rubbed olive oil in my hair and in my skin until the smell  
of Palestine seeped through to my veins/ I have an immune  
system you can only dream of/ Built on UNRWA hommous  
and foul viil/ [...] explain this to me - I have lived a refugee  
while you took my home and they tell me you’re Polish  
and some god promised you my land/ Can I have a phone  
number, a fax, an email for your god? I’d like to have a chit*

*chat/ Don't know when god became a real estate agent/ And of all the world decided to promise away my land/[...] Don't you see, don't you see? The colour of my skin is the colour of the soil in Palestine/ Every rock in Jerusalem knows my last name/ And every wave hitting the Haifa shore is waiting for me to return/ And I will return and I will always be on your mind/ ... In the stones of your homes, in the cactus plants/ I will always be on your mind/ ... I am your savage/ your terrorist/ ... Always there to haunt you.*

Through Ziadah's (2009a) poetic verse, she urges listeners to question the historical narrative they may be familiar with and the current stories that are offered in the mainstream media which portray Palestinians as savages and terrorists. She begins with an assertion that she will not apologize for her position as a political subject/object that her identification as a Palestinian woman necessarily entails. Through the dominant Israeli ethno-national narrative she has been made alien and other - a demographic threat, a savage, a terrorist. She responds to this otherness with her personal story that roots her life to Palestine through the metaphor of the landscape in the cactus, olives, soil, stones, and sea. Rooting herself firmly in Palestine, her prose figuratively alludes to her newborn child as a "demographic threat" which she will wrap in a "hattah", a term used for the now iconic black and white chequered scarf symbolic of Palestinian resistance; while the name Yafa is a reference to the historical Palestinian city, also spelled Jaffa in what is now Israel. Her symbolic use of language also pays homage to the artistic resistance of her Palestinian predecessors, especially the poetry of the infamous Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish. viii In this way Ziadah establishes relational ties to the histories of Palestinian peoples who have had similar experiences as refugees or exiles.

While Ziadah's (2009a) account does not tell of the dispossession of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, her words compel listeners to question why one group of people should have more right over a territory than another based on a biblical claim. She

puts forward an alternate narrative of her life as a refugee unable to return home to Palestine. This is a story shared by what is now one of the largest refugee populations in the world that has been disappeared through near silence in the (re)telling of the Zionist myth. Ziadah tells of her life in one of the many United Nations Refugee Works Agency (UNRWA)-run refugee camps in Lebanon notorious for poor sanitation and living conditions, as well as for dogmatic restrictions on building and movement inside and outside of the camp boundaries. ix Her stated desire to have a “chit-chat with your god” mocks the notion of Israel’s biblical claims to land and also points to the hypocrisy of Israel’s desire to be recognized as a liberal democracy. The challenge to the audience listening to Ziadah’s (2009a) work is to recognize that the conflation of Judaism and Israel has been constructed for the benefit of the governing elite. This is to the detriment and devastation of the Palestinian people.

Although the labelling of criticism of Israel as anti-Semitic creates an impossibility in critically assessing the state’s laws, policies and practices, the work of Abu-Assad (2005), Gargour (2008), and Ziadah (2009a) presents historical narratives of Palestine. These narratives are unknown to many in the West, which allow for possibilities to overcome this impossibility. These overlooked stories of Palestine demonstrate the complexity of narratives that have been stifled through violence. In providing alternative discourses to Israel’s dominant myth of biblical renaissance, the Zionist myth is made known and the current understanding of Israel can be transformed.

## PLAYING ON DICHOTOMIES

Colonial rule creates categories of differentiation for the purposes of divisiveness and assimilation: native and non-native, black and white, and civilized and savage. Mbembe (2002) argues against such efforts to (re)establish selfhood. In his opinion, these dichotomies only perpetuate colonial discourses of sepa-

ration and crude difference rather than generate conversations that account for the plurality of people and perspectives as well as examine the ambivalence of custom. Yet, to “challenge the fiction of race”, it is not enough for the colonized to assert its common humanity (Mbembe 2002:253-254). Instead of calling into question the discourse and historical falsification of Marxist and nativist attempts to assert self-hood, Mbembe (2002:254) proposes methodological challenges to philosophical, anthropological and sociological levels of inquiry. Philosophically he suggests that history must be interrogated to address actual experiences of the subject; anthropologically the thematics of sameness must oppose the “obsession with uniqueness and difference” to include “multiple ancestries”; and, sociologically the subjective experience of the everyday through which one’s own experiences are constructed must be examined to expose the familiar and the general (Mbembe 2002:258).

Gargour’s (2008) documentary explores these constructed divisions in the Palestinian context. The interviews with Palestinian men and women who lived through the period prior to the 1948 al-Nakba, Georges, Leyla and Saada, attest that Palestinian Jews were not considered any different than Palestinian Muslims or Palestinian Christians. According to their accounts these distinctions were simply not made and they were simply all Arabs. Their personal narratives question how such racialized divisions came to be. This question is answered through Masalha’s significant historical research, which he presents in the film prior to the creation of the modern Israeli state. The purposeful conflation of Judaism with the Israeli state masks the inconsistencies and contradictions in the dominant Israeli ethno-national narrative, which attempts to portray Israel as victim. The West’s unfamiliarity with the Palestinian narratives of colonization and dispossession unearthed in Gargour’s (2008) film and in Ziadah’s (2009a) spoken word, challenge the accepted dominant discourse, which understands Israel and Judaism as equivalent, and the Palestinians as alien.

Significantly what motivated the British Empire’s assistance



in bringing the Zionist plan to ethnically cleanse Palestine to fruition was their own desire to relocate the Jewish people - at the time considered to be non-white - outside of Europe (Abu-Laban and Bakan 2008:647). The white Christian peoples of Europe had long discriminated against and held racialized beliefs about Jewish peoples (Arendt 1973:158). However, as Arendt (1973:158-161) shows, the escalation of racism against Jewish peoples -anti-Semitism- intensified as a result of early twentieth century European colonial and imperial expansion. At this time race thinking required claiming sovereignty over territory and exercise control over an 'other'- played a crucial and prominent role in defining people as racially inferior and backward (Mbembe 2003:17). Notably, the increase in European anti-Semitism during the Nazi period resulted in increased support for the Zionist movement which had not received a great deal of backing from Jewish peoples previously (Abu-Laban and Bakan 2008:645-6; Davis 1987:2-3).

## SPACES AND COMMUNITIES

Art, which interrogates the historical understandings of the accepted Zionist narrative, extends beyond the Palestinian community in Palestine and the Diaspora and creates shared material as well as ideological spaces, in a transnational sense. In Ziadah's (2009b:00:00-01:14 min) *Trail of Tears* she presents the feminized association of silence against the masculinized brutal force of colonization in the experiences of colonized peoples to reveal the contradictory notions of democratic ideals in colonial narratives:

*This call is not written for you/ ... It is for the sun and the moon/ For the earth brown like us/ ... For the rivers, the waters that know and saw what you did [...] Trail of tears/ ... From Baghdad to Tyendinegal/ We're still walking a trail of tears from Palestine to Six Nations [...] Their gods*

*promised them our lands/... Bury their fears in our skin/ ...  
Uprooting our olive groves/ Stealing our land/ ... bury their  
dead in our skin/ And build golf courts on our corpses/ Call  
death machines Apaches/ ... and their cars Cherokee*

Rather than a dead-end of simplistic historical notions of victimization in the struggle for selfhood, Ziadah (2009b) uses the dichotomy of colonizer and colonized to present an untold story that is similar for many indigenous people. In doing so, she invokes solidarity not solely amongst colonized people but also for those who have been ignorant of a past that has been hidden to maintain a status quo. The connection between similar colonial narratives and the cognizance of silenced stories also works towards creating a space beyond territorial boundaries and towards communities of social justice.

## CONCLUSION

Art is a dialogical process. As such it initiates conversations and provides responses to previous discussions. Although each art form presented in this paper stands alone as a testament to a silenced Palestinian narrative, the intersection of these diverse works provides a more precise understanding of contemporary Palestine. Thus, this understanding enables the necessary transformation of the Zionist narrative. The reliance on both religious and secular Zionist narratives reveals a profound contradiction that is obscured through the constant recollection of historical Jewish suffering. By reason of the Holocaust, Zionist discourses reconfigured race along nationalist rather than explicitly biologically racist lines (Goldberg 2008:30-1; Abu El-Haj 2010:32; Lentin 2004; Yuval-Davis 1987). Yet as Foucault (2003:73) argues, when power is revealed to be unjust, the “discourse of race struggle” overrides that of the history of sovereignty. In this way the possibility for a Palestinian counter-history as a truly revolutionary discourse that will overcome that of Zionism is found in

the questioning of “dissymmetries, disequilibriums, injustice and the violence” perpetrated by the Israeli state on the Palestinian people “despite the order of laws, beneath the order of laws, and through and because of the order of laws” (Foucault 2003:79). Each work of art referenced in this paper recognizes a common and silenced history. However, none have purely nationalist or nativist intentions. Their purpose is to reveal the joy and pain of Palestinian stories. In so doing, these narratives provide novel ideological spaces that counter the dominant ethno-national Israeli discourse. Materially, each offers a space for communicating possibilities through the polyphony of voices engaged in the arduous conversation required to uncover Palestinian narratives. Both from within Palestine and in the greater Diaspora such accounts will ultimately transform the dominant Zionist myth.

## NOTES

- i I use the term *art* throughout this paper to refer to all creative works of fact and fiction including documentary, film, and spoken word.
- ii See also page 68 of Honaida Ghanim’s (2008) *Thanatopolitics: The Case of the Colonial Occupation in Palestine*
- iii For more on what Eyal Weizman (2007) terms the “politics of verticality” see *Hollowland: Israel’s Architecture of Occupation*.
- iv The term al-Nakba (Arabic for “the Catastrophe”) describes the 1948 establishment of the state of Israel as experienced by Palestinians, and as understood in Palestinian collective memory.
- v This is not to dismiss or deny the very real persecution of Jewish peoples, particularly in the European context
- vi For more detailed information on the destruction of Palestinian villages, and the expulsion and exile of Palestinians see also Uri Davis (1987:17-18); for data on the destruction of Palestinian villages, and the expulsion, exile, political assassination and imprisonment of Palestinians as well as terrorist acts committed by the Jewish forces of Hagana, Irgun

and the Stern Gang see Ghazi-Walid Falah (1996), and Ilan Pappé (2006: 13, 28, 39, 40, 56-60).

vii Foul is the name of a popular Arab dish made with fava bean which has no English equivalent. The pronunciation is similar to fool but transliterated into foul.

viii For more on the symbolism and imagery in the work of Mahmoud Darwish see Hala Khamis Nassar and Najat Rahman (2008).

ix UNRWA is short for the United Nations Refugee and Works Agency, created to aid and responsible for the Palestinian refugee population both inside and outside of Palestine.

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# CULTURAL CURING: MAGIC IN MEDICINE AND THE PURSUIT OF ALTERNATIVES

✿ HEATHER MILLMAN

## ABSTRACT

This essay explores the ways in which Haitian notions of magic and ritual within the context of illness relates to Western biomedical practices. Although biomedicine is often portrayed as both objective and acultural, increasing immigration to the West highlights the diverse and multicultural nature of experiencing illness and healing (Phelps and Johnson 2004:203). Drawing on Paul Farmer's fieldwork in Haiti during the 1980s AIDS epidemic, it will be demonstrated that forms of magic and ritual are not confined only to "exotic" medical paradigms, but also exist in various forms within Western frameworks, working to establish and maintain the social nature of the healing experience.

## INTRODUCTION: CULTURAL HEALING

Anthropology as a discipline has increasingly revealed the complex and variant ways by which culture informs our everyday lives and experiences. While people's lived experiences can differ drastically depending upon differing cultural frameworks, there are particular elements, which are common across geographical and societal boundaries. Illness and suffering exemplify universal human experiences, and hence they come to be endowed



with a vast diversity of cultural meanings and interpretations (Garro 2000:305). Consequently, the practice of healing and the techniques to treat illness and disease are the foundation of medicine trans-globally because they are intimately entwined in the economic, social, political, and philosophical understandings and practices of a culture. (Winkelman 2009:5).

In the West, biomedicine has emerged the dominant paradigm by which people come to understand illness and seek medical attention, and often its scientific foundation has been used to conjure an image of Western medicine as both objective and acultural. However, in recent years social scientists have begun to call attention to the ways in which biomedical, epistemological, and organizational structures coincide with cultural frameworks, in order to form a distinct biomedical culture with discernable sociopolitical features (Metzger 2006:133). Furthermore, the contemporary global has been experiencing an increase in the cultural diversity of the United States and other Western countries as a result of increasing transnational movement and migration (Phelps and Johnson 2004:203). Accordingly, it has become increasingly clear that the biomedical model is not universally applicable, nor does it necessarily correspond with other cultural beliefs and practices. Thus, the potential detrimental consequences of using an inappropriate model can be distinguished when addressing the difficult experiences of illness and disease, and the struggle to regain health. This becomes increasingly relevant when addressing issues of health and illness for those living in, or who have recently emigrated from, areas of the Global South where socioeconomic barriers such as poverty and lack of access to medical care are often deeply entwined with folk models of medicine (Winkelman 2009:4).

The importance of these socially embedded frameworks and how they interact with biomedicine is illustrated by the 1980s AIDS outbreak in Haiti, and how the disease has been conceptually negotiated and treated among both local residents and immigrants to the United States. Additionally, in understanding how Haitian notions of magic and ritual interact with illness

and healing, comparisons can be drawn both to biomedicine, and to the increasingly recognized forms of alternative medicine within the West. The purpose of this paper is to show that forms of magic and ritual are not confined only to “exotic” or folk medical paradigms, but also exist in various forms within established Western frameworks. In drawing comparisons between Haitian and Western practices, this paper will demonstrate that these components work both to establish and maintain the social nature of the healing experience. Furthermore, in highlighting the culturally embedded nature of health and illness, this essay stresses the inadequacy and inappropriateness of a collectively applicable, acultural biomedical model of healing.

## REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Anthropology has come to acknowledge health and illness as both biological and cultural phenomena, recognizing that experiences of sickness and the process of healing are deeply embedded in sociocultural relationships and ontological frameworks. Prior to the development of the medical anthropological sub-discipline, anthropologists were already actively researching models of illness as culture-bound syndromes (Dressler 2001:456). However, the 1960s saw the rise of medical anthropologists who were concerned with examining how the biomedical model of disease was distributed within societies, and dependent also upon economic, political, and sociocultural circumstances (Dressler 2001:456). From this more holistic foundation, researchers such as Kleinman (1984) began to approach healing practices less according to their particular cultural characteristics, but with regard more to the transmission and organization of knowledge, and the ways that this knowledge is communicated through the healer-patient relationship. Kleinman divided healing practices according to the biomedical professional sector, the folk, or “lay health culture” sector, and, finally, popular notions of sickness and healing (Sharma 1993:16). Expanded bases of study

as Kleinman's helped to open the anthropological arena to a variety of biocultural theoretical foundations, including the critical medical perspective of anthropologists such as Merrill Singer (Dressler 2001:457), who emphasized the importance of access and the distribution of health resources as key contributing factors in the multiplicity of social and environmental conditions affecting quality of life (Winkelman 2009:16).

Landy (1990:361) points out that others, such as Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987) in their work, *The Mindful Body: A Prolegomenon to Future Work in Medical Anthropology*, have furthered the scope of the discipline by detailing the significant physical effects of emotions and beliefs. In doing so, they argue that "cultural sentiments" must be recognized as separate from, and at times contradictory to, biological desires. As a result, particular sociocultural customs may not be conducive to physiological health, and similarly, certain reactions to illness may be not be directly biologically curative, but possibly detrimental. The power of belief itself, however, forms a subject of discussion within the medical anthropological field, and its capacity to provoke autonomous healing is a subject of discussion among both anthropologists and physicians (Welch 2003:26). Belief, and its various manifestations, has been a primary subject of interest since the infancy of the discipline, and researchers responsible for some of the foundational pieces of literature within Anthropology have studied the notion of "magic," and the ways in which it is created and employed within the epistemological makeup of a society. Malinowski, for example, wrote of the magic employed by the Trobriand Island fisherman for protection when they ventured out to sea (Coe 1997:2).

Within the field of medical anthropology, the idea of magic has been a subject of discussion with regard to particular cultural practices, such as the studies of shamanism by Eliade (1951) and Winkelman (2010), as well as the voodoo death first publicized by Cannon in 1942 (Winkelman 2009:360-390). However, with the recent growth in the popularity of alternative forms of medicine within the West, physicians and social scientists alike,

including Crosley in his *“Alternative Medicine and Miracles”* (2004), and Welch’s *“Ritual in Western Medicine and its Role in Placebo Healing”* (2003) have begun to draw parallels between what has so far been considered ‘foreign’ or ‘exotic’ magical healing practices. At present, the medical anthropological discussion of health and illness, and their relationship to magic and ritual, involves not only anthropologists, but also medical doctors who are both practicing physicians and social scientists. Among the most influential of these individuals is Paul Farmer, who also addresses the sociopolitical sphere, effectively interlocking the fields of anthropology, biomedicine, and political economy. In doing so, he demonstrates the interconnecting factors that influence the reality of illness. In applying his fieldwork in Haiti during the 1980s AIDS epidemic, Farmer (1992) takes a holistic approach to the study of illness within a specific cultural context, and accordingly his ethnography demonstrates the complex sociopolitical, economic, and historical context of AIDS within Haiti, as well as its relationship to the United States and Western biomedicine. Furthermore, additional studies of voodoo death and healing within Haiti have revealed the significant sociocultural and psychological power of magic, in that beliefs are able to both render one physically ill, heal sickness, as well as rearrange social relationships (Hahn and Kleinman 1983:3).

#### LESSONS FROM HAITI: MAGIC AND SOCIAL PATHOGEN

The AIDS epidemic in Haiti reaches far beyond the physical dimension of illness, permeating social, political, and economic spheres, which, in turn, serve to shape the nature of the disease itself. Haiti’s long history of slavery, political instability, and economic exploitation has left a devastatingly poor and desperate population with extremely limited access to biomedical care (Farmer 1992:183; Winkelman 2009:74). Additionally, Haitian understandings of health and illness are a hybrid of

Western-based knowledge of biology and medicine—a system in subsequent agreement with Christianity as enforced during slavery—and traditional African derived voodoo (Holcomb et al. 1996:256). Therefore, conceptual struggles between religious and medical systems of belief become manifested in the social experience of diagnosing and treating disease. Despite the presence of biomedical etiological frameworks, the socioeconomic devastation of Haiti has enforced a shared experience of suffering, rendering biomedicine incapable of providing an all-encompassing basis for the diagnoses and treatment of AIDS (or of disease in general) (Farmer 1992:44). During the initial outbreak of the disease, biomedicine failed to provide Haitians with an explanation as to why yet another form of suffering would plague members of an already destitute community. Yet voodoo beliefs in magic and the ability to “send” illness offer a social context that incorporates personal agendas and individual emotions. For example, a Haitian diagnostic divination might reveal that one individual’s slightly elevated socioeconomic status has manifested jealousy in another, providing motivation for sorcery (Farmer 1992:70). Consequently, Haiti’s historical experience involving the slave trade, European and American economic appropriation, and devastating trade sanctions that collapsed the economy and impoverished the population, is better integrated into a framework in which AIDS is not only transmitted biologically, but can also be ‘sent’ through magic (Farmer 1992:152).

Since AIDS is arguably the most significant contemporary global disease epidemic in the world, understanding the context of AIDS within Haiti is pivotal in informing the public approach to, and treatment of, this illness both cross-nationally and cross-culturally. The social perceptions of the conditions surrounding AIDS and the dimensions of the illness itself result, in part, from how political, research, and medical institutions respond to it (Winkelman 2009:71). However, appropriate responses at the institutional level rely on accurate sociocultural understandings of the multidimensional nature of illness at the cultural level. While a biomedical understanding of the origin

of AIDS exists within Haiti, this does not inhibit the coexistence of alternative etiologies, such as the sending of the disease through sorcery. In this context, the socioeconomic deprivation of Haitians can result in social unrest, should one member of the community obtain slightly more than the rest. Should this person become ill as a result of AIDS, the attributing of this illness to sorcery acknowledges that the community experiences a mutual socioeconomic suffering, and that for one individual's conditions to improve, it is unfair to, or may even come at the expense of, others. Consequently, conceptualizing the illness as being 'sent' implies a social rift that must be repaired (Wing 1998:146). Furthermore, because a person suffering from AIDS can seek out a voodoo shaman, or *Hougan* (Crosley 2004:5), to attempt to cure the illness by undoing this magic, the ill individual is able to restore a sense of social balance as well as a sense of control over the disease (Wing 1998:146).

Understanding this dichotomy between natural and unnatural disease is pivotal to the treatment of AIDS within Haiti, because it provides the rationale behind the decision of a patient and his/her family to seek out a biomedical clinic or a folk healer (Crosley 2004:127). While Catholicism remains the government-sanctioned religion of Haiti, Haitians—Catholic or not—often actively practice voodoo (Holcomb et al. 1996:256). Thus there exists in Haiti a medical pluralism, which is clearly evident in its relationship to both individual spirituality and group identity. In the context of voodoo, illness is understood to exist within a dichotomy of the natural and the unnatural, and magic is a key function to both of these realms. Within the category of natural illness, a patient is considered to be suffering from an imbalance with nature that can be caused by extreme temperature fluctuations or impurities in water or food (Holcomb et al. 1996:257). An unnatural illness sent through sorcery could involve what would appear to the Westerner as a mundane disease, such as AIDS, or something that would seem much more “exotic,” such as the Haitian belief that zombies can be raised from the dead to inflict illness upon others (Ackermann and Gauthier

1991:483). Either way an illness stemming from magical causation requires magical healing, and so an individual suffering from AIDS that has been 'sent' requires a *Hougan* to provide a magical cure (Crosley 2004:127).

Haitian understandings of AIDS and its relationship to larger local frameworks of health and illness demonstrate that no direct opposition can be made between what may be considered a strictly "biomedical" illness such as AIDS, and one that is "cultural," such as zombification. Rather, the experience of being ill is itself culturally defined; it is based within social, spiritual, and economic parameters. The economic reality of many countries in the Global South is that access to biomedical care is often difficult, if not impossible, for those who cannot afford it. Consequently, in many societies, including Haiti, 'folk' medicine is often the primary mode of healthcare, and biomedicine is often not practical or sustainable economically or culturally (Micozzi 2002:400). An anthropological perspective is thus fundamental in approaching health and medicine in a cross-cultural or multicultural context, as the beliefs held by people within a society are critical in both disease causation and the process of healing. Moreover, Western anthropologists and medical practitioners alike must be reflexive; recognizing that biomedicine itself participates equally in culturally based epistemological structures, and therefore does not necessarily contradict the "exotic," (Hahn and Kleinman 1983:3).

As migrant communities steadily increase within North America, and the West, so does evidence of the culturally contingent nature of biomedical practice. Among ethnic minorities, patient dissatisfaction results from issues of economic and linguistic accessibility, in addition to difficulties with the contrasting nature of the biomedical encounter in relation to their own healthcare traditions (Hand 1985:240-241). Consequently, issues such as 'cultural competency' and 'cultural sensitivity' in healthcare have become points of discussion within medical institutions and the medical academic world, as well as among biocultural and medical anthropologists (Phelps and Johnson

2004:203-4). Anthropology has become critical for understanding the limitations of current biomedical positions, and to a shift in the medical paradigm which includes the incorporation of cross-cultural medical perspectives into a general understanding of health and illness. Included in this shift in perspective is the breakdown of the binary between biomedicine and folk medicine, in which biomedicine represents the latest in new technologies and accuracy, and folk medicine represents more outdated, and less relevant knowledge (Micozzi 2002:398).

A culturally informed medical perspective is not only based upon knowledge of, and sensitivity to, diverse ideological frameworks of health. Rather, it involves the repositioning of the biomedical model itself in order to recognize two integral spaces within biomedicine: the points of divergence between biomedicine and folk medicine, and the elements of folk medicine which remain present, yet often unrecognized, in the biomedical model. The significance of these subjects lies in the way in which they affect quality of care. Acknowledging the cultural contingency of biomedicine allows for the realization that aspects of this model may prove unbeneficial to patients, and that it cannot be universally administered in a way that is compatible with the ideological models of other societies. An additional space for anthropologists thus lies in negotiations surrounding the incorporation of both biomedicine and folk medicine within cross-cultural contexts.

Although it exists in pluralistic medical environments within the West and throughout the world, biomedicine boasts structural hegemony over the folk traditions practiced alongside it. This authority is held by its perceived superiority on the part of institutions that distribute power and resources accordingly (Sharma 1992:28). In societies in which biomedicine is either largely inaccessible or not the preferred mode of treatment, this can lead to a marginalization of alternative forms of health-care. Even within highly multicultural societies such as North America, biomedicine dominates the political and economic spheres, and consequently it permeates cultural conventions, in-



cluding those involved in educational institutions, prenatal care, and contraceptive practices (Winkelman 2009:194). However, as patients become steadily more critical of the treatments they receive, it becomes correspondingly more essential that the elevated status of biomedicine is questioned on a functional level—that is, the ideological foundations of the structure must be accounted for (Sharma 1993:17).

## CONSIDERING CONTEXT: FINDING CULTURE IN BIOMEDICINE

Western culture emphasizes the presumed consistency and objective scientific method of biomedicine as a universally applicable system of diagnosis and healing (Winkelman 2009:194). This assumption has allowed the biomedical system to establish both structural and conceptual hegemony as the most accurate and effective method of treatment. The penetration of biomedicine into multiple facets of social life due to its allocation to the role of 'public health' has allowed for health to be presumptively and homogenously defined within biomedicine's narrow parameters (Inhorn 2006:345). Hence, clinical and public health concerns that often dominate the discursive field of health inevitably reflect Western definitions and interests. Within the United States for example, the National Institute of Health forms the governmental agency primarily responsible for funding health related research, and hence it sets the parameters and priorities of the medical field (Inhorn 2006:348). Western medicine is based upon a sharp distinction between mind and body, and carries the assumption that physical phenomena hold much more strength than the psychological. Consequently, medical focus predominantly lies solely on the material aspects of the body—using pharmaceutical drugs to affect the body at the cellular level, and fixing individual parts much like one would repair a machine. Biomedical culture is based upon the historical revelation that the illness of a whole organism can be understood

at the cell level, thus informing the diagnosis, prognosis, and treatment of a patient (Micozzi 2002:399). Medical practitioners who hold the keys to this knowledge compose an organizational culture that has distinct sociopolitical features. Just as the *Hougan* possesses knowledge that is necessary for dispelling a “sent” sickness, the physician comprehends the passing of illness on a microbial level, and so is consulted by patients and their families due to his/her possession of this exclusive understanding (Metzger 2006:133).

Biomedicine exists in an intricately developed organizational structure, arising out of a specific health culture. The social relationships and hierarchies created and maintained through the practice of biomedicine mirrors those of other societal constructions (such as kinship roles) that have long been anthropological subjects of cultural study. Physicians, for example, boast a relatively high social status due to their specialized knowledge and level of education (Metzger 2006:133). Furthermore, the role of the patient involves specific modes of interaction with both the physician and members of healthy society. When the patient submits his/herself to medical examination, a relationship is created that positions the doctor as dominant and the patient as the supplicant. In this way, a degree of separation is maintained between the two, allowing the physician to maintain both emotional distance from the patient, as well as an impression of authority and power, not unlike the spiritual power attributed to many folk healers (Welch 2003:30-31).

This interaction with a physician or healer designates a particular role to the patient, who must then contend with the social consequences of being labeled as ill. The validation of sickness or disease within the biomedical paradigm results in changes in social expectations, allowing the individual to be excused from regular responsibilities and obligations (Winkelman 2009:65). Often this involves a significant degree of social isolation while the patient is being treated—whether in a designated place of healing such as a hospital or healer’s facility, or within the home. The sick individual is thus barred from extended social interac-

tion, being instead relegated to the doctors or priests for treatment (Hutch 2006:328). Farmer (1992:68-69) illustrates this social isolation as he discusses the sick role taken up by Manno—the first member of his case study to fall ill of AIDS in Do Key, Haiti. In becoming ill, Manno's adoption of the sick role acted to degrade his relatively high status as a schoolteacher. Both his journeys to the biomedical clinic and his eventual withdrawal to the dwelling of the *Hougan* involved his removal, and eventual isolation, from the rest of the community. The sociopolitical aspect of illness and healing is present within both folk medicine and biomedicine. The patient's adoption of the sick role and the social power of the healer are pivotal parts of the healing process both within and outside of the West, and therefore biomedicine cannot be conceptualized as existing outside of social functions and societal relationships.

#### MEDICINAL RITUAL AND ALTERNATIVE MOVEMENTS IN THE WEST

The relationship between doctor and patient is pivotal to upholding the social dimensions of the healing process. This is exemplified in the biomedical paradigm, both in the social process of diagnosis and treatment, and in the collapses in communication that contribute to the failure of producing adequate biomedical service. The social patterns of self-diagnosis and seeking professional attention within biomedicine parallel those of folk medical cultures. In both structures the medical culture patterns are integrated into a complex network of beliefs and values that are embedded within larger society. Beliefs surrounding causation largely inform what preventative actions and treatments may follow, and the sequential system of behaviours that a patient is subject to is similar. Following self-diagnosis the ill individual seeks professional treatment from a professional who possesses comprehensive knowledge in the subject area (Coe 1997:2).

While biomedical practitioners often question the rituals,

remedies, and oral traditions of folk cultures, the simultaneous analysis of both paradigms reveals that many of the basic principles are similar. It has been established that the set of shared social beliefs informing folk healing systems exists also within biomedical culture. However, in addition to this, it can be illustrated that Western medical practitioners have also not entirely abandoned the methods of folk healing. Many of them have actually been integrated into contemporary care (Wing 1998:144). Often the spiritual dimension that plays an integral role in folk medicine is considered absent within biomedical practice. However, the acceptance of biological processes that are understood only by the physician differs greatly from an acceptance of the spiritual teachings of a healer. Just as Manno accepted the *Hougan's* knowledge of magic-based pathology in Farmer's ethnography, the Western patient accepts the physician's knowledge of microscopic activities, and the remedies for these various invisible maladies (Crosley 2004:85). Furthermore, the strength of the mind in healing the body is invoked in both systems. Autonomous healing, also known in Western science as the "placebo effect," has been cited as potential reason for the success in folk medicinal healing methods. However, it is also utilized in biomedicine, and results in large part out of the interaction between doctor and patient wherein the doctor provides the sick individual with meaning and limitation to his/her experience with illness (Welch 2003:27). When, through explanation or the provision of medicine, a patient is provided with the expectation that his/her condition will improve, this has a therapeutic effect and has been clinically proven to contribute to the healing process (Welch 2003:28).

In addition to employing psychological healing mechanisms, biomedicine and folk medicine also run parallel in their following of specific healing rituals. Despite the efforts of Western medicine to differentiate its own methods from those of shamans and other alternative healers, the way in which doctors interact with their patients is highly ritualized, and this plays a significant role in the healing process (Welch 2003:21). The

use of symbolism is invoked in both traditional medicine and biomedicine in order to facilitate the healing process. Within Haitian voodoo, for example, the *Hougan* may make use of dolls which symbolize the negative emotions that the sick individual wish to cast off. In biomedicine, the white coat and white colours of the hospital symbolize the physician's status as the key holder to cleanliness and purity from pathogens (Wing 1998:150). Within both systems, the practitioner intervention is the same: the ill individual is assisted in taking the appropriate action in alleviating a specific physical distress. Therefore he/she now holds the responsibility for following the healing regimen in order to both fight the sickness and prevent recurrence in the future. Following social norms such as confining oneself to the home, and avoiding negative external influences such as over-exertion are prescribed in order to counteract the manifestation and spread of a pathology. Often such actions are not considered healing rituals within Western medicine, yet comparisons can be made with what the West *does* consider ritual practice within folk healing practices (Wing 1998:152). In acknowledging these parallels, biomedicine would become better equipped to treat patients both cross-culturally and transnationally.

Because illness is embedded in societal roles and interactions, when medical care does not meet these social needs and expectations, it fails to provide the kind of holistic assistance that the patient requires. Anthropological studies have revealed the pivotal role of the healer-patient relationship. Thus in striving to remove itself from its social context, biomedicine often falls short in delivering comprehensive treatment. This relationship is further strained by the neglect of many physicians to attempt to bridge the gap between biomedical and lay medical beliefs and understandings. As a result, both the medical practitioner and the patient often end the consultation unsatisfied, and in many cases this negatively affects the compliance of the patient and his/her overall level of improvement (Coe 1997:2). In the West, biomedical patients have increasingly become more critical of the treatments they are receiving and, consequently, more

inclined to question clinical judgments and seek alternative opinions. The pursuit of a more appropriate method of healing to meet their particular problems has greatly contributed to the growth of alternative medical fields, which often resemble characteristics of the folk medical paradigm (Sharma 1993:17).

The expansion of complementary and alternative medicine is part of a movement that involves a general increase in healthcare options. Although it is often less systematic than the practice of medical doctors, practitioners of such techniques do possess some sort of extensive knowledge of the body, including ideas regarding the causes of health and illness. In addition, alternative medicine, like biomedicine and folk medicine, involves a technical intervention on the part of the practitioner, which often includes either the administration of curative substances such as in homeopathy and herbalism, or the administration of manual techniques such as osteopathy and reflexology. Furthermore, cognitive techniques such as meditation and hypnotherapy may be invoked in order to utilize the mental and emotional aspects of the healing process—practices comparable to the biomedical use of the placebo effect (Sharma 1992:4).

However, despite its recognition of an emotional aspect to healing, biomedicine generally makes a sharp distinction between the mind and the body that is not present within folk medical cultures. Because alternative medicines consist of more holistic approaches to healing, they also parallel folk medical techniques (Micozzi 2002:399). Furthermore, the techniques invoked in Western alternative medicines parallel those, which, in other cultures, have been considered magical procedures. Within the field of herbalism for example, roots and herbs with medicinal qualities are administered to the patient. Whereas in the West, their healing powers are understood to stem from particular chemicals, the folk healers of other cultures may attribute them to the “magical” properties of the plant (Hand 1985:242). Moreover, methods such as acupuncture or hypnosis are often explained on a physical level when practiced alongside biomedicine, yet these techniques do not differ greatly from certain

shamanistic techniques. These can include the use of the power inherent in animal skins or stones among some American indigenous groups, or the use of psychic energy to undo a magically "sent" illness in Haiti (Crosley 2004:120-121).

The holistic orientation of alternative medicine allows these methods to operate in approaches complementary to each other and to biomedicine. Whereas much of the functionality of the human body remains, at least in part, a mystery, alternative medicine allows the practitioner and patient to explore the knowledge that has been accumulated over centuries and across cultures (Crosley 2004:120). Furthermore, when biomedicine fails to alleviate an illness, alternative methods can be explored in order to address it more extensively, from a more holistic position (Hand 1985:242).

## CONCLUSION

Despite its wider conceptual applicability, alternative medicine in the West is not economically accessible to many members of society who may prefer it over biomedicine (Sharma 1992:18). It is likely that many individuals who are socioeconomically marginalized, such as recent immigrants, may find certain alternative therapies more appealing than a biomedical practice which often does not account for cultural diversity. However, often many of these treatments are financially inaccessible. In Western countries where biomedicine is also a financial strain, receiving adequate medical care becomes highly problematic. Simultaneously, in his ethnography on the AIDS crisis in Haiti, Farmer (1992:205) illustrates that in non-Western countries, biomedicine can be both financially inaccessible and conceptually inadequate, as it does not address the social aspect of illnesses such as AIDS, which are intricately entwined with the socioeconomic conditions of poverty and problematic social relationships.

Anthropology's focus on cultural understanding and practice

within the healing process can inform the development of a better approach to both the treatment of patients in the West, and the administration of biomedical care in the Global South. In a cross-cultural environment, it is pivotal that the perspectives of both folk healers and biomedical practitioners be incorporated and integrated into contemporary care (Wing 1998:144). Meaning, spirituality, and trust are, for many patients, key elements to the successful treatment of illness, and the existence of forms of ritual must be both acknowledged and utilized in biomedicine as well (Welch 2003:32). Such increased emphasis on interdisciplinary collaboration would help to increase accessibility to medical treatment both in the West and in the Global South (Coe 1997:6).

The body does not exist in a cultural vacuum, but within historical, socio-cultural, political, economic, and geographic contexts that, in addition to genetics and biological makeup, interact in order to form the biological organism. Correspondingly, disease is not religiously or spiritually neutral, but is understood and explained within this conceptual collage of knowledge and experience. Within the geopolitical climate of growing cross-national migration, the West is becoming increasingly culturally diverse, and thus people who are both seeking medical care and to administer medical care come from a variety of traditional backgrounds (Metzger 2006:131-132). Furthermore, the fact that biomedicine is not practiced homogeneously throughout the world illustrates its cultural foundations. As is illustrated by the pluralistic treatment of AIDS in Haiti, treatments of the same conditions vary significantly transnationally, as do inclusions of cultural etiologies along with scientific explanations (Winkelman 2009:194). Within the West, medical pluralism is often a strategy employed by immigrants in particular, as they have statistically more trouble accessing biomedical healthcare than the majority of the population, due to both structural and conceptual barriers. Consequently, consciously including cultural contexts within health assessments and treatments becomes the only way to effectively treat these members of society



(Metzger 2006:131-132). Rather than focusing on the ways in which biomedicine and folk medicine diverge theoretically and practically, exemplifying the similarities that can be found between medical paradigms can inform and revolutionize the biomedical approach, rendering it both more applicable and more effective.

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# REMEMBERING UBUNTU: MEMORY, SOVEREIGNTY AND RECONCILIATION IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

✿ GRAHAM FOX

## ABSTRACT

South Africa remains a place where the postcolonial condition is hotly debated, stemming conflicts that make the country a particular challenge for political nation builders. This essay discusses South Africa's quest for truth and reconciliation, with special appreciation for Ubuntu – a 'traditional' philosophy evoked widely in the TRC process as the essence or humanity that binds South Africans together. Essential in understanding, Ubuntu is the act of memory. It is this juncture, I argue, of memory and Ubuntu, which has enabled South African reconciliation to take place, however imperfect it may be.

## INTRODUCTION

Colonization leaves an indelible imprint on the lives it encounters. In a superimposition of foreign ideals, colonized societies are forever problematized by the distortion and dislocation of what should be considered one's own and of what should be considered someone else's. Postcolonialism therefore thrusts societies into states of daunting subjectivity and cultural negotia-

tion. As colonization is a process rather than an encounter, the rediscovery of sovereign identities can be prolonged and painful.

In few parts of the world are these dislocations as evident as in South Africa, as the stark divisions and resultant conflicts that have characterized the country create particular challenges in both political nation building and in the reparation of memory, marginality, and personhood. This essay will discuss South Africa's quest for truth and reconciliation in the post-apartheid era, with special appreciation for the notion of Ubuntu – a 'traditional' South African philosophy evoked widely in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) process as the essence or humanity that binds South Africans together. Essential in understanding Ubuntu is the act of memory. It is this juncture, I argue, of memory and Ubuntu, which has enabled South African reconciliation to take place, however imperfect we may conceive it to be. The TRC was founded in 1995 in response to the large number of South Africans seeking justice for the suffering that they or their loved one's endured during apartheid. Composed of high profile civil-society members such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the commission's mandate was to bear witness and to (potentially) grant amnesty to former apartheid conspirators on the grounds of forgiveness.

Without the advantage of ethnographic research, this paper draws on secondary accounts in creating a vignette or narrative of violence, memory and reconciliation during the post-apartheid period in South Africa. I will draw on a collection of indirectly related sources to illustrate the experiences of loss, memory and the significance of Ubuntu, in order to work toward an understanding of how the act of memory is able, or unable, to forge new perspectives on shared suffering, both personal and national. Narrative, as Simpson (1998: 221) points out, is a "a critical instrument of human agency." By deconstructing the narratives that have shaped contemporary South African history, we can better appreciate how violence is both destructive of social ties while simultaneously producing others (Hansen and Stepputat 2006: 296).

The first section of this paper recounts a particular moment in the apartheid experience; the violence, death and subjective truths surrounding the 1985 shooting of approximately twenty members of a funeral procession on Sharpeville Day in Uitenhage, Eastern Cape Province. The second section will explore the ethno-ethical ideal of Ubuntu, its origins, interpretations and significance in the post-apartheid context. The third section will discuss the act of memory and its significance for post-colonial sovereignty. Lastly, I will attempt to tie these experiences together, arguing for their interrelation and their implications for truth, reconciliation, and nation building.

## UITENHAGE

Though the apartheid experience was marked throughout by acute acts of violence, the shootings at Uitenhage (the Uitenhage massacre) were notably gruesome and vividly recollected by those involved. In the early morning of March 21, 1985, a procession of a hundred mourners defied a ban on marching by creating a funeral procession which carried the body of a loved one from the township of Kwa Nobuhle to the neighboring township of Langa, where a funeral was to occur. The route between these two townships led the procession uncomfortably close to the white neighborhood of Uitenhage, an area mainly walled off from the non-white settlements surrounding it. Police received word that a group was planning to defy the ban and planned to intercept them as the procession neared the Uitenhage roadway.

Precisely what drove police to open fire on the procession marchers is unclear and, as my discussion will demonstrate, very difficult to interpret. At least twenty people lay dead from the shooting, women and children among them (Thornton 1990: 223). Witnesses recounted the event with frightening imageries of malice and predation. Police officers were recalled hurtling callous and authoritarian remarks at the procession marchers and fifteen of the dead were reported to have been shot in the

back as they fled from police. Speculative accounts from both marchers and police officers claim Lt. Fouche, the senior police officer present, was intoxicated at the time of the shooting (Thornton 1990: 229). South African authorities staunchly accepted the police's version of events. Official details that were released by state-backed media were met with great skepticism by non-white South Africans (Thornton 1990: 223).

Anthropologist Robert Thornton (1990) produced a detailed ethnography of the Uitenhage shootings, incorporating a number of witness accounts that illustrate the problematic and subjective ways that violence is experienced, understood, and remembered. Of particular interest to Thornton is the way in which acts of violence earn their meaning retrospectively. "The event [at Uitenhage] did not just happen," says Thornton (1990: 218), "it created meaning. It achieved a salience in the political process that people continued to reflect upon and to elaborate in narratives and reenactments." In the immediate aftermath of the shooting, media accounts came predominantly from police officers involved, anxious to justify their actions against the public outrage that immediately developed. These accounts, as Thornton explains, were laden with powerful symbolisms that further complicated differing narratives. The police recounted the two main antagonists in the group as a 'Rastafarian man' and bare-breasted women. These exoticized descriptions, says Thornton (1990: 231), served to mythologize the narrative and further obstruct a clear and objective understanding of what unfolded. Evoking the "barbarity" of these figures, says Thornton (1990: 231), attempted to de-humanize the victims, allowing officers to defend their actions.

A number of other contradictory recollections demonstrated a clear conflict or misinterpretation of language. The police officers, with a limited knowledge of isiXhosa (the lingua franca of many black South Africans in this region) had interpreted the crowd's chanting of "Hai! Hai!" to mean, "Kill, Kill" – an instigation for fellow processioners to attack the police (Thornton 1990: 230). Infact, according to victims, this was a plea urging

"No! No!" as police threatened the marchers with guns drawn. Another critical figure in the police accounts was a young man on a bicycle who saluted the crowd with a raised fist as he swerved through the assembly of police. Officers interpreted this symbol as an antagonism, and in the promptly ensuing violence, the boy was shot in the head (Thornton 1990: 230).

Thornton (1990: 218) also highlights the wider context in which the Uitenhage shootings took place, explaining why this event became so symbolically potent in the anti-apartheid movement. Though only one among many violence incidents that characterized the later years of apartheid, he argues that the Uitenhage shootings "stood out against this background of endemic violence because it displayed so clearly the tacit knowledge of patterns of and for violence shared by almost all South Africans... recognized as an exemplar of a characteristically South African form of social violence" (1990: 226). The shooting at Uitenhage occurred on Sharpeville Day, one of many annual holidays memorializing violent experiences. Other examples include Blood River and Soweto, each evocative of specific political or ethnic struggles in South Africa's history. Thornton argues that the structural systems or social forms of violence in the country require a more thorough understanding, "like violence in religious sacrifice, literatures, dreams, sexual relationships, and friendship, must be understood in relation to the representations of community, self, and identity which it is linked in the daily habits of mind and body" (1990: 229). In the case of the Uitenhage massacre, violence "is not just the consequence of politics but is integral to the social processes that generate symbols and values that provision the political process" (Thornton 1990: 218).

The ways in which the Uitenhage shootings developed such powerful symbolism is reflective of both the authoritarianism of the government and the efforts of people to exert agency or resistance. "Power in these contexts" says Thornton (1990: 224), "is less the ability to cause violence by means of one's will or authority than it is the ability to impose one interpretation - that is, meaning - among competing interpretations after the occur-



rence of a particular incident of violence.” Many perspectives on violence in the social sciences focus on the causes or motivations of violence rather than the significance of its interpretations. “This functional or causal approach”, says Thornton (1990: 224), “appeals to us by its simplicity and its accordance with everyday storytelling and narrative structures of plot and sequence. The real problem of the meaning of violence emerges only after it has happened.” Indeed, the police officers’ versions were accepted as truth and were minimally challenged in apartheid-administered forums such as newspapers. These official silences were understandably saddening for families of those killed and displayed the complexity of challenges that later reconciliation discourses had the daunting task of addressing.

## U B U N T U

Most scholarly work on Ubuntu has put to the rest the pursuit of trying to rigidly define it. Extensively explored in the ontological realms of African Philosophy, the relevance of Ubuntu to Afro-Centric models of law and/or debates on morality has been argued if not overstated. In this section I explore the significance of Ubuntu as a potentially meaningful motif for reconciliation and nation building in its capacity to evoke collective values and the memories that enforce them.

The word ‘Ubuntu’ is abbreviated from the Xhosa proverb “Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” which translates as “a person is a person through other persons” (Swanson 2007: 55). Though distinctively South African in origin, the meanings and usages of Ubuntu are linguistically present throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Non-Africans familiar with Ubuntu likely attribute their knowledge to the dialogues of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, particularly in the formative months of South Africa’s TRC process. In Tutu’s own words: “Ubuntu is very difficult to render into a western language. It speaks of the very essence of being human. When we want to give high praise to someone we say, ‘Yu, u

nobuntu’ – ‘Hey, so-and-so has Ubuntu’. Then you are generous, you are hospitable, you are friendly and caring and passionate” (Swanson, 2007: 54). Tutu’s explanation emphasizes two important elements of Ubuntu: one being the quality of generosity or caring, the other being a sense of community or togetherness in forms of friendship and hospitality. These themes are central to and intractable from discussions of Ubuntu.

The majority of literature on Ubuntu describes it simply as ‘an ideal’, or in philosophical texts, ‘a philosophy’. Charles Villa-Vicencio, national research director of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission describes as an ‘ethno-ethical’ ideal (2009: 115), suggesting relevance only to certain peoples or societies. Indeed, a primary challenge for public figures seeking to utilize Ubuntu has been the ability to convey it as a distinctively African ideal. In both the pan African era of the 1960s and again in the post-apartheid era of the 1990s, public discourses based on traditional African ideals were both integral in the struggle for postcolonial identity and sovereignty. Many scholars argue that Ubuntu is an ideal of pluralism and heterogeneity. With its widespread evocation in modern South African politics, Villa-Vicencio (2009: 116) claims Ubuntu is “capturing the interaction between groups originating in Africa as well as those who have come to make Africa their home as a result of colonialism, the heritage of slavery and other forms of mobility.” Regardless of its origin, the use and misuse of Ubuntu are all in keeping with Tutu’s language and description. The underlying principle of Ubuntu, according to Villa-Vicencio is that existence is both communal and interconnected (2009:114).

Especially in South Africa, contemporary scholars continue to utilize Ubuntu as a framework for understanding and articulating the unique challenges African societies presently face. Ubuntu, says Villa-Vicencio (2009: 127) “offers a cultural incentive to promote a level of communal coexistence among individuals, clans, ethnic groups and nations that linger in the ethos and memory of a continent devastated by greed, conflict and

war.” Ubuntu has strategic advantage in its historical rooting in pre-colonial villages, allowing it to reach individuals or communities suspicious of state or religious institutions as instruments of colonialism. Villa-Vicencio (2009: 117) argues that Ubuntu “can be developed and expanded in relation to a range of contemporary challenges facing the modern state”: development, democracy or the forging of nationhood. As Ubuntu evokes ideals of truth and interconnection, it confronts the greed and individualism often found in many post conflict societies not limited to South Africa alone (Villa-Vicencio 2009: 112).

The most significant point to be touched on here is Ubuntu’s potential in the practice of memory. As it is believed to be rooted in historically continuous processes, Ubuntu is greatly symbolic of the act of memory itself. According to Villa-Vicencio, Ubuntu “remembers past generations and ancestors, drawing on the memory of the lived experiences to success and failure. Like any ethical idea, it must adapt in order to survive” (2009:121). Ubuntu is therefore a way of telling one’s story, drawing on symbols and emotions to recount relatable and historically continuous experiences. Ubuntu also encourages non-violence and co-operation. “An Ubuntu perception of the other is never fixed or rigidly closed, but adjustable or open ended,” says Villa-Vicencio (2009: 121). “It allows the other to be, to become. Because Ubuntu gives expression to self-realization through the other, the other needs to be respected and taken seriously” (2009:121). Other authors such as Cornell and Van Merle (2008: 111) describe Ubuntu as an archive in which public memory is stored, a practice or symbol that average citizens understand to be culturally fundamental to their national identity.

Explorations of Ubuntu ontology end very far from discourses on memory or collectivity. Other scholars, such as Sociolinguist Buntu Mfenyana, describe Ubuntu along the nature-culture divide, as “the quality of being human... which distinguishes a human creature from an animal or spirit” (as cited by Villa-Vicencio, 2009: 115). This argument suggests that Ubuntu represents a fundamental quality of personhood. If

the systems of apartheid sought to dehumanize non-whites by equating racial blackness as an animalism or barbarity, Ubuntu serves to “coax individuals back into the folds of humanity” (Eze 2010: 135).

Discussing Ubuntu is inadequate without considering the arguments of those who denounce it. Though Ubuntu’s ethos builds on distinctly positive motifs, critics have targeted Ubuntu as an authoritarian concept or a way of reifying conservative norms (Cornell and Van Merle 2008: 110). If Ubuntu emphasizes the interest of groups or communities over the rights of individuals, it may in fact represent an appropriative or reactionary method of replacing colonial systems of authority and servitude with ones modeled on indigenous knowledges or familiarities. According to Villa-Vicencio (2009: 112), Ubuntu “is frequently exploited and romanticized by those who seek to benefit from its offer of belonging without responding to the sense of responsibility for the other that it presupposes.” Cornell and Van Merle (2008: 110) add that “Ubuntu is such a bloated concept that it means everything to everyone, and as a bloated concept it should not be translated into a constitutional principle.” Critics also claim that Ubuntu “undermines both individual and national development and progress” (Villa-Vicencio 2009: 118) and restricts individuals from rising or excelling beyond their ascribed position in communities. Motha (2009: 321) adds that Ubuntu may be “nothing more than the expression of a feudal and hierarchical setting of social stasis where communal needs supersede the individual.” While new approaches to nation building emphasize community on a national scale, Ubuntu’s traditional origins are in the more micro contexts of families or villages. In the words of Villa-Vicencio (2009: 114), we must “to what extent is Ubuntu little more than a nostalgic longing for a projected sense of pre-colonial cultural homogeneity and coexistence?” It is this aspect that makes Ubuntu so critical in negotiating the subjectivities of colonialism.

As criticisms of Ubuntu are distinctively post-apartheid, disillusionment with its usage may be at least a partial expression

of unhappiness with the truth and reconciliation process or of a fractured state of nationhood in post-apartheid South Africa. As I demonstrate in further sections, truth and reconciliation in South Africa is a negotiation of public memory as well as personal memory. As the experience of truth and reconciliation weighs differently on individuals, the extent to which non-white South Africans are satisfied by this process is a highly contentious question.

## MEMORY

Questions of memory are front and center in debates on post-colonial subjectivities, and must be considered in addressing the challenges of democratization for post-authoritarian or segregated states such as South Africa. Anthropologist Richard Werbner (1998: 99) describes the problematic nature of memory in post-colonial Africa. In post-colonial societies, he says, “intractable traces of the past are felt on people’s bodies, known in their landscapes, landmarks and souvenirs, and perceived as the tough moral fabric of their social relations”. As with many social processes, Werbner (1998: 99) argues that the experience of memory is very much an ongoing public practice.

Memory is something to be ‘worked on’, something productive and capable of effecting lasting ontological change. Collective memory is forged in the process of collective narrative, amalgamating individual experiences towards a publicly accepted statement about how history has impacted the present, or in South Africa’s case, encapsulating the impact of apartheid on non-white citizens. By forging collective memory, communities are able to reclaim an aspect of pre-colonial sovereignty, laying the groundwork for a self-determined history, paramount in the process of nation building as well as the personal obstacles people must overcome in post-conflict situations.

Anthropological perspectives on memory offer several suggestions on how memory plays in to notions of identity and commu-

nity. Anthropologist James Laidlaw (2004: 3) argues that people experience memory in two different ways. The first is semantic memory; memories related to general, non-personal, propositional facts, for example, remembering the plot of a film. The other is episodic or autobiographical memory, remembered by an individual on the basis of first hand experience, not necessarily in context. For example, remembering searching for a seat in a theatre on a night out with friends in the past. These different forms of memory, argues Laidlaw (2004: 3), “favor some kinds of representation over others. Thus the kinds of ideas human cultures can consist of will be affected by the forms of transmission and memory that human communities have available to them”. Both sorts of memory are in strong interplay in post-traumatic situations. The negative memories individuals possess are not only personal but historically societal, “the basis for widespread but impersonal solidarity among those who share the same body of doctrine” (Laidlaw 2004: 5). Laidlaw’s comments emphasize the importance of memory in forging a sense of shared experience.

In appreciating the power of memory, anthropologists also emphasize the importance of narratives. Narratives play a tremendous role in how histories are reproduced, and more importantly, how they achieve meaning. Narratives, says Simpson (1998: 221), “give coherence to the otherwise inchoate [aspects of life]”. The concept of a narrative is also directly in play with Christian traditions of conversion and confession, dating back to the ‘Confessions of St. Augustine’, where worshippers recount the personal torment and redemption of an iconic Christian saint (Simpson 1998: 221). As symbols and metaphors evoke meaning on the basis of familiar forms, the use of religious language and narrative is an appropriation of these forms in order to engage possibly disparate sets of individuals.

Narratives allow personal or collective histories to be evoked with different emphases. They are also “a critical instrument of human agency, producing socio-cultural form through an arch of memories, actions and intentions” (Simpson 1998: 221). Permitting these different perspectives and emphases, the TRC

process grants South Africans a degree of personal sovereignty over their individual memory. "Sovereignty enters the fray as that which is at stake in self determination," says Motha (2009: 299-300). "Sovereignty persists as the archive of colonialism – it is the foundation, ground, authorization of what is 'now'". The crucial question, he asks, "is whether the reassertion of indigenous sovereignty can be an antidote to colonial sovereignty and its social and economic concomitants" (2009: 300). In the processes of truth and reconciliation, individuals in South Africa pursued a self-determined identity through the sovereignty of their own memory, utilizing narrative and Ubuntu in consecrating the impact that apartheid had and continues to have on their lives.

## RECONCILIATION

To demonstrate the convergence of this essay's key themes, I return to the tragedies at Uitenhage. Over a decade later, memories of the event were recounted on national television by families of the fallen funeral procession marchers. Pieter Meiring, a colleague and confidant of Desmond Tutu's, took notes at the hearing as one mother recounted the loss of her 14-year-old son, possibly the boy that was shot on his bicycle following an ambiguous series of gestures towards police.

*With effort she put her tale on the table: of how she, years ago, sent her fourteen year-old son to buy bread. There was unrest in the township and somewhere along the way it must have happened that the boy landed in the crossfire. For some reason the security police arrested the wounded child and subjected him to brutal torture. Two days later, the mother who, panic-stricken, fumbled about to find out what had happened to her son, saw, on her neighbor's television set during the eight o'clock news, the boy being pulled down from a bakkie (open vehicle) by his ankles – (Meiring 2000: 190)*

The mother went on to recount how police eventually gave her an address telling her, with no further detail, that she could go to this location and find her son. Unfamiliar with her destination, she arrived to realize it was a mortuary. She told the commission how her son's body was burned, bruised and gaping with bullet holes. She recounted cleaning his body in silence as mortuary staff stood silently at the threshold of the room (Meiring 2000: 190).

The details of the mother's narrative demonstrate the methods by which the meaning of her experience and sovereignty of her memory were expressed. Her language in the narrative evokes the image of an innocent young boy, obediently completing chores for his mother, an unknowing victim of events beyond his control. The mother's experience of panic evokes loss and trauma. The narrative communicates her loss as, like other themes, a process. The image of mortuary workers, not necessarily indifferent but stoic to her pain, represents humanistic figures constrained by their vocations within the structures of apartheid. The secondary characters, including the police, can be considered symbols of apartheid, and her son, the tragic victim, the innocence and freedom the system maliciously consumes. In the processes of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the story of this mother was forever sanctified.

Finally, Meiring's depiction of the mother's story demonstrates the way in which Ubuntu factors in. The introduction to the Act on the Promotion of National Unity, a landmark bill outlining policy for how truth and reconciliation processes should be carried out, addresses Ubuntu as follows: "and since the Constitution states that there is a need for understanding but not for vengeance, a need for reparation but not for retaliation, a need for Ubuntu but not for victimization" (Meiring 2000: 118). In these terms, Ubuntu is synonymous with understanding and reparation, dichotomized against victimization. In my preceding discussion I emphasize the significance of Ubuntu via two important qualities: interconnectedness and continuity, both of which



in many ways embody the value and virtue of understanding and reparation. In sharing her loss with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the mother performs the public practice of remembrance, evoking images and sentiments felt by many other non-whites, and her allegorical experience of trauma and suffering. As a single episode in the thousands of stories heard, her individual story contributed to a national dialogue in negotiation of memory, an expression of sovereignty in the freedom to recount and be acknowledged in a state-sanction forum. The public practice of memory is therefore an expression of Ubuntu, forging the collective through the shared experience of individuals.

## CONCLUSION

While the South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission was designed to acknowledge and honor the memories of individual South Africans, it is arguably problematic to force this process on people unconvinced of its efficacy. Supporters of the South African TRC fail to recognize the irony of forcing reconciliation on those unwilling or unready to whole-heartedly participate. "The environment of repressive tolerance that consistently reproduces such scenarios" say Meskell and Weiss (2006: 94), "recognizes cultural difference only insofar as the cultural difference proves profitable and, hence, amenable to popular stereotypes". Indeed, the TRC process was, and remains, highly imperfect, and likely reflective of the few options South African leaders had to hold their nation together.

The challenge of public memory in South Africa continues to be addressed by the country's foremost intellectuals. The works of Nobel Laureate J.M. Coetzee, for example, in both apartheid and post-apartheid eras, have acknowledged the importance of memory in the pursuit of nationhood and peace. Coetzee has warned that all South Africans "must be mindful of the past and about our crafting and retelling of it – specifically the ethical narrating of a shared past" (Meskell and Weiss 2006: 96).

Indeed, the careless evoking of different memories could be socially destabilizing in many South African contexts. "It has proven difficult in a climate of inclusivity and 'rainbow nationess'" say Meskell and Weiss (2006: 93), "to reinforce the specificities of deep past because they may prove even more divisive and destabilizing." Even the classic and fundamental discipline of history has faced major contention in modern South Africa. This reflects the anxiety of putting order and reason to the conflicting events that mark South Africa's history. According to historian Terrence Ranger (cited by Meskell and Weiss 2006: 95) "history [in South Africa] is becoming today what anthropology was in Africa in the 1950s, the discipline that dare not speak its name." Understandably, evoking historical events will reveal many different meanings from different parties, some who may associate events with violation or sadness, others with triumph or unity. As South Africa attempts to foster national unity, honoring the histories of one group may inevitably infringe on another's. "The conflict between popular and state memorialism", says Werbner (1998: 100), "reaches to the very right of a citizen to have a recognized memory in public, to have the politically caused trauma and loss openly acknowledged." Addressing this issue is paramount in South Africa's democratization and the development of a South African nationhood.

Ultimately, South Africa's TRC had one important goal; to engage and negotiate the country's troubled past towards establishing a public memory and some semblance of a national identity. Developing an identity, argue Cornell and Van Merle, is an ongoing and dynamic process experienced by both communities and individuals. "Individuals become individuated through their engagement with others, and their ability to live in line with their capability is at the heart of how ethical interactions are judged" (2008: 111).

Sharing certain common memories is therefore critical towards sharing a *national* identity, motivating the TRC to "create a common memory that can be recognized or acknowledged" (Ntsebeza 2000: 118). A Chilean lawyer who worked on truth

and reconciliation processes in his own country wrote that “memory *is* identity. Identities consisting of false or half-memories easily commit atrocity” (Scott 2000: 111).

Finally, it is important to emphasize the pervasiveness of duality or two-sidedness in many of this essay’s themes. Ubuntu, memory, sovereignty and reconciliation, can each be characterized as having both a personal and communal aspect; Ubuntu, memory and peace with oneself, and Ubuntu, memory and peace among others. In the context of South Africa in particular, Werbner argues that “the work of imagining the nation has been in great measure the memory work of coming to terms with past political violence which is dual in nature – both anti-colonial, in a sense this being external, and also internal, traumatically directed against a collective enemy within the nation”(1998: 98-99). The events at Uitenhage in March 1985 are a clear representation of languages, symbolisms and other cultural factors in direct and heated conflict. The context and pretext to the Uitenhage shootings gave the violence a meaning that, in its popular recollection, committed that violence to history and memory.

The search for truth and reconciliation in South Africa is arguably ongoing, and continues to be problematized by the country’s unique social, political and economic contexts. With leading global murder rates and proven propensities for xenophobic violence, South Africa remains an important case study in the postcolonial encounters of violence and history. “While the fact of death is itself banal,” says Thornton, “the interpretation of specific deaths gives other lives their meaning” (1990: 218). If violence is as structural as Thornton’s work suggests, the ways in which violence is remembered and signified must be considered foundational in anthropological understandings of many social debates in post-apartheid South Africa.

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# (RE)CONSTRUCTING THE PAST: THE ROLE OF MEMORY AND IMAGINATION AMONG TRANSNATIONALLY ADOPTED CHILDREN AND THEIR ADOPTIVE PARENTS

✿ JENNIFER SHAW

## ABSTRACT

In this article, I discuss the outcomes of research conducted with transnationally adopted children between the ages of eight and 14, adopted from seven countries. I also interviewed one or both of their adoptive parents. My findings demonstrate the role that parents play in archiving and constructing their child's past. While most children rely on their parents for their biographical information, two children I interviewed who were adopted at significantly older ages often relied on their own recollections and knowledge of their lives. Their memories and selectivity in sharing this information enables them to become purveyors of knowledge, rather than their parents.

My understanding of memory is based on anthropologist Jon Holtzman's definition as "the subjective ways that the past is recalled, memorialized, and used to construct the present" (Holtzman 2006:363). This includes "a broad array of disparate processes" such as "how a sense of historicity shapes social pro-

cesses and meanings, nostalgia for a real or imagined past, and invented traditions” (Holtzman 2006:363). In the introduction to *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*, Paul Antze and Michael Lambek suggest an approach that conceptualizes “memory as practice, not as a pregiven object of our gaze but as the act of gazing and the objects it generates. Memories are produced out of experience and, in turn, reshape it. This implies that memory is intrinsically linked to identity” (1996:xii). As will be further discussed, memories within adoptive families are valuable and contested domains of knowledge shaped by hierarchical relationships children have with their parents and other significant people in their lives.

Parents of transnationally adopted children often become the primary managers of their children’s histories and identities, selectively providing their children with information about their past and choosing what aspects of the birth country and culture their children are exposed to. Françoise-Romaine Ouellette (Ouellette and Belleau 2001:27) argues that parents tend to limit children’s knowledge of their origins as a way of managing difference within the family. She suggests that children’s histories are often limited to an archive of photographs, souvenirs and stories kept by their parents. Conversely, Toby-Alice Volkman argues that “parents seek ways of ‘activating’ the archive” rather than limiting it (2003:44). She suggests parents are genuinely curious and yearn for a deeper connection to their child’s past, for their own satisfaction and for their children. Responding to Ouellette and Volkman, Sara Dorow considers application of both perspectives by questioning “which histories are archived and activated and how” (2006:213). Through her research, Dorow (2006:218-227) finds that parents assist in constructing their child’s cultural identities through varying narrative frames, differentially employing objects and practices that assist in shaping their child’s identity. On the one hand, Dorow demonstrates that some parents practice assimilation, viewing their children wholly assimilated within their adoptive context while denying that the child is different or that difference mat-

ters. Alternatively, she found some parents were more accepting of their familial diversity, celebrating their multicultural origins and plurality. Lastly, Dorow classifies some parents as practicing immersion where they believe their children should be fully immersed in their birth “culture” and embracing of their minority status. In addition to addressing the role that parents play in maintaining their child’s biographical archive, Dorow’s research highlights how parents actively manage a collection of objects and memories that assist in constructing identity and a sense of belonging for their children.

#### CHILDREN’S HISTORIES AND PARENTS’ NARRATIVES

Throughout my research I have examined the roles parents have in creating imaginings and memories for their transnationally adopted children about their migration and birthplaces. In 2009, as part of a larger project investigating transnationally adopted children’s experiences of migration, I interviewed ten transnationally adopted children between the ages of eight and 14, adopted from seven different countries. I also interviewed one or both of their adoptive parents.

I used a comparative approach to examine the similarities and differences between children’s perspectives and those of their parents; however children’s ideas were placed at the forefront of the research study. Throughout anthropology and within transnational adoption research, emphasis is often placed on the perspectives of adults including parents, adult adoptees, and adoption professionals while research involving children often perceives their behaviours, actions, and bodies to be measurable and quantifiable (Scheper-Hughes and Sargent 1998:14). As a result, there is very little qualitative research that frames children as knowing and informative actors. My standpoint is based on the understanding that children are “articulate commentators on the social world” (James 2007:261) and it is from this



position that I highlight children's perspectives throughout my research (see James 2007, James and James 2008, Mayall 2002).

Although many children I interviewed could not recall their lives before adoption, it became apparent to me that parents repeatedly tell them stories using souvenirs, photographs, books, and movies to narrate and illustrate their origins. For example, one family recorded their first moments meeting their daughter at the orphanage. They frequently watch the film on the anniversary of the day she joined their family. Other families created scrapbooks displaying important documents, pictures, and objects pertaining to their child's adoption. One participant, Elsa, frequently referred to the scrapbook her adoptive mother had crafted for her when talking to me about her birthplace and adoption. Elsa read me excerpts from the scrapbook, trying hard to change the wording from her mother's perspective to her own, as if to tell me the story in her words. The following excerpt is an example:

*I had a Chinese mom and a Chinese dad. But they could not take care of me. They brought me to a children's home where many nice aunties gave me milk, played with me and patted me to sleep... (Elsa, 9)*

She then goes on to negotiate the perspective from which she tells the story:

*The paper in China said that we could adopt you – I mean you could adopt me, if we promised to take good care of me. We were so happy excited that we showed the picture to everyone. (Elsa, 9)*

Elsa finds her scrapbook and her parents to be informative sources on the earliest parts of her life. Many children I interviewed often referred to sources such as this, proclaiming that they had heard or received stories from their parents. One 14-year-old participant explained to me that it was odd for him to talk about his migration because he did not have all the information. He said,

*Well, it's odd because I've seen a picture of me when I was in [my birth country] with my parents and then my mom told me a story about how I was yellin' or smiling at passengers on the plane. And then, I learned a little bit about immigration. So basically what I have in my mind is a picture of me in [my birth country] and then me on a plane playing and then me teleported into some office to sign – my parents sign papers and then me teleported back to [my Canadian city] and that's pretty much it. I guess I never really thought about the blank spots, just the information that I know of. (Frankie,14)*

Frankie was able to explain to me what it felt like to not know all the details of his life, labelling these as “blank spots.” Most children I spoke with attempted to fill these “blank spots” by referring me to their parents; it was common for children to tell me to ask their parents for answers to my questions because they could not remember. It became clear to me throughout the research that although I intended to focus upon children's perspectives, these cannot be viewed in isolation to the information they gather from other people. Mom and dad become the narrators and storytellers of their children's lives, creating and managing a dominant history that not only describes where their children came from but essentially who their children are.

However, this understanding of parent-child roles within adoptive families was challenged when I met two young participants: Ivan and Polina. A number of factors made these children quite similar to each other, but very different from the other children I spoke with. Ivan and Polina were both adopted from Russia at the ages of seven and eight, respectively, which was considerably older than most of the other children I interviewed. By being adopted as older children they had many more stories to tell about what they could *remember*, unlike other children who claimed to have few memories of their lives before being adopted.

## IVAN: REMEMBERING COLD WINTERS

Ivan arrived in Canada at the age of seven. He met his adoptive parents on two occasions prior to his migration. Several months before his adoption, a language tutor helped Ivan learn English to better communicate with his adoptive parents and helped him understand his impending adoption and migration. He recalled stories about meeting his adoptive parents for the first time, going on excursions with them, and eventually coming to Canada. When I asked him to draw an image of his move to Canada, the moment that stood out for him was standing in front of his new house with his mother while his father took a picture of them to capture his moment of arrival (see Figure 1).

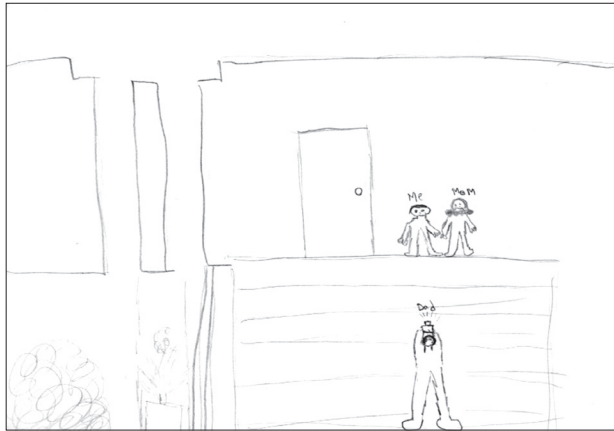


FIGURE 1:  
IVAN'S (AGE 11) ILLUSTRATION OF THE DAY HE ARRIVED AT HIS FAMILY'S  
HOME IN BRITISH COLUMBIA.

Ivan also shared stories about his life prior to meeting his adoptive parents, which reveal a very different childhood compared to his life in Canada. He recalled enduring cold winters in Russia and playing in the snow. He remembers living with a young relative in an abandoned house that may have belonged to his absent grandparents. The children were relatively self-sufficient collecting their own food, water, and daily necessities. He

did not attend school and did not have regular adult caretakers until he was taken to the orphanage and eventually adopted into a comparatively affluent Canadian family. During my conversations with his parents, Ivan's mother reflected on stories he told her. She said,

*"he tells a story about... going into a farmer's field and eating a cabbage, a raw cabbage and how wonderful that was. He'll tell stories about picking mushrooms in the woods, picking blueberries in the woods. Mostly stories like that."*

When I asked Ivan to draw an image of his birthplace, he recalled an occasion when his young relative had played a trick on him by coaxing him into a dark room and then closing the door to scare him. His illustration, shown in Figure 2, depicts this moment. He says that although he was scared at the time, it was a "good" memory because it was funny.



FIGURE 2:  
IVAN'S (AGE 11) ILLUSTRATION OF A MEMORY FROM HIS BIRTHPLACE,  
DEPICTING WHEN HIS RELATIVE CLOSED HIM INTO A DARK ROOM  
WHILE PLAYING A JOKE ON HIM.

## POLINA: REFLECTIONS ON ORPHANAGE-LIVING

Polina was adopted from Russia at the age of eight. During the interviews, she could also recount personal details about her life prior to adoption. Not only is she aware of how different her life has become since adoption but she, like Ivan, confronted two very different experiences of childhood. She remembers residing with her biological mother who was often emotionally and physically absent, and her older biological brother who often left home only to be returned by the police when he was “caught.” She was required to be self-reliant in order to meet most of her needs. She was able to describe in great detail her life in a Russian town and could reflect on what the space was like in and around her residences. She showed me a photograph of her former home and described the details of the interior such as where her bed was placed and where people would eat and sit. She also described how she used to walk to the store, down many streets, around corners, using landmarks such as trees to identify her path.

Polina moved into an orphanage when her birth mother was no longer able to care for her. The orphanage and adjacent school became main topics during our interview conversations and when I asked her to draw her birthplace, she decided to draw images of these institutions (see Figures 3 and 4). She explained each detail of the drawings including the graffiti on the orphanage staircase and the broken glass at the foot of the tagged wall. She explained what it felt like to be in the school area which she described as “tight” due to the spatial boundaries set by fences and the surveillance of the staff and teachers.



FIGURE 3:  
POLINA'S (AGE 10) ILLUSTRATION OF THE ORPHANAGE WHERE SHE  
LIVED IN RUSSIA. THE DRAWING PORTRAYS SPRAY-PAINTED IMAGES  
ON THE STAIRCASE LEADING TO THE ENTRANCE DOOR, AND BROKEN  
GLASS ON THE GROUND.



FIGURE 4:  
POLINA'S (AGE 10) ILLUSTRATION OF HER SCHOOL NEAR THE  
ORPHANAGE IN RUSSIA.

Polina's clear ability to narrate her experiences and memories of this place to me was demonstrative of her capacity to also inform her parents' knowledge. Her father said he tries to ask Polina about her life in Russia but she is selective with the information that she shares and does not answer all of his questions.

Polina's parents expressed some frustration over their lack of knowledge about her life in Russia. When they went to get Polina, they attempted to gather more information from the adoption facilitator, wanting, in their words "to know her history." Polina's father repeatedly asked the social worker and adoption facilitator to provide them with more information to which the facilitator would provide the simple response that Polina was "very poor." Polina's mother added that it was particularly frustrating because the adoption professionals, "talked in Russian with each other for ten minutes and then go, 'Well, she was very poor.'" Polina's parents felt as though they were missing information about their daughter's life. Polina is their key source of information, depending on what she is willing to share. This particular case study is an example of how children who are the key informants within their family have a sense of agency in choosing what to share about their past.

## CONSTRUCTIONS AND CONTESTATION OF IDENTITIES

Similarly to other parents I interviewed, Polina's parents are concerned with maintaining her ethnic and cultural ties with Russia. Polina's father often attempts to speak to her with his limited Russian vocabulary, but admits that she never responds and refuses to speak in Russian. When he or anyone else refers to her as "Russian," she interjects and describes herself as "Canadian-Russian." Polina told me that she feels more Canadian than Russian "because I speak it and I forgot a little bit of Russian and I don't ever think about that I am, only if like somebody asks me." Similarly, Ivan expressed that he is uninter-



ested by his parents' attempts to draw his attention towards his Russian background. He affirms that he feels "more Canadian" than Russian "because when I was in Russia I was little and I don't remember anything but in Canada I'm older and I know, I know things, I know about it. A lot more than I knew in Russia."

Interestingly, Polina and Ivan both felt distanced from their Russian origins because they say they "forgot" or "don't remember" much about the place or having lived there. Despite the many recollections they shared with me throughout our interviews, their own perceived lack of knowledge regarding Russia but substantial knowledge about and connection to Canada enables them to feel more "Canadian" than "Russian." Both sets of parents expressed concerns that their children may be losing or forgetting their Russian origins. Like most parents I interviewed, they also try to maintain the connection by creating an archive representing their children's histories. This archive specifically reflects their ideas of a Russian ethnicity and culture. However, dynamics within Ivan and Polina's families were very different than other adoptive families I spoke with because children, rather than parents, are the primary purveyors of knowledge.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the theories developed by anthropologists explaining how adoptive parents manage and construct children's histories and identities is interesting as they demonstrate not just the role of knowledge production in adopted children's lives, but also the ways in which power dynamics shape children's experiences. Similarly to the works of Ouellette (2001, 2009), Volkman (2003, 2005) and Dorow (2006), I found that parents construct an archive of their child's cultural and biographical history by retelling their early stories through mementos, photographs, souvenirs and books. Parents often expressed that it is important for them that their children know about their origins, and feel ethnically and culturally connected to their birthplace through

archived objects and practices. Many parents acknowledged that they act as main sources of information for their children.

However, parent-child roles in narrating and negotiating knowledge are not so straightforward. A critical examination into the ways biographical information is shared within adoptive families highlights crossroads of knowledge and experience within a hierarchy of age and generation. What is revealed is an intersection between the authoritative knowledge of adoptive parents, that may leave some children wanting to know more, and the imaginative, experiential and even memorable knowledge some children maintain regarding their past. Children who primarily imagined their adoption and migration look to their parents for information. Children adopted at older ages answered my questions with greater confidence because they are able to remember earlier aspects of their childhood, which is highly encouraged and valued by their parents. However, when children are selective in the information they choose to share, parents may also be left unfulfilled and wanting to know more.

Not only was I able to examine transnational adoption from the perspectives of children, but I discovered that the age when children are adopted is an important factor in their ability to recall their past and contribute to or contest the cultural archive that is created for them by their parents. This research contributes to the understanding that memory and the past are not simply “out there,” but rather they emerge through a social process of negotiation and practice within particular contexts. This research shows that although parents actively try to maintain and create memories for their child, these memories and imaginings neither fully belong to the parents, nor the children themselves. Rather, they are a valuable and contested domain that is inseparable from the power and hierarchy within the family. Thus, parents and children selectively work together to actively manage an archive of memories through which identity and belonging are constructed

## NOTES

- i. Pseudonyms are used for all participants.

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# THE PROFUSION OF POTATOES IN PRE-COLONIAL BRITISH COLUMBIA

✿ STELLA WENSTOB

## ABSTRACT

In 1858, the explorer, trader, and Indian agent, William Eddy Banfield published an article for Vancouver Island's first newspaper, the *Victoria Gazette*, describing the trade and cultivation of potatoes among the First Nations of Vancouver Island's West Coast. Banfield described a great feast among the Tla-o-qui-aht people that centred on the consumption of the prestigious trade good, potatoes. This highly ritualized, culturally and socially significant practice of the potato feast raises many questions about the early European perception of dynamism among First Nations people. By tracing the early diffusion of the potato during this time period, I use the potato as a medium to examine shifting perceptions regarding European perceptions of Pacific Northwest First Nation's land use.

## INTRODUCTION

In 1858, the explorer, trader, and Indian agent, William Eddy Banfield published an article for Vancouver Island's first newspaper, the *Victoria Gazette*, describing the trade and cultivation of potatoes among the First Nations of Vancouver Island's West

Coast. Banfield described a great feast among the Tla-o-qui-aht people that centred on the consumption of the prestigious trade good, potatoes (Sept. 9, 1858).

This highly ritualized, culturally and socially significant practice of the potato feast raises many questions about the early European perception of dynamism among First Nations people. How did this non-traditional foodstuff so readily become a significant part of the indigenous diet? The First Nations' relationship to the potato was furthered by interactions with Europeans who came to the Pacific Northwest. Over time, as European traders were replaced by gold miners, settlers and colonists, the motivations behind these interactions changed. Using documented descriptions of the potato as a medium for analysis, I will track shifting European perceptions of the First Nations people and their agricultural practices. Specifically, I will focus on the shift in settler policies that coincided with the shift from pre-colonial to colonial agendas, when land use became an issue.

This essay is an analysis of early European firsthand accounts relating to indigenous potato cultivation and more generally, indigenous agriculture along the Northwest coast. Examining these primary documents, specifically their descriptions of aboriginal potato cultivation, will reveal shifting biases and prejudices that became heightened as Europeans grew increasingly comfortable in this new frontier. This paper focuses primarily on an area along the coast of what is now British Columbia, although some mention of the Makah First Nation of Washington's Cape Flattery and the Tlingit of Southern Alaska will be made.

Before I begin, a case must be made for the uniqueness of the potato's diffusion into the Pacific Northwest. The potato was first seen by Europeans in 1532 when the Spanish explorer Pizarro and his men encountered the Andean people, who lived in present day Peru and Chile, subsisting upon them (O'Riordan 2001: 27). From here, the potato experienced a very slow and highly contested introduction into Europe. At times it was lauded as an aphrodisiac, the apple of the earth. It was later denounced as the source of alcoholism, typhus, leprosy, and other skin dis-

eases that resembled its bumpy skin. In France, the potato was banned in two separate cases, in 1619 and 1748, in an attempt to stop the spread of disease (Brandes 1999: 87). Widespread famine in Russia during the 1760's persuaded Catherine the Great to order potato planting among the serfs, but it was not until the 1850's that potatoes became a widely grown crop within Russia, following the enforcement of Catherine's order by Czar Nicholas I (Viola and Margolis 1991). By the late 1700s, with increasingly prevalent continental wars, it became recognized as a valuable food source because it could be kept in the ground until it was needed for a meal. Marauding soldiers in search of food missed the buried potatoes, taking instead the harvested grain. The potato became an important food source in difficult times and became a contributing factor for population increases throughout Europe. The population increases, which occurred during the Agricultural Revolution, provided excess workers that would later fuel the Industrial Revolution.

The potato's introduction to Europe was slow, taking nearly two hundred years to become an important staple. By the time Captain James Cook charted the Pacific Northwest in 1778 it was commonly cultivated in many parts of Europe. In comparison, I will show that the First Nations of the Pacific Northwest accepted the potato far more quickly than their European counterparts, harvesting and trading their potato crops in great numbers by around 1825 – a mere forty- seven years after first contact (Scouler 1905).

## OUTLINE

Beginning in 1828, this paper will trace the contested introduction of the potato at the Hudson Bay Company's Fort Langley, located along the Fraser River (Suttles 1951 and 2005). This will be followed by a discussion regarding the possible genetic origins of the various potato varieties that have come to be naturalized in the Pacific Northwest as well as an examination regarding

the way in which this information challenges or supports the story (Zhang et al. 2010). I will then examine Fort Victoria's establishment in 1842. Here, James Douglas' knowledge of the productive and contemporary Songhees' potato plots in the area informed his decision to choose this area for the establishment of a fort. This decision illustrates how important the cultivation of potatoes had become in the eyes of the European traders, warranting an investigation into the possible mechanisms of dispersal from its supposed initial introduction only fourteen years prior. At this point in my analysis, an inquiry into the theory of the Diffusion of Innovations will be undertaken (Rogers 1995). This theoretical framework is useful for my study since it provides a model for how newly introduced objects or ideas move across a landscape. After this, I will return to Banfield's writings in greater detail as a way to provide further support for the 'diffusionist' model. Banfield's writings represent a European attitude and consciousness that is very different from the 1864 writings of Robert Brown. Brown's writings indicate that there was a shift in attitude and policy regarding land allocation for First Nations' communities. The physical manifest of this disturbing change in European policy is highlighted by the damaging reallocation reserve land policies of Joseph Trutch, initiated in 1865. These policies made it nearly impossible for First Nations to practice agriculture and marked the end of the profusion of the potatoes among First Nations in British Columbia.

#### 1827- FORT LANGLEY

It has generally been accepted that potatoes were first introduced onto the coast of British Columbia a year after the establishment of Fort Langley (Suttles 1951). According to James McMillan, writing as a factor in the Fort Langley Journal, the schooner Cadboro brought potatoes to Fort Langley (situated along the Fraser River) in 1828, as well as other supplies from Monterrey (what was then Mexico). Weeks before the schooner's arrival,



the journal tells of the men at the fort preparing the ground in anticipation of its approach (McMillan 1998 (1828): 56-57). Later in the year, the traders harvested a hearty crop of potatoes. By the spring of 1829, the men at the fort were paying their indigenous employees with excess potatoes. By this time, the natives had apparently acquired a taste for the tubers. This has been argued to be the first documented cultivation of potatoes on the Northwest coast, and it is interesting to note how quickly the First Nations developed a demand for this product. Prior to the cultivation of potatoes, there were several comments made in the Fort Langley Journal about a lack of First Nation's demand for any items that the fort had to offer as payment for labour, furs, salmon and sturgeon. After this successful harvest there are several mentions of the potato as a valued trade item for First Nations communities.

As early as January after the fort's first harvest in 1829, Archibald McDonald, the new factor, records the following: "An unusual Squad of Men, women & children Strolled thro' the field to day in search of potatoes & also we have no doubt with the view of accommodating our people— they have turned off more peremptory than usual" (McDonald 1998 (1828): 92). This quote indicates how secure the fort was with the addition of a new food source. It also shows that the First Nations people had a clear idea regarding how to harvest the potato and found it desirable enough for them to harvest and eat.

In May of the same year, several employed First Nations were "paid with large Kettles full of potatoes now that we find of this very essential article we have more than we Can make use {now it's become impossible to preserve them}" (McMillan 1998 (1828):112). The potatoes that the traders used as a trade good were the past years' stored potatoes, something that the fort was obviously having difficulty keeping any longer. Is this evidence of traders providing First Nations with the first seed potatoes that would become the root of all future indigenous potato crops along the coast? Wayne Suttles (1951) uses the evidence from this same journal to argue that this was the initial introduc-

tion of potatoes to the Coast Salish. Suttles addresses many of the questions that are pertinent to the investigation of potato cultivation on the Northwest coast. He raises questions about how the potato was so easily dispersed and suggests that this rapid dispersal may have been related to the use of previous agricultural knowledge (Suttles 1951: 272). Suttles argues that the new crop was easily and quickly incorporated, or diffused, into a system of traditional tuber agriculture that was already in place along the coast. He suggests that potatoes were adopted using a system that the First Nations already used for the cultivation of camas, wapato and tiger lily – all starchy bulbs that are cultivated in a similar manner to the potato.

The seeming lack of evidence for agricultural practice among Northwest coast First Nations groups along with the presence of general systems of social hierarchy and semi-sedentism has long presented the discipline with “the puzzling case of the noncultivating Northwest Coast” (Deur & Turner 2005: 5). The last fifty years has seen the rise of ethnobotany and the recognition of different non-Western methods of cultivating and maintaining the land. Along with this, there has been an increased awareness regarding First Nations land and plant use, including a recognition of practices such as controlled brush burning, maintenance of clam gardens and the cultivation of camas fields (Deur & Turner 2005).

Suttles’ paper, as discussed here, is a landmark in opening up discussion regarding the potato and its relatively quick dispersal around the Pacific Northwest. However, his work is focused on the Coast and Strait Salish who represent only a fraction of the First Nations groups who were affected by this tuber. Recent genetic work (Zhang et al. 2010) and further historical inquiry (McDonald 2005) has revealed that these potatoes were not the first to be harvested along the coast.

McDonald’s recent work on Tsimshian horticulture reveals that there was a developed potato trade already established along the Nass River before the Hudson Bay Company’s fort was set up in 1834. During the first few years at Fort Nass (later re-

named Fort Simpson), the European traders subsisted on potatoes traded from the Tsimshian, Nisga'a and Haida (McDonald 2005: 252-253). The manner in which these nations gained access to the potato is disputed, although some evidence suggests that it may have been introduced following the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Russians and Spanish in California. In 1806, the Russian American Company in Alaska was low on food provisions which meant that many people in the area were succumbing to the ravages of scurvy. The potato, a source of Vitamin C, is an antiscorbutic and the extent of scurvy during this period indicates an absence of potatoes. Russian ambassador, Nikolai Rezanov led an expedition to the Columbia region to procure food, but his crew, ill and weakened with scurvy, was unable to put a boat ashore. He proceeded instead to San Francisco where he negotiated with the Spanish for provisions. This trip opened doors between the Spanish and Russians, which led to the Russians establishing Fort Ross in Northern California in 1812. This was a depot with the two-fold purpose of growing provisions for Russian forts and providing an expanded supply of sea otter pelts (Chevigny 1965). Suttles also discusses a possible Russian diffusion, but he dismisses this in favour of the previously discussed diffusion from Fort Langley instead. However, in light of this early evidence regarding Tsimshian potato agriculture, it is not likely that they could have gotten them from the Salish people around Fort Langley since it had only been six years since the potato was thought to have been introduced at that location.

A physician and naturalist named Dr. John Scouler provides an early and informative account of the Haida trade and cultivation of potatoes on the Queen Charlotte Islands. This account was recorded in his journals aboard the Hudson Bay company trade vessel the William & Ann. On July 26th 1824, he writes:

*"The acuteness of the Queen Charlotte's Islanders has prompted them to adopt a great many customs of civilised life, & the cultivation of potatoes is very general among*

*them, and had our time permitted we might have obtained any quantity of this useful article. This consideration alone, in my opinion, places them far above the natives of the Columbia in the scale of intelligence. With all the advantages of having Europeans constantly among them I do not know of one improvement requiring the smallest exertion that has been adopted by the Cheenooks. Poor Skittigass Tom was the only Indian that ever expressed much anxiety to learn to read and write, & was very fond of obtaining a few ciphers. He made charts of Nass & Skittigass, which served to give a very good idea of the coast & of the different tribes settled along it.” (1905 (1824):191)*

Notice how even early on in the pre-colonial period, there is a language of superiority and usage of agricultural knowledge as indicative of the ‘civilized’ (Mackie 1993: 108-109). As well, Scouler gives the Haida credit for their efforts in learning how to read, write and map – all very Western based knowledge systems.

Later in 1848, Scouler continues to praise the ‘progressive’ nature of the Haida. “The introduction and general cultivation of the potato without the aid of European lessons or example is a remarkable instance of the docility and industry of the Haidah, and they not un-frequently sell from five to eight hundred bushels of them at the annual fair at Naas.” (Scouler 1848: 247). This quote indicates the friendly nature of the trade and reveals Scouler’s characterization of the Haida as a ‘progressive’ people who could easily adapt to European ways. Despite these friendly overtones, his general tone remains patronizing and condescending because he still expects the natives to naturally progress towards the European goal of ‘civilizing’ the area. As well, in the quote above, he denies that the Chinook have an ability to adapt.

Scouler’s writings did not appraise the land as much as later writers were apt to. His writings seem to be ‘scientifically’ descriptive – the product of a naturalist. The people he describes, like the plants and animals, are not depicted as frozen in time

like they are in the writings of later ethnographers. He creates a First Nation “other”, who is different in many ways from the European known, but he allows his characters to have enough agency “to learn to read and write” and to be active and even helpful members of the expeditions that he describes. Scouler’s characterization of the First Nations he encounters is fluid and subjective, and is not bounded by harsher prejudices that are often characteristic of the colonial mindset.

## GENETICS

Along the Northwest coast there are several naturalized varieties of potato that are supposedly derived from crops that were introduced by Europeans during the early years of contact. In 2010, an American genetic study tested the diversity of these varieties to see how closely related they are to the potatoes that were taken to Europe in the initial old world dispersal during the 1530s, or to the original potato varieties seen in the Andes (Zhang et al. 2010). This is an intriguing question because it has been generally accepted that after the dispersion of potatoes out of the Andes from Chile to Europe, all other potato introductions were comprised of this European naturalized variety. The study shows that three of the potato varieties grown along the coast were not directly related to the European variety, but more closely related to the Peruvian cultivar or a cultivar naturalized to Mexico (Zhang et al. 2010: 22). This information indicates that these varieties were either brought directly from Peru, or were brought to Mexico from Peru, and were dispersed into the Pacific Northwest from there. Either way, this offers an intriguing new dispersion pathway that demonstrates how inter-related early European trade networks were, since trade with Mexico and Peru was still important to the distant traders in the Pacific Northwest. Peru and Mexico are located along the sailing route from Europe, which took travellers around the Cape Horn of South America. As well, there is documented trade between

Europeans and forts that were set up in Mexico. Another possibility is that the potato was a trade good derived from indigenous trade networks that reached into southern North America, or even as far as South America. Although these studies provide some preliminary information, more research is needed to completely understand the origin and dispersion of the potato.

An intriguing aspect of the introduction of the potato is that there is an additional variety found on the Northwest coast that is not from these Peruvian or Mexican cultivars. Rather, it is more closely related to the Chilean cultivars that were naturalized in Europe. This variety must have been part of a separate European dispersal (Zhang et al. 2010: 22). This potato, the “To-Le-Ak” of the Quillayute Nation of La Push Washington State, shares a similar cultural history with potato varieties deriving from the early pre-colonial fur trade era. Why would the European fur traders introduce two different varieties of potatoes separately? To answer this we need to look at specific potato varieties.

The three potato varieties derived from Mexican or Chilean cultivars are the Ozette potato of the Makah in Washington State, Maria’s potato of the Tlingit Nation and the Kasaan potato of the Haida, both from Southern Alaska. The Ozette potato was reportedly introduced by the early Spanish explorers who set up a fort in Neah Bay for a short time in 1792, an area where several of the Makah’s villages are located (Zhang et al. 2010:25). As well, the Spanish traders set up a garden at their settlement in Nootka Sound on Vancouver Island in 1790, only a short distance away from Neah Bay. Potatoes are listed in the journal of José Mariano Moziño as one of the crops grown here (Moziño 1970:111 and Zhang et al 2010:25). As well, in 1791, the Spanish trader Juan Pantoja y Arriaga describes a visit to the gardens at Nootka Sound where “some fine cabbage, lettuce, radishes, potatoes, garlic, onions, carrots, artichokes and tomatoes have been grown” (Gill 1983: 351 and Wagner 1933:162). The people of Nootka Sound are part of the same language group and share many cultural affiliations with the Makah, suggesting

an increased level of trade and shared cultural practices. If it was not diffused through trade with the Spanish, the potato, valued by the Makah and Nootka groups, would have diffused between these groups through the process of natural trade relations. The other two potatoes, the Kasaan and Maria's potato, may have been traded up the coast to Alaska, or may have been introduced by European traders. It seems then, that these potato varieties are the same ones that Scouler (1905) and McDonald (2005) describe as a valuable trade good along the Nass River. The Quillayute Nation of La Push, although geographically close to the Makah, keeps very distinct cultural boundaries, maintaining separate languages and similar but separate origin stories. This is different from the connections between the people of Nootka Sound and the Makah, as mentioned above. It is possible that this cultural boundary controlled the flow of potato varieties amongst these people or maybe their lack of connection with the Spanish traders gave them a predilection for the variety introduced by different traders.

In either case, the appearance of potatoes in the Pacific Northwest, although vital to our understanding of the issue, is difficult to trace and understand with confidence. That is why the remainder of this essay will concentrate on the diffusion or movement of the potato across the landscape – examining why this tuber was so successful amongst the First Nations people. As well, the remainder of this paper will continue to review and analyze the European's perception of the First Nation's practice of cultivating potatoes.

Fort Victoria 1842

Unlike the complex history presented here, some believe that the introduction of the potato into the Pacific Northwest follows a more easily examined trajectory. James Douglas of the Hudson Bay Company (HBC) proclaims in a letter to London in October 1839, the following:

*"I may be permitted to mention . . . as a matter to interest the friends of our native population, and all who desire to*

*trace the first dawn and early progress of civilization, that the Cowegians (Lower Fraser Tribes) around Fort Langley, influenced by the counsel and example of the fort, are beginning to cultivate the soil, many of them having with great perseverance and industry cleared patches of forest land of sufficient extent to plant, each ten bushels of potatoes; the same spirit of enterprise extends, though less generally, to the Gulf of Georgia and de Fuca's straits, where the very novel sight of flourishing fields of potatoes satisfies the missionary visitors that the Honourable Company neither oppose, nor feel indifferent to, the march of improvement?" (quoted in Suttles 1951:274)*

Suttles argues that this claim was a political attempt to counter the negative image that the HBC had acquired as a business that sought to keep First Nations in a static, 'non progressive' state in an attempt to more easily control their trade (1951:4). Perhaps, considering these political intentions, the credibility of this quote is somewhat undermined since it may simply be an example of Douglas attempting to portray the HBC in a favourable light. However, this quote does illustrate how widespread the potato was amongst the First Nations and it illustrates the HBC's awareness of indigenous agricultural practices. As well, this quote indicates that the First Nations' emphasis on agricultural practice was deemed 'industrious' and represented an improvement on previous practices in the eyes of European authorities. Cultivation here is seen as a landmark achievement in the 'civilizing' of the First Nations, a concept that is similar to the ideas that are inherent in Scouler's writings fifteen years prior.

Three years later, now acting as chief factor, James Douglas was charged with deciding where to establish the next company's fort above the newly contested American border. He decided to place this new fort on the southern tip of Vancouver Island. This decision was based upon observations of intense indigenous land use in the area. He describes the potential for agricultural productivity at what would soon be known as Fort Victoria. In



a letter to John McLoughlin, he specifically notes that, “we are certain that potatoes thrive here and grow to a large size, as the Indians have many small fields in cultivation, which appear to repay the labour bestowed upon them.” (quoted in 1943[1842]:6) This quote not only illustrates how important potatoes were to the First Nations, but it also indicates that the indigenous ability to cultivate potatoes was important to the fort since they would be able to provide the fort with food. It also ensured that the soil would be productive for the fort’s own use.

Mackie (1993) discusses a similar valuation of the aboriginal produced potatoes in a letter from John McLoughlin to another HBC trader John Work in 1844 stressing that,

*“I hope every means will be used to increase our intercourse with the Indians of the Queen Charlotte Island, and it will be proper to purchase potatoes and whatever property they may bring to induce them to visit the Establishments more frequently, as we will be eventually the gainer by such a course. The potatoes cost a trifle, and provided they are not required at Fort Simpson. . . they may be sent to Stikeen.”*  
(Mackie 1993: 381)

At Fort Stikine, there were no gardens and the potatoes consumed were all derived from trade with the Haida (Mackie 1993: 381). The above quote indicates that HBC traders were promoting trade in potatoes for their own subsistence and to improve relations with the First Nations. This trading relationship gave the aboriginal population a degree of agency in deciding their price. Gill (1983: 351), Mackie (1993: 380) and Suttles (1951: 280) discuss how the potato may have been a good crop to cultivate and trade since it was always in demand at the fort. It may have been a trade that resulted from both an introduced cultivar and a strong market demand.

The 1840s were the beginning of a great profusion of potatoes. In Puget Sound, an American explorer wrote that the locals “cultivate potatoes principally, which are extremely fine and

raised in great abundance, and now constitute a large portion of their food.” (Farnham 1979 (1843): 104). In 1849, the first settlers arrived on Vancouver Island. Douglas describes these newcomers and their interactions with the indigenous people:

*“This little body of Colonists, the first independent settlers on Vancouver Island, have commenced their bold enterprise, under the most favourable auspices: they have no enemies to dread, and no obstacles to encounter, beyond those which the hand of nature has interposed through the force of a teeming sail. Instead of thirsting for their blood, the Natives are not only kind and friendly, but willing to share their labours and assist in all of their toils, and they regularly bring in large quantities of the finest [sic] salmon and potatoes, which they part with at a low rate in barter for such articles as suit their fancy or necessities.”*

*(Fort Victoria Letters 1979 (1846-1851): 38-39)*

This quote implies that there was a relationship of equality between the new settlers and the First Nations. In this case, potato and salmon represented a token of the First Nation’s amiability. In this quote by Douglas, the potato encodes a metaphor of civility and peacefulness. In this way the potato may serve as a marker for the changing image of the indigenous people in the eyes of these Europeans. They perceived indigenous agricultural practice as a sign of aboriginal domestication and indoctrination into acceptable European customs and practices.

The late 1840s mark the end of the pre-colonial era when the period of intense fur trading had begun to wane. In 1849, Vancouver Island became a colony. After this event, the profusion of potatoes slowly became a threat to the newly developing European prerogative of taking native land for themselves. This spurred a reimagining of what Europeans deemed ‘proper’ use of the land, so as to lend legitimacy to their appropriation of First Nation’s land.

## THE DIFFUSION OF INNOVATIONS

The Diffusion of Innovations is a theory developed by Everret M. Rogers (1995), which seeks to explain the adoption and movement of innovations throughout a group of people or populations that are separated by culture type, language or some other ethnic dividers. This theory is applied to the topic of potatoes in the Pacific Northwest by Suttles (1951:281). This is an attempt to explain why the potato caught on so easily and quickly from his argued site of introduction at Fort Langley. If one can assume that the potato at Fort Langley, though perhaps a second or third introduction, was not the sole or the initial introduction of the potato to the Pacific Northwest, one can still recognize the helpfulness of this model for explaining its movement and adaptation.

The 'Diffusion of Innovations' theory states that there are four main elements which control success: innovation, communication networks, time and preexisting social systems. An innovation is a new idea or technology that must be newly adopted or perceived as new by the adopter. Innovations are learned and moved through communication networks with a combination of trade interactions, exhibitions, word of mouth, and advertisements. Time and preexisting social systems control when and how fast the innovation is accepted. Aside from these four main elements there are important factors that control whether innovations will adapt in certain situations and contexts.

The innovation must have some perceived advantage in order to be adopted (Rogers 1995:15). For the potato the advantages are numerous in a gastronomic sense. As well, this innovation brings about economic benefits. For example the Haida may have been partly attracted to cultivating and trading potatoes to secure trading status at the HBC forts (Gill 1983; Mackie 1993; Suttles 1951). There are also some intangible advantages or disadvantages that could control the distribution of potato crops, like perceptions regarding taste and various health benefits. As well, the innovation must be compatible with current social norms and cultural practices in order for it to be read-

ily accepted (Rogers 1995:15). Suttles (1951: 281) clearly shows how the practice of cultivating potatoes would have been easily adopted into the traditional tuber crop cultivation of the Salish. The Salish land ownership system, designed for growing and maintaining camas fields, provided an easily adaptable system for the potato because it could be grown in a very similar way (Suttles 1951: 276). Also, the highly developed camas trade was still underway in the 1850s (Banfield August 14, 1858). This would have meant that developed trade networks for food items were already in place.

Another important factor in the success of an innovation is its complexity (Rogers 1995:16). The potato might be considered incredibly complex or very simple, depending on the preexisting agricultural knowledge of people utilizing the crop. In a later article, Suttles (2005: 181) examines whether or not the agricultural practice of cultivating camas, wapato and other indigenous tubers may have preceded the introduction of the potato, or whether these practices developed at a later time. This may be the wrong question to ask because, as Suttles (2005) proves in this article, there is no evidence that the potato's introduction facilitated the growth of the production of other tubers. Regardless, the article still documents important indigenous concepts of plants, seeds and growing, characteristics that could help us understand whether or not the potato should be considered a complicated innovation within this context. Suttles (2005:191) talks about how the word 'seed' was unknown, and yet First Nation's groups recognized that tubers produced the plant. Perhaps in this case 'complexity' is too bound up in Western notions of difficulty and scientific, factual knowledge that does not translate directly to matters of indigenous traditional knowledge.

'Trialability' is also an important factor in adopting a new practice which is also tied to complexity. Rogers (1995:16) describes trialability as the ability of an innovation to be tested with a method of trial and error, rather than a process of being taught how to use an innovation. The potato was not automatically a staple for the First Nation communities that adopted it

since they already had their own traditional staples. These other staples may have given the First Nation cultivators the luxury to be able to experiment with the potato alongside more traditional crops, like camas. Even after the potato became a central food item for many communities along the coast, a strong reliance on more traditional foods remained.

The final aspect of the diffusion process is 'observability' (Rogers 1995:16). This condition states that for a new practice or innovation to be taken up by other people in a community, it must be visible and observable. Along with this increased visibility, there would be increased access to knowledge relating to a particular item or practice. In the case of the potato, this knowledge would include information about when it is harvested, who trades it, who eats it, and how it is cooked.

#### WILLIAM EDDY BANFIELD - 1858

William Eddy Banfield, a ship's carpenter, originally came to Victoria in 1849. He actively traded and lived with the First Nations people of the West Coast of Vancouver Island between 1854 and 1858. He later took up the colonial post of Indian Agent in Ohiat in 1859 (letter from W. E. Banfield and Peter Francis Banfield to James Douglas Esq., July 17, 1855 & letter from Douglas to Rear-Admiral Baynes, October 31, 1859). He lived among the Clayoquat (Tla-o-qui-aht), observing and participating in daily activities and learning the language of the Nuu-chah-nulth tribes. His ethnographic writings are perhaps the only detailed firsthand account of the First Nations people of Vancouver Island's West Coast that was written by someone familiar with the language and culture prior to extensive contact with Europeans. Banfield's writings describe how potatoes were made visible to members of the community through the prestigious practice of feasting. In his writings of the Tla-o-qui-aht people, Banfield gives a detailed account of the potato's role in feasting events. Banfield writes,

*“Immense quantities of potatoes are purchased every year by this tribe [Tla-o-qui-aht], from white traders and the Macaws [Makahs]. They make large feasts. I have seen seventy bushels of potatoes cooked at once, in two piles on hot stones. They eat whale oil in quantities with potatoes. At these feasts, probably two or three hundred guests are invited. The females are never asked. Much decorum prevails, and positive urbanity is shown to every guest, rich or poor. Clean mats are laid completely around the lodge; every guest as he enters is announced by name, and placed in his proper seat, and there are a number of the junior branches of the host’s relations in attendance with small bunches of a sort of flax made from cedar bark, which is handed to each guest as he takes his seat, for the purpose of wiping his feet. The meal is never served until all invited guests arrive. Some chiefs are very late in coming. When all are seated, the host, who is near the cooking apparatus, takes a potato and eats it, and then gives direction to serve his guests. Few words are spoken during the feast— silence being a mark of strict politeness. As each finishes, a clean piece of flax is given him to wipe his mouth and hands, in the same manner as a napkin is used among whites.”*

(Banfield Set. 9, 1858)

This passage shows not only how the potatoes were consumed and cooked, but it also shows that the potatoes were valued by the Tla-o-qui-aht people of the West Coast of Vancouver Island. These people traded for the potatoes because they had a strong demand for them. The potatoes were also connected to the reaffirmation of prestigious status since their consumption was organized into a feast that was only attended by men and appears to have been very formalized. Also, the potatoes were consumed along with whale oil, another prestigious trade item. Banfield describes the manufacture of this item in another article, describing the oil rendering process of the Ditidaht First Nations, another group that resided along the West Coast of Vancouver Island,

*“The oil [of the whale] is not half tried out by the half boiling process it undergoes; but what is, they carefully skim off and put in clean bladders for the purpose of eating with dried salmon, potatoes or other roots. The oil is considered a luxury, and sells high. With the Netinetts [Ditidahts] and Macaws [Makahs] it forms a valuable article of traffic.”*  
(Banfield August 28, 1858)

In another account by Banfield, he describes how the local people grew their own potatoes as well as traded for them. The prestigious value of the potato and its incorporation into ritual ceremonial feasting events underscores its importance to First Nation groups on Western Vancouver Island. This may indicate long standing practices of potato cultivation and consumption that predate Suttles’ proposed introduction of the potato at Fort Langley in 1828, thirty years prior (1951).

Banfield’s observations took place before the gold rush and the establishment of British Columbia as a colony. During this period, the population of non-natives on Vancouver Island was less than 700, and much of the west coast was uncharted and unknown to them. Although Banfield’s writings often cast the local First Nations in a favourable light, he seems to be advertising the wonders of the coast in a bid to attract settlers. He talks about a land that is “well suited for settlement” (Banfield August 14, 1858). When describing the promises of what is now Barkley Sound and Port Alberni he proclaims, “All that is wanted to create a city is for immigrants to see it, settle and develop it” (Banfield Sept.3, 1858). These respectful and praiseworthy descriptions of the First Nations highlight Banfield’s intentions of sharing their very productive land with them. Having said that, he never explicitly supports taking land from the First Nations, nor does he ever try to legitimize a European claim to the place.

Banfield met with an untimely death by drowning in Barkley Sound in 1862. His heirs on the Isles of Scilly requested that Anderson Thompson and Co. in London retrieve his effects (letter from Francis Banfield to Anderson Thompson, Jan. 8, 1863).

It is interesting to note here that Gilbert Malcolm Sproat was the agent for Anderson Thompson and Co. in Alberni. Banfield's ethnographic writings and observations can be seen in Sproat's, *Scenes and Studies of Savage Life*, published in 1868, though they were somewhat altered to reflect the changing attitude of the settlers towards First Nations and land use (Sproat 1987 [1868]). Banfield's enthusiastic and hopeful nature was replaced by the negative writings of Sproat and later colonists who sought to exploit the land and people that Banfield had so respectfully described. These new colonial voices included Robert Brown and Joseph Trutch.

#### ROBERT BROWN – 1864

Robert Brown was a Scottish botanist and explorer who at the young age of 21 led the Vancouver Island Exploring Expedition in 1864, keeping a journal of his exploits along the way. Together, they travelled throughout Vancouver Island, encountering many indigenous settlements. In his description of the K'ómoks First Nation, he tries to justify and legitimize the developing colonial practice of taking First Nation land with no proper compensation

*“Here as everywhere the Indians are growling about payment for their land...When traveling or sitting around the camp fire with them they always appeal to me on the subject & I assure you that it is no easy matter to answer the question satisfactorily when an intelligent [Indian] looks up in your face and asks ‘Had you no good land of your own that you come and deprive us of ours?’ I tell them that once upon a time the great good chief above gave all the earth to the White man and Indian alike. The White man took one part and the Indian another, but the Indian instead of cultivating his land went to war & was very wicked; but the white men increased and multiplied and learned all things and filled all their Country: so the*



*white man said to himself: see our land is full, we wish to grow corn and potatoes and rear Moo-Moos [Cattle] but our friend the Indian over the salt water does not care about corn and oxen but likes Salmon and Gummas [Camas]: he does not require all his land— so we will go and ask him to allow us to live in his land in peace and friendship. If we take any land he has need of, our chief good King George will pay for it. So if we have hurt and not benefited you by coming to live among you— send your Chiefs to have a talk with Mr. Kennedy & he will pay you if he thinks you speak straight— for he is a just man with a straight tongue that never lies. But my mind is you have got much good by us king Georges. When you came you were ragged in a skin blanket or a poor one that that you made out of bark or dogs-hair. You have now shirt & hat, trousers & boots. Who brought these among you? You would starve some winter if it was not for potatoes! Who gave you these? Was it not Mr. Yale at Fort Langley? And is he not a King George Man? Eh?”*

(Brown 1989 [1864]: 124-125).

Not only is Brown's information about the potato dispersal inaccurate, it also misrepresents the symbolism that the early colonists and traders had previously imbued to the potato. Previously, the potato represented the progress of the First Nations, living in peaceful coexistence with the Europeans. The potato was the object of trade that benefited both whites and natives alike. Brown, however, uses the potato as an item that symbolizes superiority. In his eyes it is a guilt charged item that represents a debt that First Nations owe to Europeans in exchange for the introduction of the potato. His narrative legitimizes the encroachment of white settlers on indigenous land. Since the First Nations were not using the land in any 'proper' way, they do not, as Brown argues, "require all [of their] land" (1989 [1864]:125).

Brown's writing was influenced by changing indigenous land

rights policies that were brought forth by the new Kennedy governorship. Arthur Kennedy replaced Douglas as governor of Vancouver Island and enacted many oppressive land policies that acted to greatly reduce the land that was allocated to First Nations. This allowed more settlers to take up the land for their own use. His decision was influenced by Joseph Trutch, the Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works (Fisher 1971:3).

#### JOSEPH TRUTCH – 1864

Robin Fisher (1971) offers a chilling review of the changing land policies that occurred in association with this change in government as well as the increasing influence of Joseph Trutch. According to Fisher, Trutch was convinced that the previously laid out First Nation reserves were too big and were holding back development in these areas since First Nations held control of the land and settlers were only allowed to rent or lease that land off of them (Fisher 1971:7). Fisher quotes Phillip Nind, the Gold Commissioner at Lytton, who wrote in a letter in 1865 complaining to the Colonial Secretary about the First Nations of the Thompson River's usage of the land, claiming, "These Indians do nothing more with their land than cultivate a few small patches of potatoes here and there" (quoted in Fisher 1971:9). This quote shows that in 1865 potatoes no longer represented a 'great equalizer'. The potato was no longer used by Europeans in order to talk about the advancements or civilized characteristics of the First Nations. Instead, the potato represented a threat to the European's claim to the landscape because it was an accepted, 'civilized' practice of cultivation, which the Europeans recognized as being equal to their 'modern' subsistence practices. Potato cultivation was no longer a source of pride to the colonists, as it once had for early settlers like Douglas and Banfield.

Trutch enacted land policies that further reduced the land that was allocated to First Nations groups in the area. These policies not only ran counter to Douglas's earlier policies but

they also ignored First Nation input. He carved out the best aboriginal land and offered it up for European use. Fisher uses the quote by the chiefs of the Lower Fraser River to depict the implications of land reallocation in 1868.

*Some days ago came new men who told us that by order of their Chief they have to curtail our small reservation, and so they did to our greater grief; not only they shortened our land but by their new paper they set aside our best land, some of our gardens, and gave us in place, some hilly and sandy land, where it is next to impossible to raise any potatoes: our hearts were full of grief day and night. (quoted in Fisher 1971:16)*

Thus land reallocation ended the profusion of potatoes in the Pacific Northwest. After this the First Nations people were given less and less freedom. Over time, many land rights were also taken away. Trutch went on from here to help iron out British Columbia's confederation with Canada in 1871. Under this agreement, First Nations were made wards of the Federal government and denied land ownership rights.

The potato went on to flourish in the gardens and farms of European settlers, but they seem to disappear in First Nations' plots with the exception of a few notable cases in Washington State and Alaska (Zhang et al. 2010). The potato served as a commodity, a food source, an elite status item and a symbol of progress for Europeans. During the time of the fur trade and the early colonial era, equality and respect towards the First Nations was critical for a number of pragmatic reasons. First, natives greatly outnumbered European traders and settlers, prompting settlers to maintain friendly relationships. Second, the European traders needed to maintain reciprocal trade relationships with First Nations peoples for economic reasons. With the increase of settlers in British Columbia and land tensions that arose as a result of the 1858 Fraser River Gold Rush, land became more important to both parties. Europeans sought ways of legitimiz-

ing claims to First Nation land. European claims to the land were tempered by the land policies of Trutch and other legislations that inhibited First Nation's agency and rights to land use.

## CONCLUSION

The journals of explorers, traders, settlers and colonists provide a glimpse into the shifting perceptions and attitudes of Europeans. These writings call attention to the dynamic and shifting nature of European views towards aboriginal land use. The story of the potato in the early historic period of the Pacific Northwest is important and interesting because it highlights how the mutable social valuation of this one plant had the ability to make entire groups of people seem more 'progressive', 'advanced' and 'civilized' than another. This is seen in Scouler's evaluations of the Haida and Chinook Nations. As well, the perception of what cultivating the potato meant to Europeans also changed, as was seen in a comparison of the writings of Douglas, Banfield, Brown and Nind.

Not only has the valuation of the potato changed for Europeans in regards to First Nations' land practices, but the potatoes cultural implications have shifted as well. The Tla-o-qui-aht came to value the potato as a prestigious trade item of deep cultural importance. Other nations, such as the Haida, the Tsimshian and the Makah capitalized upon the potato, supplying the demand for this product among groups like the Tla-o-qui-aht and the European fur trade forts. As well, early settlers benefited from the potato trade. On the local level, the potato became a staple for many First Nations groups grew it in local plots using methods that were developed for more traditional tuber crops. The Ozette, Kasaan and Maria's potato varieties still serve an important role for First Nations communities.

The potato is a very important part of British Columbia's past and serves as a useful medium for understanding European and First Nations relations. As well, the potato's introduction

is not as straightforward as it has been proposed (Suttles 1951). With new genetic information, the story of the potato is becoming more complex (Zhang et al 2010). This is an important consideration because it hints at possible histories that have not been told, including the possible movement of the potato into Mexico. It also challenges hegemonic European histories which pervade and colour nearly all current knowledge of past aboriginal agricultural practices. Many more questions still need to be asked and answered regarding the history of the potato on the west coast and its profusion in pre-colonial British Columbia.

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